–EDITED TRANSCRIPT–

HUDSON INSTITUTE's

BRADLEY CENTER

FOR PHILANTHROPY AND CIVIC RENEWAL

presents a book discussion of

Civil Society

by Michael Edwards

Monday, November 16, 2009 ▪ 12:00 to 2:00 p.m.
Hudson Institute ▪ Betsy and Walter Stern Conference Center ▪ 1015 15th Street, NW ▪ Suite 600

In November 2009, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which commenced the struggle to replace totalitarian regimes in Eastern and Central Europe with liberal democracies. Many claim that the emergence of a lively civil society behind the Iron Curtain was essential to this development. Thus was kicked off several years of vigorous intellectual interest in the concept of civil society, which if anything became even muddier and less helpful as the discussion went on. **MICHAEL EDWARDS**' volume *Civil Society*, however, clarified and focused our understanding of the subject, and so the second edition, which includes not only updated information but also more of a global perspective, is a welcome addition to the debate.

On November 16, 2009, the Bradley Center hosted a discussion with Edwards, along with the Case Foundation's **MICHAEL SMITH**, **RUTH McCAMBRIDGE** of *Nonprofit Quarterly*, and **WILLIAM DENNIS** of the Atlas Economic Research Foundation. The Bradley Center's own **WILLIAM SCHAMBRA** moderated the discussion.

PROGRAM AND PANEL

12:00 p.m.	Welcome by Hudson Institute's **WILLIAM SCHAMBRA**
12:10	Panel discussion **MICHAEL EDWARDS**, author of *Civil Society* **RUTH McCAMBRIDGE**, *Nonprofit Quarterly* **MICHAEL SMITH**, Case Foundation **WILLIAM DENNIS**, Atlas Economic Research Foundation
1:10	Question-and-answer session
2:00	Adjournment

FURTHER INFORMATION

This transcript was prepared from an audio recording and edited by Krista Shaffer. To request further information on this event or the Bradley Center, please visit our web site at http://pcr.hudson.org, contact Hudson Institute at (202) 974-2424, or send an e-mail to Krista Shaffer at Krista@hudson.org.

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Panel Biographies

From 1985 to 2001 **William C. Dennis** served Liberty Fund, Inc., and its sister organization the Pierre F. and Enid Goodrich Foundation in various capacities, including program officer, director of publications, and director of grants. During that time he ran the book-publishing program of Liberty Fund for two years and attended as program officer, discussion leader, participant, or observer over 300 Liberty Fund academic conferences. While at Liberty Fund he also served one term as president of the Philadelphia Society. Currently he is an independent consultant in philanthropy, and a senior fellow at the Atlas Economic Research Foundation. Dennis was a professor of American History at Denison University from 1968 to 1985. His special areas of teaching included courses on colonial America, and America during the Early National Period. He also taught advanced seminars on a number of topics including the History of American Conservatism and Land and Liberty in American History. During this time he also spent two years (1981-1983) as Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Budget and Administration, U. S. Department of the Interior.

Michael Edwards is a distinguished senior fellow at Demos, a Network for Ideas and Action, in New York; and a senior visiting scholar at New York University's Wagner School of Public Service. From 1999 to 2008 he was the director of the Ford Foundation's Governance and Civil Society Program, prior to which he served as the World Bank's senior adviser on civil society in Washington DC. Edwards also spent fifteen years as a senior manager at OXFAM, Save the Children and other international NGOs. The author of thirteen books and hundreds of articles on civil society, philanthropy and social change, Edwards' next book, *Small Change: Why Business Won't Save the World*, will be released in January 2010. You can visit his Web site at http://www.futurepositive.org.

Ruth McCambridge is the editor in chief of the *Nonprofit Quarterly*, this country's premier journal for nonprofit practitioners. She began her career more than forty years ago door-knocking in Boston for a national civil rights organization and spent the next twenty years working in grassroots organizations that mixed self help and organizing with policy advocacy. In the late 1980s, McCambridge took a longstanding interest in organizational dynamics to the Boston Community Foundation where she managed the Fund for the Homeless, a public/private partnership, and developed and implemented a number of collaboratively funded city and statewide capacity building initiatives.

Michael D. Smith is a vice president for social innovation at the Case Foundation in Washington, DC. Smith works with the CEO and senior leadership team to set the programmatic direction of the foundation and manages a portfolio of social investments and partnerships designed to spark civic participation and expand giving. Currently, Smith's major areas of focus include: America's Giving Challenge, an initiative designed to catalyze online giving; Make It Your Own, a program lifting-up "citizen-centered" approaches to civic engagement and philanthropy; and myriad economic development efforts in the Palestinian West Bank in partnership with the U.S. government and Aspen Institute. Before joining the Case Foundation, Smith worked as the lead program officer for the Beaumont Foundation of America's effort creating nearly 600 Operation Connect technology centers in underserved communities nationwide. As a regional program manager at PowerUP he also oversaw cross-sector regional partnerships and the launch and operation of nearly 200 after school technology sites for youth. Smith has also served as a senior program and communications staff member at a Massachusetts Boys & Girls Club and was an aide to U.S. Congressman Richard Neal.

Proceedings

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: Good afternoon! I'm Bill Schambra, director of the Bradley Center for Philanthropy and Civic Renewal here at Hudson Institute. Krista Shaffer and I welcome you to today's discussion of the second edition of Michael Edwards' book entitled *Civil Society*.

First, as usual, our coming attractions: On December 15, we're gathering to honor the generosity of the late Irving Kristol. His was a generosity not only in the sense of philanthropy, although few people steered as many dollars to as many people and projects over the past thirty years as did Mr. Kristol, but generosity as well with avuncular advice, counsel, contacts, and wisdom.

When he first told me he was going to offer me some avuncular advice, he had to first define "avuncular" for me. (Laughter.)

We've assembled a distinguished panel for the event, all of whose lives were touched in one way or another by Mr. Kristol: James Piereson and Leslie Lenkowsky, both of whom worked with him on his giving; Rachel Wildavsky, who went through the legendary internship program at *The Public Interest*, Mr. Kristol's magazine; and Roger Hertog, whose giving in many ways resembles that of Irving Kristol. That's December 15, noon to 2 pm.

Now for today's panel. I confess that my primary motivation for thus marking the second edition of Michael Edwards' volume *Civil Society* is that I've been kicking myself for five years, now, for not having had a panel on the book when it *first* came out in 2004.

But that oversight is hereby remedied—and just in time for a momentous anniversary, namely, the observation of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which as you know happened twenty years ago this month.

As Mr. Edwards notes in his book, "civil society" became something of a buzzword around that time, precisely because it seemed to have played such a powerful role in that event, with often-surreptitious grassroots civic activism undermining the Soviet bloc's totalitarian authority from within, at first gradually, and then suddenly.

As he also notes, interest in civil society as such seems to have waned a bit since then—although just as we're about to consign it to the bulging dustbin of worn-out philanthropic clichés, there appears in last Friday's *New York Times* a front-page article, dateline Jurm, Afghanistan, entitled "Afghan Enclave Seen as Model to Rebuild, and Rebuff Taliban."[1]

Its point is that while billions in development dollars have been squandered by government and corporate efforts to prompt development from the top down, development only begins to happen when local villagers themselves assume responsibility for such efforts, from the bottom up.

[1] Sabrina Tavernise, "Afghan Enclave Seen as Model to Rebuild, and Rebuff Taliban," *New York Times*, November 13, 2009. Online at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/13/world/asia/13jurm.html, last accessed November 19, 2009.

As the story notes, "If there are lessons to be drawn from the still tentative successes there, they are that small projects often work best, that the consent and participation of local people are essential and that even baby steps take years."

In other words, let's not throw away the notion of civil society quite yet—although as Mr. Edwards might also remind us, the notion of civil society as small, local, associational activism may not fill out the definition of civil society as many understand it.

To discuss this and other issues relating Mr. Edwards' book, we have, of course, Michael Edwards himself. Mr. Edwards was formerly the director of the Ford Foundation's Governance and Civil Society program, and is today distinguished senior fellow at Demos in New York;

He will be followed by Ruth McCambridge, editor in chief of the terrific journal *Nonprofit Quarterly*—and it's terrific for many reasons beyond the fact that it periodically consents to publish something I may have written;

Next we'll hear from Michael Smith, vice president for social innovation at the Case Foundation here in Washington DC;

And finally we'll hear from Bill Dennis, a former program officer at the Liberty Fund in Indianapolis and now a senior fellow at the Atlas Economic Research Foundation.

So, Mr. Edwards?

MICHAEL EDWARDS: Thank you, Bill, for that introduction, and to my fellow panelists and to you all (audience), thank you for coming. I realize that you all are exceptionally busy people.

It's a historical fact that groups of people working together for some higher purpose than satisfying their own immediate self-interest can influence society for the better in ways both very large and very small but not insignificant. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world," Margaret Mead famously said—and she added, "It's the only thing that ever has."

As usual with Margaret Mead, that great anthropologist, she was exaggerating. When one thinks of the power and resources that governments and markets bring to the table of social change, one has to put into perspective the relative influence of civil society in its different guises. But her saying contains more than a few grains of truth, as has been demonstrated countless times over the last couple of hundred years at least from the struggle against slavery to recent pro-democracy demonstrations in Iran, and including as Bill (Schambra) said, those small circles of freedom and activism that helped bring down the Berlin Wall, whose twentieth anniversary provides the background for our conversation today.

But if life were as simple as that, we would have no debate about civil society except perhaps about how to protect that tradition as much as possible. There would be no reason for people like me to write books about it, which thankfully is not so. This remains one of the most confusing and contested ideas that we have in our toolbox, subject to radically different interpretations,

contradictory and conflicting interpretations across the cultural and political spectrum especially as one moves outside of North America and Europe. Therefore it gives rise to very different policies and practices when we think about building civil society or nurturing and sustaining civil society and so on.

