

A Democracy Dialogue

Getting to the Essence of Freedom

Julie Diamond

The year I was 16, the United States pulled out of Vietnam. In my English class we were reading the anti-war novel, *Johnny Got His Gun*. One day, our teacher invited the local military recruiter to talk with us about his tour of duty in Vietnam. All the other English classes in the grade were there that day, as well as the head of the English Department and the Vice Principal. The young soldier spoke for a while and then asked the class if they had any questions. A young woman, sitting in the front row, asked him the simple yet terribly complex question, “How can you actually kill another human being?”

The room went silent, the students uncertain how the soldier would answer. The young man looked uncomfortable, frowned and bit his lip, as if trying to formulate something he hadn’t ever talked about. After a long and tense minute he said, “Well, you see, the other guy, he’s not really like you. He’s different, and, I mean, he’s shooting at you, and, and...” He struggled for a moment, paused, and then said angrily, “I mean, he doesn’t have any beliefs or religion or anything, he’s not even Christian...” He didn’t finish his sentence. But he didn’t have to. The implication that killing a non-Christian was justified hung in the air. The room fell silent. Without thinking, and oblivious to the packed room of students and teachers, I leapt to my feet, and yelled at the soldier, “How can you say that? Of course he has a religion, it’s just not the same one as

yours! That’s just stupid war propaganda, how can you even believe that?!” Shaking and crying, I sat down, and then remembered where I was. All eyes were on me, and then on the young man, waiting to see how he would respond. Without waiting for his reply, I ran out of the classroom.

For years, whenever I thought of that story, I felt it was a victory. I was proud that I spoke out, not only against war, but against racism and religious supremacy. I was standing up against the forces of ignorance and oppression. Even more, the soldier symbolized the authority of the State, and so I felt justified in my attack. He was the “Establishment,” and he was Christian, supporting the killing of non-Christians. As one of a handful of Jews in a predominantly non-Jewish school and town, I felt I had no choice but to protest the oppression of my religion or any minority religion. I was practicing democracy. Or was I?

As I grew older, a feeling of shame clouded my sense of pride. I had humiliated someone in public. No longer seeing the situation through sixteen-year-old eyes, I saw a young, nervous man, not just an authority symbol. I saw his insecurity as he struggled to express himself to a large group of strangers. I saw a soldier of low rank. He had probably been drafted, and as much a victim of the establishment as I was. Maybe even more so, for I didn’t have to risk my life in a place far from my home, enduring the daily terrors of war. It dawned on me, over

the years, that I was guilty of the same thing I had accused him of doing—failing to see the human face of my opponent. I dehumanized him by seeing only a faceless symbol of power which justified—even fueled—my violence towards him. My sense of righteousness allowed me to momentarily oppress him. In retrospect I wish I had engaged him as a person, in a conversation, rather than obliterating him and his position, the way I felt he had done to the Vietcong.

What I had done, from one point of view, was a completely normal practice of democracy—it was a winner-take-all interaction. Isn't this what democracy is all about? From another point of view, though, my means and my ends were incongruent. I used the very method I was criticizing to attack the soldier. Winner-take-all democracy is a *zero-sum game*: one side's win is necessarily the other side's loss. This incongruity between democratic ends or ideals, and the means we use to achieve them, is one of the central difficulties with our democratic system. By repressing one side, zero-sum methods are not truly democratic, because they seek democratic ends through less-than-democratic means.

I suddenly find myself in an internal debate: *Well, I think you're being too high minded. Democracy is not perfect, but it is miraculous that for over 200 years, transitions of power in the USA have occurred regularly every four years without bloodshed. Looked at historically—and even contemporarily—a bloodless transfer of power is a miracle. The majority of the planet still lives under some form of totalitarian dictatorship. Yelling at an opponent, winning and losing, that's just a question of politeness, and democracy isn't polite. It's about power, and power battles are just not sweet little tea parties. Your story took place in 1974. The nation was torn apart with conflict over that war. Hundreds of thousands of young men died. Most of them were poor, many of them African American. It was a lousy, unfair, unjust war. Thousands of protestors were arrested; hundreds died giving their lives to stop the bloodshed. And you're upset with yourself because you yelled?*

Well, yes, I am upset about it. But it's not just politeness or communication style. There is

something deeper that I want to investigate. Philosophy lies behind what we do, and if there's something incongruent in these underlying philosophies, then our methods will reflect it. We can talk all we want about reforming the political system, but it'll be no more than tweaks and polishes unless we investigate the ideas that give rise to our methods. There is a terrible dissonance between democratic principles and democratic practices. Democratic theory—like many disciplines today—reflects its old fashioned heritage. Medicine is undergoing a radical revisioning by investigating the shortcomings of the Newtonian mechanistic model upon which it is founded. Organizational theory is changing by incorporating new ideas from biological, self-organizing systems. Why can't politics go through a similar update? Democratic methods are based on a three-hundred-year-old picture of human nature and social structure, a 17th century view of the world that lacked a concept of psychology: unconscious behavior, group dynamics, and cross cultural issues.

Well, that's a good point. But what does it have to do with that problem you had with being impolite to the soldier?

It's not just that I was impolite. I discovered that in fighting my opponent, I acted like him. When means and ends are incongruent, we arrive at the paradox that we become like those whom we oppose. We become the other by using their methods. I have a problem with this because I love democracy—the ideal of democracy. This incongruity between democratic means and ends makes it impossible to consider our form of government truly democratic. It's like a parent who says “Do as I say, not as I do.” I can't respect that parent very much. I have to ask myself, if they believed so much in what they were saying, they'd also change their behavior. When I look at democracy now, I see democracy progressing toward an ideal. It's a great beginning, but in our methods we are settling for an achievable democracy, not an ideal one. We've developed democratic procedures that match our skill level, but not ones that challenge us to rise above our skills. Some

of the earliest democratic theorists had a great vision for democracy—that the point of democracy was not government, but human development! They felt that giving people the task of governing themselves would force them to develop their full spiritual, intellectual, emotional and relational potential as humans. This, for them, was the point of democracy. When I look around, I don't see this passion anymore. I see technologies of efficiency. I see rational procedure. But where's the vision for human development? Where's the promotion of the Self in self-government?

But what exactly is wrong with using the methods of our opponents? In the end, isn't it enough that the Vietnam War ended? It's like the old expression, "to make an omelet, you have to break a few eggs." Do you think that how we speak to each other is more important than achieving Civil Rights legislation? Or that protesting is impolite and therefore shouldn't be done? Without using the methods of our opponents, we would never have ended slavery, attained universal enfranchisement, stopped the war in Vietnam, won the eight hour work day... and thousands of other basic, human rights.

The idea behind making means and ends congruent is that the struggle for democracy must be at least a little democratic itself. For instance, Emerson's philosophy of nonviolence, which so profoundly influenced Howard Thurman, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., and formed the basis of two of the most important democratic struggles of the 20th century—India's Independence and the Civil Rights movement in the United States—is based on the principle of unifying ends and means. If we just project the presence of democracy onto the piece of paper that says, This is Democracy, we overlook the fact that ultimately democracy is a *behavior*. In the end, democracy depends upon people for its enactment.

For instance, if we raise our children to be independent and use good judgement, but we use totalitarian methods of child-rearing by making every decision for them, and controlling all of their actions, how are they going to learn to use their own judgement? We'd never

give them a chance to develop it. How are people to become democratic? If we don't model democratic behavior, no piece of paper can miraculously produce it! Unless we scrupulously insure that our methods reflect our democratic ideals, we are defining and then practicing democracy as something material and external to ourselves.

This discrepancy stems from the 17th century worldview of modern science upon which American Democracy is based. American Democracy today is still a work in progress, even though there have been many democratic methods in place throughout history. Native American councils used democratic decision making, and Nelson Mandela wrote about his people, the Thembu, who used a very advanced form of consensus and dialogue to arrive at community decisions. The ancient Athenians had a semi-democratic government; semi-democratic because it was based on a slave economy, and real democracy, in my mind, means full enfranchisement.