Just to give you a few examples, the Cato Institute defines civil society in terms of free markets and individual liberty. The World Social Forum defines it as a place where people organize *against* the market and the individualism it promotes. Neo-conservatives (in the United States) supported civil society-building as one rationale for war against Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The global peace movement saw it as the place where people organized against the war and in favor of nonviolent means of international dispute resolution. And Al Gore—you may have caught this in the press—recently recommended that citizens' groups should break the law if needs be in their efforts to protect the environment, which is somewhat surprising to those who believe that the rule of law is actually civil society's defining characteristic.[2]

Depending on whose view you subscribe to, there are schools of thought for all of these things: civil society is either a bulwark against intervention by the state, by government, or it's a necessary support for government reformers; it's either the protector of traditional values or it's the ground on which alternatives to the status quo are mounted; it's either the crucible of a successful market economy or it's a zone free of business thinking; it's either the last hope for a real, viable democracy or it's a source of gridlock in the system through special-interest politics; it's either the home of secularism, or it's the ultimate expression of faith-based communities. As an Egyptian scholar said to me recently, the West offered us a civil society, not realizing that we had one already—it's called Islam. (Laughter.)

And here is Vladimir Putin, of all people, on the record last year as supporting "civil society" in his own words as a key element in his efforts to strengthen popular support for authoritarian government at home and rebuild Russian influence abroad by encouraging closer ties between nonprofits and the state in Russia and developing officially-sponsored NGOs in countries like the Ukraine and Belarus.[3]

Well, I rest my case. And it would be easy to give up here and now and simply abandon a concept which has become so dangerously elastic, so dangerously chameleon-like. But that would be a mistake, I think. The idea of civil society is too important to be left as an ideological football, kicked around by contending schools of thought. After all, it has been at the center of thinking and action about the good society, the rights and responsibilities of citizens, the practice of politics, and how we live together peacefully while embracing our individuality and our differences for about two thousand years, at least since Aristotle introduced the concept.

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[2]Al Gore was quoted as having said, "Civil disobedience has an honorable history, and when the urgency and moral clarity cross a certain threshold, then I think that civil disobedience is quite understandable, and it has a role to play. And I expect that it will increase, no question about it." Oliver Burkeman, "Civil Disobedience Has a Role to Play," *The Guardian*, November 7, 2009.

[3] Examples can be found in the Conference Proceedings of the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Cohesion, held in Moscow on February 26, 2009, and in "Concept of long-term socio-economic development of the Russian Federation for the period up to the year 2020," The Ministry for Economic Development of the Russian Federation, November 17, 2008.

So it's incumbent on us I think to reason our way through this confusion to a greater sense of clarity even if we can't reach consensus, because greater clarity is the only basis to have a sensible conversation with each other about the potential of these ideas as a vehicle for concrete change in the world. Otherwise we're simply talking past each other in a sea of confusion, and we're using that confusion in the way in which we deal with real-world issues to obvious negative effect.

That was the prime reason for writing and now revising *Civil Society*—to help people to find their own way through this maze of different ideas and interpretations, to be clear what they think and to recognize the implications of the path they choose for what they're going to do about it. The book has done that reasonably well, I think. It has become the standard text at universities around the world; it is widely used by donor agencies and foundations; and it has been adopted by commissions of inquiry about the future of civil society in Germany, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere. It was no surprise that the first translations of the book came from China, Vietnam, and South Korea, where interest in this concept is so high both inside and outside government.

The book does this—it provides this guide, if you like—by unraveling three threads that have become very entangled in the civil society debate. They've become conflated, and that has led to an awful lot of confusion. The book then re-weaves these threads into a different template which can be used in any context regardless of the politics you bring to the table, although you end up in a different place when you use it. It simply provides a template to think about and come to your own conclusions.

The first thread is civil society as associational life, the one that we all think about first of all, as popularized originally by the great Alexis de Tocqueville when he visited these shores in the 1830s. This is the world of voluntary organizations, although not just the nonprofit sector or the third sector. I'll come to that in a moment.

The second idea is civil society as the good society. We use this as shorthand for the kind of society we want to live in. It is marked out by values and principles like trust, cooperation, and mutuality—which voluntary organizations are supposed to generate but often don't.

The third set of ideas is the most recent cluster around civil society as the *public sphere*. The public sphere is very important because it acts as a bridge between those first two understandings of the concept—because let's face it, voluntary associations do very different things and believe very different things, and our visions of the good society are markedly different even in this room, I would guess. So you have to have places and processes which are called the public sphere, where citizens can argue about those differences and negotiate some constantly evolving sense of the common or the public interest, which provides society with some overall basic sense of direction where they are heading, and where they want to head. Without a functioning public sphere of argument and deliberation and media and magazines and writing and discussion like this, there would be no place where citizens can come together to forge a sense of a consensus on where they want their society to go.

All three of those theories have a very respectable historical and intellectual trajectory. The really interesting thing about these ideas comes when you start to recombine them in different ways. How do different kinds of voluntary sectors help to produce the achievements and the norms of a good society by promoting a dynamic and active public sphere about the great issues of the day? When you use the template in that more eclectic way, then the civil society debate loses some of its mystique, and it becomes much easier to talk about ideas that would otherwise be surprising. For example, when someone comments to you that Hamas and Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood are key members of civil society in the Middle East, your reaction doesn't have to be, "You must be joking – these are terrorist groups!" You can use that template to segment associations with certain values which you may not agree with that are doing their thing and trying to take their societies in a particular direction.

Or you can start to understand why the United States has such a fractured civil society that it has become almost impossible to arrive at a national consensus anymore—a consensus which is needed to drive through large-scale social reforms of the kind that you had in the immediate post-war period with the GI Bill of 1944, and so on. During that time, civil society associations' values and public deliberations came together to cement a coalition which was large enough to force through what would otherwise have been stuck in the differences of Catholic or Protestant, or right or left, or conservative and liberal.

But unfortunately, even though it makes the task of analysis easier, it makes the task of deciding what we do much more complicated because there are no universals anymore, no static rigid models, no one way of doing things. Civil society will be different in every part of the world; it will look different; it will act different. And therefore policy towards civil society and civil society building becomes much more complicated. Personally, I think that's a good thing because it brings in a much greater degree of humility and sophistication to the argument, and it pushes it away from a very simplistic idea that we can build something called civil society in a fixed image of the West in radically different settings.

Bill (Schambra) mentioned Afghanistan in his introduction. What usually happens when we try and do that is that we end up with a thin layer of nonprofit organizations with no social roots and no political legitimacy that are therefore easily dismissed as pawns of foreign powers, are unable to achieve much beyond small scale provision of services, welfare services and humanitarian relief and so on. There's no real force or dynamism or meaning to that form of civil society, and it moves us instead to an approach which focuses on creating the conditions in which people can shape their own civil societies in line with their context and culture and understanding, even if, as I say, they look and act somewhat differently to those we are accustomed to, and therefore they have more purchase on the drivers of social change. At root, civil society is a set of evolving capacities and relationships. It's not a "thing" that can be built by outsiders in ten or twenty years.

So much for the analysis of the book. In my last couple of minutes I want to talk about the subtext in writing it, which was to highlight some of the dangers I see to any conception of civil society worthy of the name as a result of contemporary trends, and to defend what I see as the most important core of this idea, which does not exist independent of ideology and religion and

politics – that would be stupid – but which, I think, crosses those divisions in a real way. We'll see whether that survives the treatment of the panel.

To me that core of civil society in all three of its dimensions is the permanent existence, hopefully in every society, of capacities and relationships that are not captured by either government or the market, thus retaining the difference and independence required for citizens to hold those other institutions accountable for their actions, to undertake tasks for which they are not well-suited, and preserve the ideal that love, solidarity, and compassion can still be the guiding principles for at least a good amount of human activity and interaction in modern capitalist economies—perhaps *especially* in modern capitalist economies given their effects on eroding the social bonds that hold us together. And on *those* grounds, I am worried.

I am worried because on the political side, attempts to restrict or close down the space for independent citizen action and a dynamic public sphere have risen in pretty much every country you can name—from Russia to Brazil, Egypt to Cambodia, Uganda to the United States, and in my own country, the United Kingdom, where we recently found out that the police are now carrying photo IDs to identify people who take part in demonstrations or any sort of radical civil society activity. Governments have formulated tighter laws, regulations, registration requirements, financial disclosure policies and so on for NGOs, the media, and other civic groups, many justified by what we know as the "war on terror" and the need to clamp down on support for organizations seen as conduits for terrorist financing. In reality, these policies are motivated deeper down, I think, by more basic elemental suspicions of civil society's rising influence, even in authoritarian contexts. That's why Putin wants to co-opt the idea rather than simply to ignore it.

It's a fact, I think, that all politicians love civil society until they get elected, after which they spend most of their time either ignoring it or trying to repress it—even, sadly, in the contexts that benefited from the fall of the Berlin Wall.

On the economic side—and here I'm treading a little more perhaps on controversial ground given what we've discussed in previous meetings here at the Hudson Institute—I'm concerned that business and the market are encroaching into civil society in all three of the dimensions that I outlined, with potentially damaging results. For many years there has been tension between what you might call political and economic interpretations of this idea.

The political sees civil society as the ground from which to challenge the status-quo and build new alternatives—whether you're a conservative or a liberal it doesn't really matter; you can see it in those terms. Economic analysis tends to see civil society as the service-providing, not-for-profit sector necessitated by "market failure." It's seen as the shadow side of capitalism.

Today, what Mathew Bishop of *The Economist* calls "philanthrocapitalism"—the belief that business and the market can solve social problems as well as create an economic surplus, something I've written a lot about—has thrown that debate into even sharper relief.[4] Not all

[4] The Bradley Center hosted Matthew Bishop and Michael Edwards for a discussion of their ideas on philanthrocapitalism on April 9, 2009, entitled "Philanthrocapitalism: Savior or Emperor?" A complete transcript of

business influence is damaging to the idea of civil society—I'm not saying that. But the skepticism one finds among philanthrocapitalists about the power of collective action, social movements, democratic decision-making, community organizing, and the non-commercial values of service and cooperation is certainly disturbing to me. A society that reduces everything to a market inevitably divides those who can buy from those who cannot, undermining any sense of collective responsibility, and eventually, democracy.

So to finish, I'll pose a question for the panel and the rest of us in the starkest terms that I can. Will increased government intervention and philanthrocapitalism undermine civil society's transformative potential by reducing the ability or willingness of citizens and their associations to hold public and private power accountable for its actions, generate alternative policies and ideas, push for fundamental changes in the structures of power, and organize collective action on a scale large enough to force through long-term shifts in politics, economics, and social relations? That's the question, I think. If those things do come to pass, I think the prospects for any civil society worthy of the name could be irreversibly reduced, and we will all ultimately be the poorer for it. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MICHAEL SMITH: So we are jumping a little – Ruth (McCambridge) and I arm wrestled about who would go next and she won. (Laughter.) So it's my turn.

It's really an honor to be on this panel with Michael (Edwards), Ruth (McCambridge), and Bill (Dennis). This is my first Bradley Center panel, so I hope you all will give me a little bit of wiggle room. (Laughter.) I want to start off by telling you just a little bit about the Case Foundation, and then I'd like to talk a little bit about our experiments and lessons in strengthening civil society—many of which I did not know were experiments and lessons in strengthening civil society until I read Michael (Edwards)'s book.

I had hoped to come in with a crisp argument based on a lot of the work we've done in bottom-up participatory and dialogic civic engagement, and say that this is the most important form of civil society especially as it relates to the public sphere. But after I read Michael's book, I had more questions, and I was a little more confused on that argument than when I had started. So at the end of my remarks I will leave you with a few questions about that, after I explain it a little bit.

First, let me tell you about the Case Foundation. We are a very young foundation, created in 1997 by Steve and Jean Case. Steve Case was the co-founder of AOL, and his wife Jean, our CEO, was in charge of consumer marketing and branding for the company. Now, our founders would say that they saw AOL as an experiment in civic participation—a successful for-profit experiment, but an experiment in civic participation nonetheless. Michael (Edwards) talks a bit in the book about where technologies are taking us, where media companies and the mass-marketization of online companies and blogs will take us in terms of conversations in civic participation. Well, when AOL came about, people who had been kind of isolated and held apart

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the discussion can be found online at
http://www.hudson.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=hudson_upcoming_events&id=670

could come together and connect in a way that they hadn't been able to connect before and create communities of power and have dialogue about conversations that couldn't happen before – think of the gay and lesbian community for instance. It was kind of the first place that that happened. That belief in civic participation grew into what the Case Foundation is today, a foundation that tries to leverage new technologies and entrepreneurial approaches to ignite civic participation in this country.

At Case, we've looked at civic participation with a variety of different lenses. From our very beginning we were investing in strategies like the big volunteer users, organizations like Habitat for Humanity and the Special Olympics. We were among the largest funders of those organizations. We then took it to fund the national service movement, and we do a lot of work to fund the national service space and organizations like City Year. We're also doing a lot of work around pro bono, trying to move skilled volunteerism in a way that hadn't been done before, outside of the legal space.

What I'll talk a little bit about today is investing in those bottom-up approaches to civic engagement and trying to fuel the civic space. The reason why we at the Case Foundation invest in civic participation instead of a more specific issue area is because we think that when you ignite civic participation and you have active and engaged communities, you are fostering active and engaged citizens who create the types of social innovations that can solve myriad problems. So that has really colored the way that the Case Foundation has done its work.

I want to talk briefly about three experiments we've done. The first is citizen-centered approaches to civic engagement. Second, we support economic and educational developments in the Palestinian West Bank. Third, we leverage social media to catalyze giving and civic action.

So, first, citizen-centered approaches to civic engagement tie most closely to the piece of civil society that is the "public sphere" or "public space." Back in 2006, the Case Foundation was at a bit of an inflection point in terms of all of our work. We had invested a lot of money in the volunteer and civic participation space, as had the federal government, corporations, and many people who were trying to support the big volunteer-using organizations and also create the kind of bottom-up efforts that would create communities of active citizens.

But in 2006 we found a landscape that is somewhat similar to the landscape we find now. There was certainly an increase in programs that do good, and there were more nonprofits than there had ever been before. We were seeing incremental gains in volunteering. There was a big effort at that time to put in place the ten-by-10 campaign to have ten million more volunteers by 2010; which came out of the Corporation for National and Community Service. So there were big efforts to push volunteering. But we were still seeing just incremental gains. We were seeing increased social isolation in a way that we hadn't before. People seemed to be kind of retreating and not wanting to be involved actively in the middle of their communities. We saw declines in certain civic participation measures, and civic health and chronic social problems as Michael (Edwards) mentioned in his book were once again going unsolved despite this landscape.

So we worked with Cynthia Gibson, whom I think many of you in this room probably know.[5] Cindy was a program officer at the Carnegie Foundation, with their Strengthening US Democracy programs. She had done a lot of work on the civic mission of schools. We asked her if she would interview a variety of people who were working to activate and mobilize people and find out what was going on with this ethos of service and civic engagement in this country.

What she found by interviewing marketing executives and service and civic engagement practitioners and thought leaders is that we did not have a problem in the associational form of civic participation; we were doing quite well when it came to establishing associations and funding associations and people wanting to go and be involved in communities. That is a part of our DNA in this country.

But we were slipping on this public space, and so we wanted to learn a little bit more about that. So Cindy (Gibson) came up with the phrase "citizen-centered civic engagement," thinking that if we could invest in getting people to not just plug into activities occasionally – to come paint a building, repair a fence, or participate in the one hour budget hearing – but to kind of own the challenges and the opportunities in their community, then we could start to see some very big movements when it comes to civic participation. We could see the kind of civic participation that solves problems. The citizen-centered civic engagement model combined some of the best of the dialogue-and-deliberation space with the best of volunteer action, so you both had to have dialogue and deliberation where people were connecting and coming together, but you also had to move those people to action.

The dialogue space gets criticized a lot for a big kum-ba-yah moment, where people come and sing around the fire, pat each other on the back, and don't go anywhere. And the volunteering space gets a lot of flak for being just the opposite; people pick up a lot of trash, but to what end? It's not really solving any major civic problems, people say.

The citizen-centered approach has some common characteristics beyond those. One – and Michael (Edwards) talks about this – certainly when we talk about the public space, you have to bring together a wide cross-section of your community. Many of you probably know the AmericaSpeaks model, which is about taking the town-hall meeting into the twenty-first century. What's interesting about AmericaSpeaks is, when they go into a community they spend most of their time at the beginning trying to get the right people into the room. It's not about necessarily having opposing views. It's about having a microcosm reflective of your community. They actually even go as far as doing specific youth forums so that the youth will be engaged beyond the regular meeting.

This approach gives all people a chance to share their experiences; it creates spaces where people can feel empowered rather than just consumers of services, whether that's voting or volunteering or activism; it involves all of the sectors as partners rather than having any one in particular driving it; and it moves away from defining civic engagement as a set of traditional tactics. So it's beyond voting and volunteering. It's about ongoing and active engagement. It moves beyond dialogue and consensus building to tough deliberation and decision making. It's non-partisan. And it gives all people a chance to see their ideas implemented, getting back to the action phase.

[5] Read more about Ms. Gibson and her work on her blog, at http://cingib.blogspot.com/.

Well, we decided to learn a little bit by funding. We created a grant program called the "Make It Your Own" awards (online at http://miyo.casefoundation.org/). We wanted to learn more about these citizen-centered approaches to civic engagement; we wanted to promote the concept; and we wanted to see more diverse stories than those we had seen to that point. We invited people to submit ideas. It was a small-grants program – we were giving away twenty $10,000 grants and letting the public decide what the top four grants should be.

We saw almost *five thousand* applications. (Audible gasp from the audience.) Yes – thank you! And we selected the top one hundred, and then the top twenty. It shocked us and threw our timeline off a bit to have that many applications. And when it came to picking the top twenty, we saw more than fifteen thousand unique votes by people who wanted to engage in that discussion and select the top twenty.

The programs that were selected ranged from citizen participation in New Orleans, which built off of the Unified New Orleans Planning Process (www.unifiedneworleansplan.com) and was really trying to give New Orleans' citizens a permanent voice in the lawmaking process, to the South Bronx-based Conversations for Change, which was trying to foster dialogue between the communities and community police in Bronx, New York, to Juveniles for Justice, which was trying to bring young people in the justice system together with young people from the outside to create some reforms there. The Burlington, Vermont-based Front Porch Forum was another model where people come together online and have the smallest discussions about needing a sidewalk shoveled to the biggest discussions about where the community should be going when it comes to health care. Two-thirds of the people in Burlington are involved in that.

I really still believe, after our experiences in citizen-centered civic engagement and after reading Michael's book, that an investment in the public sphere can really help to lead to a good society, and to building associations that make sense.

Here's where we still struggle: Citizen-centered civic engagement is supposed to be issue-averse. But we see problems with people not being able to rally without an issue. You want people to be engaged in their community and not just get excited about the environment. But it seems very hard. What we're studying from our organizations is that people don't get excited about meeting; they need something – and I don't know what we do with that. We're still studying that.

The concept is also hard to separate from community organizing. We found that of the five thousand applications we received, a vast majority of them were traditional organizing – they were run by nonprofit programs, and sadly – or not sadly – many of the ones we thought were about citizen-centered engagement and trying to build the civic space turned into organizing. So that's an issue that we continue to struggle with.