Yet American democracy, and most modern democratic forms of government, do not originate from these examples, but arise from Western philosophical and political thought. Beginning in the late Middle Ages and spanning several centuries, monarchy was challenged by a new idea: that government should be based on rational decisions, not just on the whim of the monarch. Kings and queens were empowered by something called "the Divine Right of Kings," the idea that the monarch was God's earthly representative. The first big advance in government was the idea that governing was not based on faith in God, but on rational principles, like laws, or a constitution.

This shift in thinking was due to the same historical events which also eventually gave rise to modern science. During the Medieval era, church dogma completely dominated the European worldview. All knowledge was faith-based. Whatever we knew, we supposedly knew because God gave us the knowledge. There could be no research into the material world, no empirical thinking because the world

was just as God made it. To dissect the human body, for instance, or to compute the orbit of planets was to look into the mind of God, to question His thinking. It was blasphemous. This same faith-based principle dominated ideas about governing. God was the ultimate ruler, and ruled on earth through his intermediaries—the Kings or Queens.

The rediscovery of classical Greek and Roman texts in the late Middle Ages began a long, slow road to modern thinking in Western Europe. The texts rekindled an interest in philosophy, art, poetry, and science, and resulted in a resurgence in the belief in the human mind to think, know, and develop. This in turn gave rise to rationalism, the precursor to modern science. Rationalism was the belief that people were capable of novel thought, of reason, of perception. It meant that the human being, not just a supreme deity, was knowledgeable. And this meant that people could make sound judgements, and that a legal document such as a constitution or contract should be the authority which defined and delineated the rights and relationships between the people, and between the sovereign and the people.

This major shift was followed by another shift, again prompted by major historical events. The Reformation in the sixteenth century championed the notion that individuals could have a direct and personal relationship to God. Its principles promoted the role of the individual in relationship to authority—both the authority of the church and the authority of God. Individualism, together with the rise of science and the discoveries of Kepler, Copernicus, Galileo and Newton, altered the picture of humans as passive participants in an unfathomable cosmos to that of inventors and discoverers of new worlds and new ideas. In political thought, these revolutions in worldview gave rise to two new ideas about government: enfranchisement and representation. These two ideas together—legal, rational principles and elected representation—comprise the political system that we now call democracy.

Representative democracy is a major advance from despotic rule, but it still is a rudimentary

form of democracy. In fact, it is rather feudal because it still sees government as the great provider, protector, or caretaker of the people. This places the responsibility for government outside the individual, onto legal and political representatives, procedures, and structures. This is typical of 17th century science in which the material world is the definitive, or real world. The material emphasis of Newtonian science is carried over to democracy, in which we equate democracy more with the piece of paper, with the laws and procedures and buildings, than with the invisible realm of mindsets, behavior and feelings. It is based on the concept of projection—that the government or politician possesses power, or that law equals freedom. But it neglects democracy as a way of living and of interacting and as a behavior towards others. Real democracy, freed from these philosophical shackles, is a way of living, a behavior. It is what Arny Mindell calls *deep democracy*, a democracy of congruent means and ends. He says that once a group rids itself of tyrannical power, it comes to a fork in the road. Either it projects freedom and equality onto the struggle against oppression, or it goes deeper into freedom and equality, by embodying the very qualities it has criticized the oppressive “other” for lacking. The latter is the path to deep democracy. Yet this next step is difficult, because it requires that we go deep within ourselves, and build a democratic character. It requires us to become the leaders we are looking for, to develop the qualities that we insist our leaders should have. It requires us to forego the sense of power we gain by struggling against an outer force. Democracy that is not shackled to material reality becomes a psychological and spiritual practice.

When you use the word “spiritual” in the context of politics and government, I get scared. There’s already too much religion in government.

Spirituality doesn’t mean a program or prescription for spiritual living. It means a way of looking at people, and of social systems, that includes non-material experiences, ineffable feelings, transcendence, community, love, those things marginalized in the 17th century,

scientific paradigm. For instance, Gandhi's democracy was based on a non-Newtonian concept of freedom. For him, democracy was *swaraj*, the Hindu concept of freedom. *Swaraj* means freedom, not just material freedom from tyranny, but also inner liberation from the tyranny of illusion. The biggest illusion is that we are separate from the other and from the world around us. True freedom, or *swaraj*, means the ability to sense, feel, and see oneself in the other. It's not just political independence but inner liberation from attitudes of exclusivity, projections and internalized oppression.

Gandhi understood that people's tendency to project their own behavior onto other groups was as much an obstacle to democracy as any oppressor. While fighting for freedom from the British, Gandhi reminded his fellow Indians that they, too, were "British." He said to them, "We may rid the country of the British, but we also suffer from the British *within*, the tyranny of racism, gender oppression, caste institutions, and religious domination in our own country. If we identify only the British as tyrants, what awaits us once we kick them out?"²

If we look at independence struggles through Gandhi's broader definition of freedom, then it becomes evident that oppressors—as well as their victims—suffer from oppression. They both labor under the illusion of separateness from the other. When the British fired on hundreds of unarmed and innocent men, women, and children at the non-violent march at Amritsar, Gandhi said to the British, this is not only a disaster for the Indian people but for you, as well. Look what you have done to *yourselves*, he admonished, you have lost your humanity.

You're talking about projections, aren't you? I understand what you're saying from the point of view of ethics. But from a political perspective, the concept of projection comes close to a "blame the victim" attitude. There's a fine line between saying that the Indians' caste system was oppressive, and saying that the British occupation was just a projection. It's like saying because Africans sold slaves of other tribes to the slave traders, that the European colonial powers can't be held responsible for the slave trade. The

psychological perspective scares me, because it can be used to let the oppressor off the hook by saying that the victims do it too. Where's accountability and responsibility? At some point, don't we have to draw a line in the sand, take a stand and say, "Hey, you did something or are doing something oppressive and that has to change?"

Yes, but using a psychological approach as finger pointing or avoiding blame is the problem of the user, not of the philosophy. Just because someone uses a hammer to assault someone else, doesn't mean the hammer's design is faulty. But to really answer your question, we have to go back to philosophy. Yes, British imperialism was the problem. At the same time, it wasn't the *only* problem. Yes, focusing on the Indian caste system as an oppressive force while the British were still in India would be reprehensible. But the deeper problem here is not who was worse to whom, but the limitation of thinking in terms of only one, material, objective reality.

Mindell uses the idea that there are different levels of consciousness through which we view reality. These different levels of consciousness give rise in turn to different dimensions of reality: material or consensus reality, "dreamland" or a psychological level of reality, and a sentient, unitary level of reality. Consensus reality, or what we call "the real world," is the level of awareness in which we consider the material, consensual world of matter to be real (2000). At this level of reality, democracy is synonymous with individual rights, protection against abuse of power, and the unfettered ability to do, act, and possess. It views freedom literally and materially, as concrete, tangible things like voting, lawmaking, mobility, verbal expression, and economic activity. From the material reality point of view, the real heart of the democratic paradigm is *economic* or material freedom, in particular the right to own property.

In the 17th century, basing freedom on property made sense, for freedom meant nothing unless people had the means to earn their own living. Without the ability to work their own land, peasants remained in feudal bondage, tilling soil owned by the aristocracy and passed

along from one generation to the next according to birthright. This is still true today. The material level of reality is utterly crucial: the struggle for equality and justice centers on freedom from economic structures that inhibit the full exercise of one's rights. For instance, racism and sexism are upheld by economic inequities, as well as psychological attitudes. Both ways of looking at the problem are important and true simultaneously, without canceling each other out. It's a spurious debate to say, first we need economic justice, then we can work on the psychological attitudes. Or, first we need to confront attitudes and prejudice, then we can address economic inequity. Both need to have happened *yesterday*! The debate is about worldviews, between a material reality and a psychological one.