Money is another issue that we struggle with. We went out with the citizen-centered concept, saying that this is about people connecting in their living rooms and in church basements, and you just need to have a conversation and get excited about being in your community. And we found that most people who did not move forward with their projects were held back because they did not have the money to have the meetings or the space to have the meetings, and the

people who were the most successful of our grantees were the people who used our money to create the meetings. We don't know where money comes in, when it comes to creating the civic space.

And lastly, there's the chicken-and-egg riddle that I struggle with a little bit when it comes to civil society. If you have a bloated nonprofit community that isn't solving a whole lot of problems, do you need the right kinds of associations to create a civic space, or is it that when you have a thriving civic space of people talking, it builds the right organizations? These are the questions that I still struggle with. I look forward to having that conversation.

I see I've reached my time limit, so hopefully when we get into a discussion a bit later I can talk about the other areas the Case Foundation works on, like trying to build civil society in the Palestinian West Bank by creating youth centers and working quite a bit with corporations – Intel and Cisco were some of our most active partners in helping to create civil society there. It wasn't about vast scalable programs, but about Intel doing things like teaching teachers how to teach, or Cisco creating video-conferencing so young people are talking to each other within the Middle East and without. There's the question of how corporations can exist in that space and be a part of civil society without having it be a large, multinational, corporate, top-down approach.

The other thing that I want to say – on the corporate side – to Michael (Edwards) is this: 31 percent of the respondents in the millennial generation said recently in the Civic Health Index that they had a great deal of confidence in small businesses, making them the most trusted institution.[6] We also saw a recent report from the Intelligence Group that said that millennials – people between the ages of 16 and 29, I think – list corporations as the most trusted institution beyond government and beyond organizations. What do we do with that? Young people are getting out of business school, getting out of high school and looking for the institutions that they think can solve problems, and they're flocking to corporations. Some of that is because they want to brand their life with some of these good campaigns and programs. In any case, it's very interesting to think about.

And then lastly, I want to make a quick point about technology. What does civil society mean – especially from an associations perspective – when eighty million people are using the Causes application on Facebook; when there are three hundred million people on Facebook; and when there are 300,000 Causes. There are hundreds of thousands of groups. So we talk about a bloated nonprofit industry. Anyone can create a "Cause," even without a 501(c)(3). So what does that mean for the associations space? Those are just some points that intersect with some of the work that we're doing, and some questions that we still have when it comes to building civil society.

(Applause.)

[6] The 2009 Civic Health Index is an annual, cooperative effort of the National Conference on Citizenship, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University, and Harvard University's Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America, as well as members of a Civic Health Index Working Group. It is published by the National Conference on Citizenship, and can be found online at http://www.ncoc.net/index.php?tray=series&tid=top5&cid=2gp54.

RUTH McCAMBRIDGE: I'm editor-in-chief of *The Nonprofit Quarterly*, but truth be told, my heart is still in where I came from, professionally; I worked as an organizer for twenty years. Now, I've learned a lot in the twenty years since then, in terms of just being able to look back and process some of what I've learned, but in fact I feel like I'm still what I was. All the disciplines that I used as a community organizer are the disciplines that I use now, and they are incredibly valuable.

I want to talk for a second about organizing and civil society. A lot of times people will talk about organizing as though it's somehow manipulative – and, indeed, some kinds of organizing are incredibly manipulative. But there are types of organizing that help people to understand what it is that they care most about, and to organize themselves around doing something about it. That kind of organizing can happen very spontaneously, or it can happen as a matter of planning, but in some way it has to be supported by the culture that it's in.

Last week I was in very rural Missouri, and I was talking to a group of very dissimilar people who all looked like they had had kind of a rough life. They told me that their town is the methamphetamine capital of the country, and they are trying to build up and centralize their substance abuse treatment capacity in the form of a substance abuse center. And while they freely offered that they didn't know what they were doing, and they had already made a couple of glaring mistakes including buying a building at a very young age – something that nobody would have advised them to do, the fact of the matter is that they are going to get done what they are going to get done come hell or high water. And it isn't because they've been brought into a civic space to talk about the stuff that is going on in their town; it's because they have friends and family members or they themselves have had substance abuse issues. It's because they've seen their town really suffering from this issue that they really are impelled to do something about it.

The same thing is true of the feral cat society in my town. These ladies will not give up no matter what. They're going to go out and catch all of those cats, and if they don't catch them, they're going to feed them and they're going to educate everyone around them in the weirdest possible ways as to why you should pay attention to these cats. I went to a local sandcastle building contest once where they had built a cat out of sand, and all of these old ladies were just wandering around it.

Those odd, unique things that we do as collectives of people are what make up the *real* space of civil society. You can not construct it in this super-predictable way; it doesn't happen that way. True civil society that keeps people engaged is about people getting a taste of being able to make change about something that they truly care about. Even if they don't think that they are pivotal in making a particular change, they believe that they had agency in making the change. I don't care if you are stuffing envelopes or you're wandering around town with flyers or whatever it is that you're doing, there is something in the *doing* of something that really matters to you that is the heart and soul of civil society.

Now, as Michael (Edwards) said, the environment has to be right for that. And on the one hand, you can look at whether the law, the political framework, or the dominant ideology encourages civil society. But on the other hand you have to look at some other things also that I think are

very important. One is this odd habit that we have of trying to institutionalize things when they really need to remain more fluid. There's a piece in Michael's (Edwards) book where he quotes Hannah Arendt talking about how attempts to standardize everything in terms of the way it functions internally have the effect of killing off a lot of stuff. (See *Civil Society*, 2nd edition, page 94.) There's something about needing things to be predictable and similar "enough" so that we can identify immediately what we want to have changed about it that seems to soothe certain funders. Anyone who wants to be in the civic space and be funded to be in the civic space ends up being infected by these expectations of who they *ought* to be – unless they are funded by people who are just naturally attached to them.

I think the larger, more national, and more standardized philanthropy gets, the assumption that we can define what civil society is and tidy it up it gets worse and worse. Bill (Schambra) and I have talked a lot about this during this economic downturn. And I see national philanthropy getting more focused on defining methods, outcomes, and the one "right way" to do a particular thing. Meanwhile, at the local level you see small foundations really struggling with what is happening in their particular community. Where can they get in to make things a little bit easier, if things are heading in the right direction? How can they make sure things can move forward? As they ask these questions, I see that local philanthropy is getting more intimately local.

And I wonder if we're going to see local philanthropy and local community groups reconnecting in ways that they haven't been connected before, or haven't been as well connected as they could have been over the last twenty years. I think we are. I see things changing at the local level – really kind of nuanced things like all of a sudden you see local philanthropy stepping back a little bit from urging everybody to merge up. Instead, they're asking to know what's going on out there, and what they can do to help, and they're looking for collaboration where they sit. And it's producing some things I think that are surprising, some of the bridging stuff that I think philanthropy has always wanted to see people do. And it's producing that naturally because people are stressing the environment, and philanthropy is stepping back a little bit to watch how people are reorganizing themselves, how groups are reorganizing themselves.

Attempts to define the space of civil society frustrate me, because in the end it is what we make of it. The one place where I really differ with Michael (Edwards) – and I haven't told him this yet (laughter) – is that he seems to think that we're supposed to be heading towards a loving, collaborative place, and I actually believe it isn't all loving and collaborative. My experience of working in civil society is that it's often painful and confrontational, and it makes you change because it won't let you *not* change. It's hard to be in a space of real change in a community group. It's torturous! I have worked in two different movements over periods of many years, and it was torturous because it forces you to grow and to adopt leadership capacity.

I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks that "what I use now is what I learned then." I learned all the skills of understanding when a contradiction is being resolved, and knowing how to help that work itself out in a group of people. I learned the skills of being able to be quiet when I needed to be quiet, and of ensuring that there was enough space for other voices to get heard. I learned so incredibly much in being involved in just the first few years in civil society at the most rudimentary level.

And right now we're seeing a lot of contradictions being played out. For example, with the use of technology there's the assumption that it is sufficient somehow for people to get hooked up online. It's easy, but it's SO *not* sufficient – because you can more easily disengage from that than when you're face to face and you're being challenged and you have to grow and you have to develop new skills. There's a real contradiction between these kinds of engagement.

And the value of predictability, measurability, and predetermined outcomes – the be-all, end-all of so-called "strategic" philanthropy – is contradicted in philanthropy by the inherent value in the messiness of engagement and the messiness of not even knowing what you're headed for, never mind how you're going to get there. Does the value found in messiness somehow supersede the value of strict, measurable outcomes as laid out ahead of time? Are these two very different endeavors that shouldn't be combined? I wonder about that sometimes.

You get in the middle of these conversations, and you've got one group of people who are talking about measurable outcomes and strategic philanthropy as if they were the be-all, end-all, and you've got another group of people who are saying that the important thing is to get people involved in a public space on the issues that are closest to their hearts, so that our democracy will really thrive. And you might think you're going crazy because these are really two very different conversations. It's very hard to sit in rooms where the two are going on at the same time, because those two groupings don't necessarily hear each other.

Moreover, I think some calcification happens when organizations mature. When we talk about "small" and "local," I'm sure all of us have an image in our heads of what such an organization looks like. And when you try to transform that into a larger institution, a so-called "sustainable" institution, you can run into the problem that people are getting marginalized out of the conversation, and you've got a few leaders making all of the decisions, and participation is set up in such a way that it never really affects the core of the operation. It's a huge challenge in this sector.

Generally, there's something in all of us that wants the predictable, wants the stable, that doesn't want to be out there on a precipice feeling like we're going to fall off the edge, feeling like we're at risk. The fact of the matter is, when we take things on in the places where we live and there are people who don't agree with us, it automatically puts us at risk. And so you have to figure out how important is it to you. I think the job of philanthropy that funds civil society is to ensure that every individual who takes these risks is supported in helping to develop himself or herself into a full citizen and – and by that I mean an active and vocal citizen, and a citizen who really feels capable of being part of making change.