No one level is wrong, but one level alone is a problem. One of the difficulties with democracy is that it has been, until now, primarily defined as a material activity. Freedom is only felt and experienced in material ways, and we measure our freedom by the quantity of possessions and activities that symbolize freedom. Daniel Kemmis, the former mayor of Missoula, Montana, who wrote a book on citizenship called *The Good City and The Good Life*, says that if the material definition of freedom wins out, democracy will "not reach very far beyond some notion of equal access to all good things, especially blue jeans and cheeseburgers" (1993: 281).

Political philosophers called this material freedom "negative freedom"—freedom *from* constraint, *from* the abuse of power, *from* any infringement on our activities. At the consensus reality level, democracy has an antagonistic flavor, pitting individual against individual, individual against government, and minority against majority. This is the zero-sum game I talked about earlier. In a material worldview, there is only so much pie. One slice for me means one *less* slice for you. Negative freedom means my freedom is your loss. My right to play loud music is pitted against your right to quiet. But in a non-material worldview, your freedom means my freedom.

From a non-material point of view, freedom is unlimited. It's not a quantity, but a quality. Political philosophers called this "positive freedom," or the freedom *to*, as opposed to the freedom *from*. Positive freedom is more than absence of constraint. One philosopher said, "The mere enabling a man to do as he likes, is in itself no contribution to true freedom."¹ While freedom *from* has been the dominant mode of democracy to-date, freedom *to* is a lesser known, not-yet-realized form of democracy. It is a more psychological definition of freedom. Positive freedom is a power to create, not just resist. It's a generative, not just an oppositional power. For instance, negative freedom would have us speaking out or standing up *against* something. It means gaining and holding the floor, a limited commodity. It is an individual right that has to be claimed *against* someone else's individual right. But positive freedom, the non-material freedom, is an unlimited quality. Speaking out is not a right, but a duty benefiting the whole. Whereas from an oppositional point of view, we stand up and say, "I can't be controlled. I have to speak out, to say what I want, because I must exercise my sense of self, whether it suits you or not," from the non-material point of view, we might instead say, "I speak out because in so doing, I make room for others to speak, and the more people speak, the better it is for us all."

Positive freedom begets freedom. Positive freedom is a free mind, unlimited, fluid, and full of choices, regardless of outer or inner constraints upon it. A free mind is a muscle we need in relationship to unknown situations and disadvantage. Oppression is a tragedy. But the tragedy of oppression is compounded when we are also prisoners of our identity, of our predictable and compulsive ways of dealing with outer oppression. Rosa Luxemburg, the Russian born revolutionary, pointed out that real freedom is the freedom to think differently. Even when the constraints against us are significant, the ability to experience inner freedom spells the difference between despair and hope. Nelson Mandela is a classic example of spiritual or internal freedom. Here's a man who was

locked up as a political prisoner by one of the most oppressive regimes of the 20th century. He sat for twenty-seven years in a prison cell, and emerged a moral giant, becoming the first President of post-apartheid South Africa. He even invited his white jailer to attend his inauguration as his honored guest, the first of many gestures towards reconciliation and forgiveness. Mandela suffered enormously in prison, humiliated by the drudgery of forced labor, the attitudes of the guards. Everything in prison was designed to break his spirit, to dehumanize him, and to turn him into a hate-filled, vengeful man. But unable to exercise material freedom, he instead, exercised internal freedom and fluidity, connecting with compassion and forgiveness, and developing an extraordinary ability to think for the whole community, not just the needs of some. This non-material freedom is stronger than material freedom, because it is a freedom not defined by those against whom we are fighting.