I also want to say that I think it's really appropriate to act inappropriately. I think we should act inappropriately much more often, I think we should get rude now and then, and as far as I'm concerned, incivility is the stock of civil society. There's far too much half-talking, not fully expressing ourselves. And if there's one thing that disengages people, it's the inability of organizations that are speaking in their name not to fully express the reality of the people that they're claiming to represent.

I want to tell one last story about my experience with all three of the elements of social capital, I think, and the development of a civil society. It takes place in Northern Ireland. I'm not sure that I've told you guys (on the panel) this story before. In Northern Ireland right before the Good Friday Agreement, the women's sector was very concerned about what routes there were into politics for women. At that point, the women's sector was made up of a lot of different sizes and types of groups – there were some tea groups that existed in little rural towns, and there were some umbrella groups that existed at the national level, and there were a lot of domestic violence groups and anti-violence groups for women, and there were just a lot of different kinds of groups on this little land mass. And they were all pretty independent. But right before the Good Friday Agreement they decided that they needed to figure out their collective "next step."

So the women's groups decided to come together in this big planning process. They used something called the Future Search process,[7] whereby you basically get the right people in the room, you develop the right set of questions – which comes out of people who are knowledgeable with the people in that room, and then you equalize the dialogue as much as possible. And for three days you walk the people in the room through what's happened in the past, what's happening in the present, and you all move toward some future vision.

In the end each one of those groups took what was there back into their own work, and it "worked like a dream," as they will say to you. In each place this common vision was embedded in the local group. That is powerful. That means you don't necessarily have to keep this cross-grouping together; you just have to pull the cross-grouping together from time to time and allow people to focus the core of their energy in the places that they truly care about. That kind of distribution-centralization-distribution-centralization doesn't allow you to grow a big organization around you, but it does create a sense of dynamism and excitement about what it is that we're all in together.

I don't think I have to tell you that I'm *in love* with people's willingness and ability to take action collectively – I'm *in love* with it. I love watching it; it's exciting. Everything we can do to encourage this willingness and ability at the most local levels, and then to encourage the bridging and the linking that helps those groups to be really as effective as they can, to be working with as much information and resources as they can, that's what our jobs are at higher levels of work and in academia.

(Applause).

WILLIAM DENNIS: Thank you, everybody! I'm going to take somewhat of a different approach. And I'm going to take my cue from Mr. Edwards' own words on page 80 of *Civil Society*. He writes, "The best consent, let's remember, emerges from dissent, not the rosy glow of polite conversation that fuels liberal fantasies about social transformation." I only have ten minutes, though, so I'm going to be blunt and maybe even uncivil. (Laughter.)

I'm going to start out by reading a paragraph from a much-neglected author, James Gould Cozzens, one of the famous authors on civil society and small-town America. This book, *The*

[7] For more information on this process, visit the Future Search web site at http://www.futuresearch.net/.

Just and the Unjust,[8] is not only about a murder trial, it's really about life in this small city. At the very end of the book, Judge Coates is talking to his son Abner – Abner is the district attorney. Here's what he says (p. 434):

> "Don't be cynical," Judge Coates said. "A cynic is just a man who found out when he was about ten that there wasn't any Santa Claus, and he's still upset. Yes, there'll be more war; and soon, I don't doubt. There always has been. There'll be deaths and disappointments and failures. When they come, you meet them. Nobody promises you a good time or an easy time. I don't know who it was who said when we think of the past we regret and when we think of the future we fear. And with reason. But no bets are off. There is the present to think of, and as long as you live there always will be. In the present, every day is a miracle. The world gets up in the morning and is fed and goes to work, and in the evening it comes home and is fed again and perhaps has a little amusement and goes to sleep. To make that possible, so much has to be done by so many people that, on the face of it, it is impossible. Well, every day we do it; and every day, come hell, come high water, we're going to have to go on doing it as well as we can."
>
> "So it seems," said Abner.
>
> "Yes, so it seems," said Judge Coates, "and so it is, and so it will be! And that's where you come in. That's all we want of you."
>
> Abner said, "What do you want of me?"
>
> "We just want you to do the impossible," Judge Coates said.

Now to me, that's a civil society. That's the world that *really* matters. That's the getting up in the morning and performing those miracles that keep the world going. It's pretty much the world I grew up in, and I think it's pretty much the world that's still out there in America. And I admire it. It's where all the heavy lifting is done. And I urge you, when you leave this room, to go out on the streets of Washington and just contemplate again how it all gets there, how all of the people get there in the morning, and where they all go at night, and what is going on in their lives. And I think you'll find that individuals, families, businesses, professions, sectors, associations, school children, and so on, produce and distribute the goods and services necessary to keep a large, complex society going on for another day – and that is truly a miracle.

So I view civil society as everything but government. Government in a limited constitutional republic is supposed to be the servant of the civil society. The civil society is the families and the businesses and the voluntary associations that de Tocqueville wrote about that get the work done. That is a miracle, and that is my first big point.

[8] James Gould Cozzens, *The Just and the Unjust* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1942).

Mr. Edwards doesn't ignore this altogether. He has me in a category labeled Tocquevillian – and worse, a conservative Tocquevillian. And I think that's probably correct. But Mr. Edwards isn't satisfied with daily accomplishments – these "daily miracles," as James Gould Cozzens says. He says that things must be done with "the structural problems of inequality, discrimination, and the institutionalized concentration of power" (105). He says this in one variation or another throughout the book.

Now I don't know whether those are problems or not. I used to tell my students that it is important for us to talk about the difference between "problems" and "situations." If some scientists came to us and said that an asteroid is going hit our planet in two weeks, that's not a problem; it's a situation. If they say it's going to happen in twenty years, it's worth investigating – it might be a problem after all. But if it happened that the same scientists came to us in 1809 and said that an asteroid was going to hit in twenty years, then it's just a situation.

So it's probably a subject for another day, Mr. Edwards, what you mean by "inequality," "discrimination," and "the institutionalized concentration of power," but let us suppose that these are important questions. Then I would argue – and this is my second important point – that among the other achievements of civil society as I have defined it, it has actually produced, already, substantial equality, reduced all sorts of discrimination, and created diverse centers of social power – maybe about as much as you can actually do. The average American lives better in material terms than greatest the princes of past ages; he has better food, clothing, housing and medical care; he has more living space; almost the entire world is open to his investigations; his children do not die in infancy; and he lives into what historically was a legendary old age. Libraries of knowledge are now available at his fingertips. He may choose to purchase material improvements unheard of just a few years ago. He experiences and appreciates a wide array of personal liberties. And I think, with the globalization of capitalism, which Mr. Edwards also talks about and seems to not like too much, these benefits have spread throughout the civilized portions of the world.

And so have the people associated with global capitalism and the spread of this sort of civil society, from all countries – executives, managers, technicians, and their families who now by the millions complete portions of their careers on foreign soil. Along with this have come international travel and the cross-boundaries migrations of young people for education, teaching, and adventure. And we have the outwork of the churches. So we really are becoming slowly a global civilization in healthy ways, ways that fit into the values that I think my fellow panelists have talked about. Yet they don't seem to want to emphasize that. They want to see all these problems, all this social work that still needs to be accomplished. And I suspect many of you feel the same way.

When we look at the data about social change, we find that secular economic growth is common, even ubiquitous, with overall average material circumstances making regular improvement. Self-government in the sense of governing oneself is now the social norm and expectation. Participatory political systems continue to spread and flourish. This is what I call in some of my writings "the environment for liberty." It depends for its success on well-defined and protected rights to property, the rule of law, and a limited constitutional government with regular and periodic elections. It is an environment in which most people, given the opportunity, wish to live

because it allows them to thrive in whatever ways they find the most valuable. It is an environment that is hard won over the ages, and it is always and everywhere an endangered environment because it is always under threat by the clever manipulators with their clever plans, who seem to think that nothing good can be accomplished without their ministrations, and who therefore demand that an increasing share of the public time and wealth and attention be turned over to them to pursue their projects on behalf of the reign of virtue.

During the campaign Michelle Obama said that Barrack is not going to leave you alone, and I took her seriously about that, and I thought that was a bad thing. I want to be left alone. I want to choose who I associate with, and what projects I get engaged in, and what causes I think are just.

I don't have the time to do it, but I want to point you to a passage from Mr. Edwards' page 60; I was going to read it, but there's just not time for that. It's an interesting passage starting with "However, even loving families and socially responsible capitalism will create – or fail to redress – inequalities in power, access, and opportunity." And then he goes on with a long list of stuff that capitalism and families "can't do."

I think there's an underlying antipathy here. The institutions of free society that [inaudible] pervades this book – there are pages after pages after pages on the one hand saying, "well, we can't reach consensus" and on the other hand, "we're going to have consensus around these social problems if we're doing what has to be done." And I just don't think that's the case.

I think, furthermore – and here's my third point – that when we turn away from truly voluntary associations – and some of the ones [Edwards] lists as voluntary aren't really – and turn to institutions of government to improve the situations of mankind, we do not find a friendly ally. We can see through history what a dangerous force government has largely been. Over the millennia of civilization, it seems to me, such horrors as pestilence, famine, death, and destruction on a colossal scale – class against class, race against race, faith against faith – have been the characteristic gifts of the state, and not some promise of benevolent protections.

To sum up, in the last few decades we have seen that people all over the world, without abandoning their religions and their distinctive cultures, will if given the chance choose to live in some variant of "the environment of liberty." It is the environment that priests, emperors, dictators, generals, and their legions of willing minions have long decried and continued to oppose. But it is the environment that has proven to be popular with the people at large. It is the environment most compatible with human nature as it actually is. It is the environment that, by another name, we know as civil society.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: I'd like to pose a question, if I could – and then certainly we'll mix things up here for a couple of minutes. But I think my question will frame the kind of conversation we would have anyway. And that is this:

Michael Smith, you mentioned the chicken-and-egg problem, and I think that's the question that struck me in the book. It's really a decisive problem, and the thing we need to wrestle with – and Bill (Dennis)'s comments get to this as well.

There is a sense, when you read the book, that civil society comes at then end of a process of substantial political and social change pointing in the direction that Bill Dennis was suggesting here, namely, greater egalitarianism, greater distribution of the goods of society – of housing, of food, of wealth, of all sorts of things. Only at that point does a true associational kind of civil society become possible – and you make a very good point, Michael (Edwards). This is a point, incidentally, that American progressives made; Theodore Roosevelt was very big about this, talking about the need for wages and hours laws so that working men in America could participate in public life. He was very concerned about participation in public life – and of course he said "working men," but the end result of this social reform was to be greater participation of the worker in the daily life that he faced.

But on the other hand, as we celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall we have to recognize that there civil society seemed to play a role where none of those conditions were met, where it was precisely the opposite of a flourishing social democracy with general equality. I can't remember who it was, but one of the Eastern European dissenters basically said that the key to it all was that they had to begin to live as if they were free. In those little cells in their everyday life, they began to live as if the totalitarian regime around them, the farthest thing from the generalized civil society you could get, was a lie. They said, enough. They were no longer going to participate in the lie. And so there was a kind of a flourishing of a civil society under the most dramatically unfavorable conditions, given Michael Edwards' definition and the requirements he discusses as necessary for civil society.

This is a long question which is actually, obviously, a comment. (Laughter.) But we'll take comments on that, and in the course of that you'll probably address some of the other remarks that you heard – if that's okay with you.

MICHAEL EDWARDS: Yes, sure! But you still want me to answer, right? (Laughter.)

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: That's exactly right!

MICHAEL EDWARDS: Well, there's no answer to the chicken-and-egg conundrum. We know that. It's a "both/and," and it's the same with civil society. What do you believe? Do you believe the chicken comes before the egg or that the egg comes before the chicken? That's a matter of belief.

And there are people who believe – passionately – that you have to pass through certain stages of historical and economic development to get to civil society. That's a perfectly legitimate view. And there are other people who believe anyone can have civil society anywhere regardless of the context or culture.

I'm in the latter category. I recognize the importance of history, but to me it's much more refreshing because the debate is more open and liberating if one starts from the assumption that

people who don't have civil society can create change. If you have to pass through two hundred years of capitalism, then it's bad luck if you're in the West Bank, because civil society ain't for you – which is a profoundly disappointing thing to say, at the very least.

So I tend to look simply for the conditions in which people can undertake the kind of action that we've all been talking about in our different ways, which will eventually create something useful whether you call it civil society or not. That's enough for me because it fits my own definition of what civil society is and can be. It's the process of people working together to create positive social change. And that looks very different in different places. The question of whether the chicken or the egg came first is a neither-here-nor-there question, for me. We have to act in the here and now, and we have plenty of routes to doing that which can be very useful to people doing that task.

WILLIAM DENNIS: Palestinians all over the world are prosperous and energetic and ambitious and skilled. Just in the West Bank they have problems. Why is that? Because they can't sit down and live with their neighbor. We don't want to talk about that, but that is generally what I was arguing. You don't have to go through two hundred years of capitalism; you can have capitalism in the West Bank and Gaza tomorrow. All they have to do is let the Israelis start investing in their society, to agree to be friends. And they're working on some of that. I see some nice things happening in the West Bank; they're talking about developing water projects together with Jordan. Maybe that can happen. It's not a mystery!

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: On this question of business, incidentally, is where Michael Smith and Bill Dennis seem to have a bit more in common here, as opposed to Michael Edwards and perhaps Ruth McCambridge, although I won't categorize Ruth's view quite yet.

Michael (Edwards), there is a tension in the book between economic self-interest and civil society – and this characterizes your other work as well, *Philanthrocapitalism*, your defense of civil society against the incursion of business ethics and what-not.[9] And yet Michael Smith said that young people are able to combine a civically activist orientation with a sort of admiration for business. What he has seen in the millennial generation is not necessarily a radical tension between the values of the marketplace and the values of civil society. And of course, Bill (Dennis) is quite clear on his defense of the values of the marketplace as a piece of civil society. So, is this a fruitful tension?

MICHAEL EDWARDS: It's certainly fruitful in many ways, and I think that's where the debate is and will continue to be because these are both inescapable elements of our lives and of any abundant society. A market economy is essential to grow the kind of economic surplus that any society needs to be successful, but if that was it, then that would be the end of the debate and we would all be living in paradise – which unfortunately most of us are not. So clearly there's something missing from that equation, and that's why I constantly stress what to me is missing from that equation – civil society in the sense that we've been discussing, which is always activist, both a counterweight and a source of pressure and accountability and alternative ideas and values so that so that capitalism is tolerable, so that the effects of capitalism are distributed

[9] Michael Edwards, *Just Another Emperor? The Myths and Realities of Philanthrocapitalism* (New York and London: Demos: A Network for Ideas & Action and The Young Foundation, 2008).

more fairly in society, so that the cost and externalities that are always associated with capitalism become managed in some sensible way.

So there actually isn't that much disagreement, or if there is a disagreement it's on my terms – it's where capitalism simply includes civil society in Bill (Dennis)'s terms, whether the two are constructive and critical friends, which I guess is how I hear Michael (Smith), or whether they are foresworn enemies, which is not my view but it's a view that is honorable, a view that is held in some parts of the progressive community.

For me the crucial issue is, are civil society and the market answering the same question, or are they answering different questions about the meaning of life, to put it as bluntly as possible. If one takes Bill (Dennis)'s view, then that question is all wrapped up in one, and it answers itself. All you need to do is get government off your backs, let the markets loose, and society will be paradise including on the West Bank. If you take my point of view, that will never be enough. It's simply naïve to believe that. We have as much evidence as we ever need, empirical evidence, to show us that that's the case. And therefore we need something else, and if we do that then we need to protect and nurture that "something else," because that's what will make capitalism tolerable and use its great wealth-producing potential to some social advantage for the broad mass of the population. So I continue to defend the need for that "something else" as a crucial part of the equation. That "something else," for me, is civil society in this discussion.

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: Michael (Smith), did you want to say a bit more about this relationship between this combination of marketplace values and civil society values?

MICHAEL SMITH: I think from some of the trend reports that we've seen, and the survey data, young people think they can do more with their dollar. They see their dollar working more quickly than they see their governments working or their civil society, or there's this trend of "buy-cotting" as opposed to boycotting. If I buy this product, I see that I'm getting water into the hands of a child. I see that almost immediately, and I can go to the web site and download the photo of the kid drinking the water. I see my parents paying their taxes every day but there are still potholes on my street.

I think that's where you're having some of these issues with young people. They don't look at corporations as the panacea or the great savior. There's not this great sense of trust. They just look at capitalism as a more expedient route to solution-making. In our work – and I'll take the Palestinian West Bank as an example – we've seen that when all of the players are at the table, corporations have been active players in civil society, right there with nonprofits and solution-makers in all of the work we've done in the West Bank.

I really think about helping to create that good society and being a part of those associations. When all of those play together, government with corporations with local people and civil society groups, I think that's when you see the best innovations. They all have a role. You've talked about this in your book, Michael (Edwards). Government has limitations, business has limitations, and civil society organizations have limitations. It's when we come together that I think we're at our best.

RUTH McCAMBRIDGE: I think the danger in all of that is when the roles are confused and government and corporations are funding the civil society organizations. There's a way of squelching a voice that ends up with the funders driving things. I've seen that happen over and over again in real life – that's just what happens in real life. There has to be an effort to make sure that the conversation is equalized in some way. There has to be an attempt to keep the conversation free of those really pernicious power dynamics, because they can be extremely pernicious.

WILLIAM DENNIS: Life is a bundle of externalities. It's all externalities. The question is whether institutions by and large work to the good, however we define it, or work to the bad. And there is no empirical evidence, Michael (Edwards), that capitalism has done anything on net except improve lives of people around the world in the last fifty years. And there's lots of empirical evidence on the contrary – there are countries that we can point to, as you know, with magnificent achievements because they've developed more of a free society. That doesn't mean I'm saying that capitalism is the only thing. I'm all for voluntary associations – I've worked in them all my life.

MICHAEL EDWARDS: Well, actually, there's a lot of evidence. If one reads any economic history worth the name in the post-war period, no country has either grown or developed through pure capitalism or free markets. So this is nonsense. You can read in any textbook about the rise of East Asia in the '50s and '60s. The most successful developers are now China, Vietnam, Brazil, Chile, Botswana, and Mauritius. This is sort of old debate that I keep having to rehearse. None of those were based on free market capitalism. They were all based on some sense of government direction of the economy in strategic ways; the gradual incorporation of economy into world markets, as a result of large measures of protectionism; and the development of the social contract, if you like, between civic society – ordinary people – and the state, which exchanged a short-term surrender of pensions and benefits and high wages for long-term social and political stability and the widespread benefits of growth. It has nothing to do with free market capitalism. So one can ignore the evidence, Bill (Dennis), but the evidence is there and it's not going to go away.

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: I'm sure we'll return to this topic, but let us now go to the audience. Pablo Eisenberg, please? I commend, incidentally, the recent cover piece he wrote in the philanthropy section of *The Wall Street Journal*.[10] I commend it to your attention.

PABLO EISENBERG: I have a question for Michael Edwards. At the end of your remarks you seem to conclude with some doubt about the future of civil society and its impact on people both locally and nationally. What do you see as the obstacles? What are the major characteristics of our society, of our peoples, that could in fact undermine civil society? Is it the personal qualities or the lack of courage on the part of nonprofit folks and political leaders? Is it lack of tolerance for other points of view? What is it that disturbs you as you look at the future?