When we are defined in relation to the other, we're not really free. It is a double bind situation. We feel free because we are not the other, but our identity depends on there being an other! We're caught in a system where we equate the struggle for freedom with the experience of freedom itself. But what we feel is the temporary surge of power and elation that comes from fighting against an opposition. It resembles freedom, but it's merely its likeness. It's like addiction. Drinking makes us feel loose and uninhibited, really free and easy. But in fact, we're not free. We're dependent on the outer substance to touch our sense of freedom. It looks free, but it's not. The same is true with real freedom. Freedom from a constraint is not really freedom, because our sense of freedom depends on there being the constraint against which we struggle. We're defined by a *ghost*, an unrepresented being whom we perceive to be in the way of our unfoldment. It is a ghost because it is not only an outer figure, but an inner one as well. Mindell uses the example that King George III is a ghost in the sense that monarchism and elitism were not just perpetrated in the person of George III, but were

also present in the minds of the colonist, too. In fact, the very first debate in the newly formed Congress of the United States was what to call the new President, George Washington. Some actually wanted to call him, His Majesty, or His Royal Highness! Freeing ourselves from the inner ghost, as Gandhi recommended, is the work of anti-racism activists who help us focus on internalized racism, sexism and other forms of inner oppression. W.E.B. DuBois first drew attention to shame for one's own race, gender, ethnicity, calling it "race suicide." It means that the oppression is not just the material force upon us, or the economic constraint. It is a mind-set, a behavior, a feeling towards ourselves.

Some of the most radical and wonderful activists for democracy were effective just because of their ability to discuss the psychological dimension of democracy, democracy as a way of life and behavior. Martin Luther King Jr. was an amazing orator in part because of his ability to frame the struggle for civil rights as a spiritual and emotional experience. In fact, some of these activists knew that unless they translated the struggle for freedom into something psychological and spiritual, democracy would never work because people are actually afraid of freedom.

What do you mean, how can we be afraid of freedom?

If freedom is not freedom *from* anything, then it is the fullness of experience itself. There is a human tendency to want to be defined, to need to repress parts of ourselves in order to focus, to limit ourselves and, basically, get on with the business of daily life. By struggling against a constraint, we gain a sense of identity and purpose. The ghost gives us meaning. Without the struggle, who are we? If freedom is not a battle, then how do we feel free, how do we create ourselves out of nothing, moment to moment? This is what Kierkegaard meant when he said that humans are condemned to freedom. Freedom is terrifying because true freedom means the fullness of self, and the full self is unknown, a book yet to be read, or perhaps written. Negative freedom is easier

because it gives us a ready-made identity. We are *not* the other. But positive freedom, well, that is a whole different thing. True freedom is a sentient experience; it does not depend on anything defining us, even through opposing us.

Negative freedom is dualistic; it's the struggle between parts, between freedom fighter and oppressor. But positive freedom is the freedom to develop, beyond parts and conflict, beyond opposition and constraint. For instance, Mandela in prison was practicing a sentient freedom: his inner development was not blocked by his lack of material freedom. The sentient dimension is the level of awareness beyond parts and conflict, beyond dualism. It is a unitary consciousness, as opposed to a dualistic consciousness of this-not-that. The unitary consciousness is not differentiated into "I and Thou," or object and subject. It is the realm of not-yet-manifest reality, or as Mindell says, "a tendency that has not yet manifested in terms of everyday conceptions." Aboriginals refer to the sentient realm as dreaming. Sentient awareness is experience before marginalization, or before the edge. Only repression or marginalization creates everyday consciousness. In other words, experience that has no opposition does not "particularize" into a dream figure or projection. Shape and form is created through the encounter with the edge or obstacle.

If freedom is the fullness of the experience itself, not the struggle to have experience, then it may be that sentience itself is freedom—experience without constraint, being without opposition. But being without opposition is to forego a sense of identity, because as we have said, identity is crafted through opposition—by marginalizing parts of ourselves, and defining ourselves against the other. Which brings us to the idea that real freedom is close to what the Eastern philosophers of religion have been saying all along, that the only real freedom is the state of no identity, or egolessness. To be free is to be unattached, to be a nobody. And this has very radical implications for democracy and politics, where identity is seen as a central tool of struggle. This might mean that the

future of democracy lies paradoxically in both having a greater sense of identity and at the same time, in having a lesser sense of identity!