[10] Pablo Eisenberg, "What's Wrong with Charitable Giving – and How to Fix It," *Wall Street Journal*, November 9, 2009, online at http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704500604574481773446591750.html (last accessed December 1, 2009).

MICHAEL EDWARDS: Talk about the chicken and the egg! There's another variation – are the problems in our institutions, or are they inside individuals?

It's a mixture of both, and they're obviously reciprocal; they influence each other. I think that by and large, despite the heroic everyday efforts of ordinary people which still continue in pretty much every community I am familiar with – and this is where I agree with Bill (Dennis)'s point, I don't think we have what I would call a macro-environment that is welcoming, and even less, encouraging for people to spend large parts of their lives in service to those goals and those activities.

The economic pressures are huge. The way in which politics is being turned into basically an adversarial winner-takes-all game is a deep disincentive, I think, for people to get involved. The sheer difficulty of getting anything done even at the local level, even if you do volunteer and join, is a major obstacle. There is the culture of passivity and consumption which we're constantly fed – because that's the sort of society we live in. One can go on and on and on.

Are those things responsible for people's ultimate decision to either become involved or not to become involved? No. We all retain that room to maneuver because we're human beings and we have those choices. But it's very difficult, when you're faced by wave upon wave of counter-pressure and disincentive, to be the kind of active citizen that everyone on this panel is celebrating. That phrase rolls off the tongue and it's a wonderful phrase. If only!

But making it happen in the real-time conditions of the world we live in is extraordinarily difficult. Someone has to salute those who make that choice. And it's difficult to start by changing people. But it's not difficult to start by changing that environment. That's where I would start.

We can do a thousand things to create a more welcoming and promising environment for people to release those energies which they have inside of them to be effective citizens, to express that side of their nature. If we did that, they would respond, I'm pretty sure.

But I think one of the strong points that comes out from this panel, for me, is this underlying tension between what you might call social engineering, social work – as Bill (Dennis) called it, top-down solutions, government intervention, government-sponsored volunteering schemes, social innovation, and that whole official apparatus, in which the foundation world is of course deeply involved and which is supposed to be supporting the development of civil society in the United States, and what people would describe as spontaneous self-organizing, dynamic, bottom-up, grassroots, passionate, uncontrolled, and unpredictable actions by people which create civil society on their own over the long term. The latter is more, I guess, where I am.

I recognize that there's always going to be a tension between trying to get the environment right and going overboard and imagining that we could engineer a civil society worthy of the name, which clearly is impossible.

RUTH McCAMBRIDGE: I'm not a big advocate of thinking that the environment has to be perfect for people to organize themselves. In fact, I think that sometimes the environment, when

it's chaotic, difficult, and painful, organizes *us*. And then we move it forward. So I actually don't consider any of the things that Michael (Edwards) talked about as being barriers. They're difficult, but they're not barriers.

At the local level, I see people realizing that what we've built to date is not really working for all of us right now, and they are beginning to wonder what the other things are that we need to do to move the society forward in the way that we want it to move in the near future. So those questions and motivations come out of a sense of discomfort. I think a lot of us change when we're uncomfortable, and not necessarily when everything is made super-comfortable for us. So I would say that many of the things that make it difficult for us to organize and engage are also the things that make it important personally for us to organize and engage.

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: Michael Smith, you mentioned the difficulty of trying to organize, to encourage civic deliberation, or to encourage civil society in the abstract. There's the tension between getting people together to talk, and the fact that people are strongly motivated by very specific causes, by some specific grievance, some specific thing that is really irritating them, something to which I think Ruth is alluding.

The Case Foundation, incidentally, just really deserves all sorts of congratulations for tackling this issue head on, because most foundations have ignored it; most foundations aren't even aware of the tension between the kinds of top-down programs they're funding and the discouragement that this produces for civic activism; the tension between that top-down funding and *genuine* civic activism.

But maybe the answer is that you are never going to have people getting together just for the sake of getting together and talking.

MICHAEL SMITH: Absolutely. We're doing research right now, and Pablo (Eisenberg) and certainly many people in this room were quoted in some of the work that we've done on citizen-centered civic engagement. And as we do the research about the grantees of ours that are about a year and a half old right now, there are two big issues that are coming up.

Working with Cindy (Gibson), we went out and kind of touted this model that you should be able to engage people so that they would want to own the challenges and opportunities in their communities, and they would want to be active participants – because it's their community and they should develop the solutions. And the Unified New Orleans Planning Process with citizen participation went strong immediately, when that issue was hot; the Juveniles for Justice program went strong when there were originally issues with community policing; and we had another one, an environmental summit down in Florida.

But we're finding that after the original impetus for the discussion fades a bit, they're not keeping people. This idea that people would want to engage because they would want to own their communities just is not working, and I don't know where we leave it.

And the other issue that we're left with, about which we spoke earlier, is the idea that this sort of engagement can happen in your church basement or in your living room. Well, it's just not

happening that way either. It requires more deliberate organization where people come together. You need people to have conversations in a certain way so that you can hear both sides without people yelling at each other. Technology is a great playing-field-leveler, but it can make loud voices louder, too, and so there's some structure that is required. It doesn't happen its own, as we had hoped.

NADIA McCONNELL, US-Ukraine Foundation: I don't know whether I'm at an advantage or disadvantage because I haven't read Mr. Edwards book. (Laughter.) Listening to all of the panelists, it's clear that one size does not fit all. And I think each of you have expressed things that are "right on."

Working in the Ukraine for twenty years, I am prepared to prove that all of the positive changes that have taken place are due to the maturing of Ukrainian civil society. Starting in the mid-1980s, different groups of people who were going through painful experiences got together. We had the mothers of the children of Chernobyl; their biggest fear was what was in store for their children. We had the mothers of the soldiers serving in the Afghan War. Fear of the state was secondary, but it was all of those people coming together that made change. And I can go throughout this twenty year history.

So it's not one-size-fits-all. And like I said, each of you has made an important point. A lot of times the donors – the funders – who are trying to make sure that the programs are successful create these formulas. And sometimes those formulas don't fit. One of the issues is indigenization, as if that in and of itself is a good goal. But are the societies ready for that? So this is a very interesting discussion.

Now, my question. I recently participated on a panel about NGOs in US-Ukraine relations and Canada-Ukraine relations. The conference was attended by mostly government people and ambassadors. And when my panel, the NGO panel, took place, those people left. Today, we've talked about capitalism and its role, but what is the role of government? Mr. Edwards said that we all believe in the role of civil society until somebody gets elected. I see that as an obstacle. Even though we mouth that we support civil society, we really don't understand it well enough to really truly support it if it's not politically convenient. Does anyone want to talk about the role of government in supporting or not supporting civil society, especially internationally?

MICHAEL EDWARDS: I'm just tempted to say that it's very important. This is where deeper ideological discussions come into play. If you don't believe government can do anything useful, then that's pretty much the end of the conversation. If you believe it sometimes can, but it is limited, then that opens the way to another conversation – and that's the camp I'm in. I see government as a crucial potential guarantor of the space that any civil society or public sphere worth the name requires to operate outside of conditions of being squashed or conditioned or contained and so on. The government is crucial because you need laws and you need policies and you need redistribution mechanisms and public goods provision, all of the things that government does. So government is actually central to most visions of civil society, I would say. It's not an aggressor – or it doesn't have to be. But in real time, in real history, it often has been, of course. Those are two separate conversations.

There are lots of things that government can and should do in order simply to open the way, to be as supportive as possible, to create the kind of environment we're talking about, and then to get out of the way and let people to do their own thing.

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: Bill (Dennis), do you have something to say about the role of government, maybe?

(Laughter).

WILLIAM DENNIS: Let me read two sentences from Michael's book, which I agree with. On page 71 –

MICHAEL EDWARDS: At least he's read it! This is excellent.

(Laughter.)

RUTH McCAMBRIDGE: (Glances over at Bill Dennis' book.) He underlined *his* [copy], too – my goodness!

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: Yes, there's a lot of underlining, I can see!

MICHAEL SMITH: It's like church!

(Laughter continues.)

WILLIAM DENNIS: Indeed, Michael!

MICHAEL SMITH (Feigning liturgical reading): In the "book of Edwards"…

WILLIAM DENNIS: (Reading.) "As previous chapters have shown, civil society is the land of difference, the place where we find meaning in our lives as people of different faiths, races, interests, perspectives and agendas. But the governance of complex societies and the preservation of peaceful coexistence require that *some* (emphasis by Dennis) of these particularities are surrendered to the common interest, in the form of rules, laws, norms and other agreements that cut across the views of different communities, and to which all citizens subscribe."

I think that's your point – you can't have a uniform rule for everything.

And I think what Michael (Smith) just said is also on point. The real problem is the "some" in the phrase "some of these particularities are surrendered to the common interest." And I suggest to you that that "some" should be limited, and that the common interest in a modern, complex world is not an open-ended thing. It's a very narrow thing. I think Michael (Edwards) feels that the "some" is really, in principle, unlimited. There are always other problems out there that we should bring the state in to engage in. There's no reason why it should be an untrustworthy

instrument. And I think that is really where the disagreement is, and where it's very hard to come to a common worldview.

MICHAEL SMITH: Can I jump in for a moment there?

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: Sure.

MICHAEL SMITH: Mike (Edwards), I would actually love for you to comment. I don't remember the chapter and verse –

(Laughter.)

MICHAEL SMITH: – but you talk in the book about – in the international realm especially – government and civil society money. In the work that we've done internationally, we find that almost every single NGO that we've worked with is receiving a big piece of their purse from one agency for development or another. So civil society seems not to be created in many areas if you don't have a large amount of government funding, as opposed to here, where you have individuals making up the bulk of funding for the sector. And 80 percent of givers in the United States are individuals – and I would argue that with technology now, that's even more true. Here, you have another route to funding as institutional funding is drying up.

MICHAEL EDWARDS: Well, it's a huge issue, and I did mention it very briefly in terms of social routes and political legitimacy. If you're on the government payroll, whether it's your own government or some foreign government – it's probably worse if it's a foreign government – you do tend to lose those two things, and if those are the things that you need to be affecting than you're in trouble. But that's the sort of theoretical side of things. The practical side is that you need cash to do your work. Where can you get it? And if you have to twist and turn a little bit, and there are some conditions, you decide to negotiate those.

So as someone who has worked in this "real world," so to speak, for thirty years, I am acutely aware of the way in which donors themselves are responsible for a lack of an answer to your question. Because they-you-we, I was one, don't invest sufficiently in the kind of self-generated, localized indigenous funding mechanisms that might help civil society organizations escape from that trap.

COURTNEY BOURNS, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations: My question is a bit related to Pablo Eisenberg's. It's about participation, and whether participation looks different now especially with technology. My concept of civil society is a bit like the church basement and the dialogue in the living room, the more grassroots thing where people are face to face in dialogue. We see this with the megachurches, I think, where there is this craving to come together face to face. But I also have the perception that people really are not engaged at that level as much as they used to be. I just read in the *New York Times* yesterday that the average American over two years old watches 4.4 hours of television a day, which to me says something about where we're spending our time. I just wonder if participation looks different with technology and, with what we saw during the election last year, what engagement looks like online. Should we be watching for different things about whether people are participating in civil society?

MICHAEL SMITH: I'll start. Because of the work that we do, we look at a lot of innovations and potential businesses to help do online discussions. There are those like Open Democracy (www.opendemocracy.org), and Michael (Edwards) mentioned *The Globalist*, Stephan Richter (founder and editor, www.theglobalist.com). I would have to say that from where I sit I have not seen a very good example of how to do real public conversations online in a meaningful way. The internet and online technologies are very important in reaching new audiences and bringing people to the table whom you could not reach before.

There's this great MySpace and Facebook debate that's happening right now. Facebook tends to be a little bit more white, a little bit more women, a little bit more wealthy. MySpace tends to be the opposite of all of those things. You could almost say that if you could reach a particular area, you could pull people in and reach *x* group – it's a great way to market, and it's a great way to start discussions. But the true, meaningful dialogue and deliberations that I think lead to social innovation and creating that public space are still happening *offline*. And Scott Heiferman, who founded Meetup.com, will tell you the exact same thing. It's great to start connecting online in ways that you couldn't before, but it really has to go to the actual space of a grounded community.

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: Ruth (McCambridge), that sort of goes to your point as well that there's no substitute for the face to face.

RUTH McCAMBRIDGE: No, because that is where you get held accountable. It's where you grow. It's where your ideas develop and evolve – not that ideas developing and evolving can't happen online. But when people get in a room personally, engage with one another, do work together, watch each other do work, debrief from that work, and reorganize themselves towards new work, there are things that happen in the space, and it is much more emotionally and intellectually productive in terms of just building our ability to get things done, in my mind.

We can sign onto stuff and we can engage in things online, definitely. No question about it. But there's something about the evolution of a movement that needs to happen at least partially face to face.

MICHAEL SMITH: I just want to give one quick example. For our Make It Your Own Awards, twenty percent of the applicants were African American. I don't think we could have done that without technology. We had some very specific strategies of tapping into BlackPlanet.com and areas like that where we normally could not have reached people. And so I wouldn't want to live in this space without technology. It's an incredible opportunity.

LARRY OTTINGER, Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest (www.clpi.org): I wanted to get your thoughts on another aspect of government. I was thinking of President Lincoln saying that government is of the people, by the people, and for the people. My question goes to that aspect of democracy, where we all participate in making the laws that affect us.

You all talk about democracy, civic engagement, and citizenship. My question is, as it relates to civil society and specifically as it relates to nonprofit organizations, do you all agree and see the

need for an increased role in terms of simplifying the rules so that nonprofits can be visible and be seen in the same way that business and government officials are sitting down at the table in terms of having influence over the policy decisions that affect us? Would all of you be supportive of increasing the ability of nonprofits to be at that table?

I remember when Mr. Schambra and the Bradley Foundation were very engaged in groups that were involved in policy formulation, policy implementation, and in promoting policy solutions to our social problems. Where does that piece fit into all of your conceptions of civil society?

WILLIAM EDWARDS: Well, it fits squarely into the public sphere. That's one of the reasons why I wrote the book – to bring the idea of the public sphere back into the civil society conversation, because it had largely been forgotten. The most powerful protagonists were locked into an associational view of the concept, and all the experiments that you outlined come from those ideas about the public sphere, people participating in public work, as Ruth (McCambridge) just said, in order to share in and maybe even create decisions which affect their lives. It's an incredibly important idea. And so, broadly, yes, I've always been supportive of increasing the role of citizens' organizations in those processes. To me that's an essential part of the civil society debate.

But it obviously raises a lot of questions, and these will be questions for business as well – so I'm not picking on civil society here. It raises questions of representation, of accountability, legitimacy, transparency, of whether there's a level playing field for different citizens' voices to be heard in those dialogues and deliberations – to which the answer is, no.

So if we're going to go down that route, and I think we probably will although I think the counter-forces are very powerful – I'll say something about that in a moment – we have to grapple with those questions very seriously. We don't have to come to some absolute resolution. But we do have to show that we've done the hard work, as citizens organizations ourselves, so that we can answer the questions which will inevitably and rightly come our way about whom *we* represent, whether or not we're just a special interest group. and what it means if another nonprofit down the road says the opposite thing, and so on and so on. Those are management issues about the public sphere, but they're very important.

I'll finish on the broader point that I was going to make about opposition. I said half-jokingly that politicians love civil society until they get elected. That is actually true. Everyone loves deliberative democracy until they become active in the representative system, and then all this participation stuff and deliberation becomes either a direct threat – it's taking power away from me; you elected me; I'm the power holder, so that's the end of the matter – or it becomes impossible. I always hear from politicians and those in charge of the political process that it's great in theory but in practice it's simply impossible to manage. They don't even go there. They do little experiments here and there, but by and large they keep the structure of politics as it is – frankly, because they benefit from that.

WILLIAM DENNIS: It sounds like politics has some problems with it, maybe even along the lines that I am thinking! (Laughter.) One of the strange themes in your book is that all of these nonprofits out there – this underprivileged class – aren't part of the discussion. That's the first I

knew about that. But it's clearly been something that Ruth (McCambridge) has also been worrying about over time.

One of the questions I am interested in is about environmental matters. The top five national environmental groups raise hundreds of millions of dollars every year. They are big players, and they own millions of acres of land. I bet that's true in all sorts of other things, too, but I guess they're underprivileged.

MICHAEL EDWARDS: Just be fair, you don't want to say that *they* are underprivileged. What we're trying to say is that there should be a level playing field so that all of those different citizen voices have a seat at the table, just to say what we're actually saying.

WILLIAM DENNIS: How could we possibly do that, Michael (Edwards)? What do you mean by "level playing field"?

MICHAEL EDWARDS: I mean that everyone has as far as possible an equal opportunity to have their voice heard. If you disagree with that I'd be interested to hear the philosophy behind it.

RUTH McCAMBRIDGE: I'd just like to say something about this as well. Those big advocacy organizations do not necessarily represent the people who are out in the field doing work in the communities around environmental issues. That is something that Cindy (Gibson) did an excellent job of documenting as well. I think that we've got multiple levels of issues, here, and when I talked about the calcification or bureaucratization, the self interest of particular institutions as being counterproductive to organizing at the local level, it's really true. If someone's saying at the national level that they represent your interests, and they don't truly represent your interests, that constitutes a problem beyond the problems that you're dealing with in your realm, because now you have to fight against the perception that you're already well represented. I think it's a more complicated question than the way you're posing it.

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: Theda Skocpol, who's not a free-market conservative by any means, also points to this problem, and Mr. Ottinger, you and I have had this conversation from time to time. The nonprofits that are able to step forward and have significant influence in public life typically are precisely those that have severed themselves from a kind of rootedness in life. They're more akin to Bill Dennis' multi-million-dollar lobbying organization, and insofar as they have membership lists at all, it's just the folks who've mailed in their checks. It's quite apart from what we're talking about, which is the kind of –

RUTH McCAMBRIDGE: – So the counter-image to that – I'm sorry and I know we're getting very close to the end here –

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: You can wrap it up, Ruth. (Laughter.)

RUTH McCAMBRIDGE: The counter image to that is NAMI – and I'm always getting their name wrong – the National Alliance on Mental Illness, which in fact has an entity here in Washington that does its lobbying. Basically NAMI is a network of about 1,400 self-help

organizations across the country that are made up primarily of people with mental illnesses and their families. Those organizations make up this network that feeds into a national entity that has been doing the work that resulted in the parity in health insurance for people who are mentally ill last year.

One of the people who was pivotal in pushing that forward was Senator Peter Domenici (R—New Mexico), a Republican legislator whose daughter had schizophrenia. He just started with his wife going to these meetings after work just to deal with his own personal self-interest in the issue, that in fact the system was not set up to care for mentally ill people in the way that it really needed to be. And it was through his involvement at that very local level that he got this burning desire to change national policy. In my mind that's kind of an ideal way for civil society to work. There is this connective tissue, but you also have these very vivid self-organizing groups at the local level that really are run by people who deeply know and care about the issue that they're working on.

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: I think that that's a terrific way to end our conversation. Oh, I should say one thing: Mr. Edwards has a new book coming out in January called *Small Change*, so we'll have to have him back early next year to talk about that! Let's give our panel a round of applause.

(Applause.)