Modern political thinking is based on identity—knowing who we are. We take a stand for something; we identify with a group, political party, one side or the other of a political issue. Yet, from a psychological perspective we know that no matter who we say we are, who we are *not* is never far away. We may not identify with the other, but our intimate knowledge of what we marginalize appears in our behavior, our dreams, and our projections onto others. Knowing who we are as a group or community is important, but just as important—in some ways, even more so—is knowing who we are *not*. While Western individualism has always prized stability as a core attribute of identity, many other cultures have honored and even worshipped ambiguity of identity. In ancient cultures, oracles, shamans, priests, and deities often took the form of speaking animals, half-beast, half human beings:

[S]ocieties throughout history have been obsessed with creatures—from the Sphinx to the centaur to the hermaphrodite to the elephant-headed figure known in Hindi as Ganesha—who embodied biological impossibility. It was their very freakishness that conveyed their magical, quasi-divine status. (Taylor, 1993: 105)

The holiest and wisest members of the community were the *shape-shifters*, those who could take the form of other beings, spirits, and entities. In fact, these wise men and women were the tribal leaders, and their ambiguity of identity was seen to be the quality most important to maintaining and strengthening community. The shaman or community healer treated ailments and balanced the community's relation to the surrounding land and the larger field of forces in which the village was embedded. To do this, the shaman sought rapport and communication with non-human entities, a capacity that requires great fluidity of identity, shifting beyond human form.

Although such a model seems foreign to our Western industrialized concepts, this same

capacity to attune ourselves to others, to the forces in the “field,” i.e., the moods, emotions, and attitudes within a group, is just as important for our political process. Individuals’ abilities to hold and then let go of identities are valuable in conflict and can lead to a greater sense of community. For instance, when someone has the ability to shift identities, to see beyond her own position, to acknowledge the experience of the other side, or to speak about the potential growth inherent in the conflict, the conflict momentarily transforms. Polarization changes to connection, and the seeds of community are sown. Whenever an individual remembers something beyond his or her momentary position, polarization lessens. We are American, but can also identify with Russians, Italians, Japanese, and Indonesians. We are Jews, but can find our way into the Muslim mindset, the feelings of a Christian, the attitudes of a Buddhist. We might never have suffered social oppression, but can find that experience somewhere in us, in order to understand the other. We may be a collective without designated authority roles, yet we see power and authority in our ways of interacting with each other.

Defining freedom, and thus democracy, in terms of these non-material experiences and psychological dimensions, changes how we think about society. Measuring an individual’s or a society’s freedom is not just measuring material factors like laws, rights, gross domestic product, enfranchisement and literacy. It also means measuring their ability to become their true selves, because real freedom is the freedom to be and become. A free society is one in which citizens can make the most of themselves. Seen from this sentient level, freedom is, in a sense nothing, if not the freedom to unfold and develop ourselves to the highest potential. This is what those early democratic theorists had in mind when they said that real democracy

is developmental. They thought that the true goal of democracy was not the attainment of rights or other material factors. The real goal of democracy was found in the path itself; democracy was the vehicle for human unfoldment and transcendence. Freedom and democracy beyond the dualistic Newtonian mindset that pits us against inner or outer obstacles has the power to connect us to our personal uniqueness, dreams, and life myth. Thus, to be a true democrat means developing inner freedom, recognizing, prizing and feeding our uniqueness, and becoming everything we dream of becoming in life.

Notes

1. T.H. Green, *Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract* in Birch, *The Concepts and Theories of Modern Democracy*.
2. Taken from the audiotape *Power over People: Classical and Modern Political Theory*. Dennis Dalton. From The Teaching Company, Course 443.

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Julie Diamond, Ph.D., wrote this article as part of a larger project researching the development of democracy as a mindset and way of life. She is a therapist in private practice in Portland, Oregon, and teaches process work at the Process Work Center of Portland and in learning communities around the world. Julie also works as a facilitator with organizations and communities on the challenges and adventures implicit in group life.