

# Nygaard Notes

*Independent Periodic News and Analysis*

Number 650

February 7, 2020

---

## Everyone for Themselves

In the last Nygaard Notes I promised to contrast a Competitive worldview with a Cooperative worldview, and to contrast a Social worldview with an Individualist one. As it turns out, each of the two pairs of adjectives are best understood as interlocking pieces of a single worldview. For that reason it is misleading (when trying to understand this worldview) to compare Individualism to anything without thinking about Competition. And a Social worldview is nearly meaningless without bringing in the Cooperative ethos that is its logical mate.

So at least I've expanded my "worldview adjectives" from one to two. But, as I've said before, it's dangerous to reduce such complex things to a couple of pairs of adjectives, and I'm only doing it here for the sake of brevity. Oh, well, as long as we're oversimplifying, let's attach a couple of short slogans to the two worldviews.

This essay will focus on the prevailing worldview of Individualism and Competition, which I will abbreviate with the initials IC.

To represent the culturally dominant IC worldview I nominate the slogan "Everyone for Themselves." (I grew up hearing it as "Every Man for Himself," but no need to use that gender-specific construction.)

Everyone for Themselves is a familiar phrase the meaning of which the Cambridge Dictionary says is when "everyone in a particular situation is trying to do what is best for themselves and no one is trying to help anyone else."

U.S. society, like the capitalist system at its core, is based on the principle of Everyone for Themselves, with the market/society being composed of individuals competing with others, each one trying to get ahead. Individuals acting with nothing but their own self interest in mind is defined by capitalist economists as "rational" behavior. Aim your search engine at "rational choice theory" if you doubt me on this.

Selfish competition, in this worldview, is a good thing. The theory holds that the cumulative effect of all this self-serving behavior in a capitalist marketplace will be social progress and social justice. This supposedly occurs through the workings of something called The Invisible Hand, which you can read about in Wikipedia. Or aim your search engine in that direction.

In an opinion piece published in my local newspaper on January 14<sup>th</sup>, conservative columnist Cal Thomas identified one of the major problems that he'd like addressed by the presidential candidates. He worries that "The idea of individualism, personal responsibility and accountability for one's actions has appeared to have given way to grievance, envy and entitlement." What, Thomas wants to know, would the next President do to "cure" this disease?

For those swamped by student debt, bankrupted by unpredictable medical bills, or thrown out of work due to corporate profit-seeking, to be told that it's Everyone for Themselves is a cruel prescription. And an appeal for "personal responsibility" is a dagger to the heart of those wounded or killed due to a culture of hate directed at those that the dominant culture has identified as the "other". (I discuss Race and Individualism elsewhere in this issue of the Notes.)

### **The IC Worldview Leads to "America First"**

The current President reinforces the Individualistic/Competitive worldview all the time. In the name-calling realm, his most disdainful attack is to call someone a loser, thus reinforcing the idea of competition as a main enforcer of the social order.

When it comes to individualism, Trump's promotion of—or maybe reliance on; I'm not sure he promotes anything other than himself—an Individualistic approach extends beyond individual persons into the realm of

*continued on page 2*

Greetings,

In the previous Nygaard Notes I contrasted two different ways of looking at the world. The worldview that is dominant in the United States right now I labeled INDIVIDUALISTIC and COMPETITIVE. I also suggested an alternative worldview that I labeled SOCIAL and COOPERATIVE. I implied that the political "polarization" about which everyone is talking (and talking and talking...) is at least partly explained by understanding the difference between these very different ways of viewing the world. I also said that these different worldviews shape our understanding of not only how the world is, but also about how it could be or might be. In this issue I hope to bring these ideas into sharper focus.

It's a double-sized issue this time, which I've been trying to avoid. Take your time with it, and drop me a line to tell me what you think, would you?

I hope everyone had a great Groundhog Day!

Nygaard

*IC from page 1*

international affairs, where he prefers bilateral deal-making to multilateral negotiation. He disdains any collective effort. He prefers to wield the power of the United States as much as possible in one-to-one bilateral agreements in which the US strikes a "deal" that he can portray as a victory. There are no "win/win" deals in Trump's world: It's win or lose and devil take the hindmost.

As the German broadcaster Deutsche Welle reported last September, "Over the past couple of years, US President Donald Trump has championed 'America First' policies and cut funding for multilateral organizations like the United Nations. Trump has also withdrawn the US from bodies like the UN Human Rights Council, UNESCO and the Paris Climate Agreement." His many other withdrawals and threats of withdrawals from multilateral agreements and institutions indicate a pattern. As Human Rights Watch reported this past June, "Trump's aggressive speech at the 2018 UN General Assembly praised sovereignty and independence over 'global governance.'"


In response to the nationalism and protectionism that is the favored stance of Trump and others like him, Germany and France have organized the Alliance for Multilateralism, "a loose group of nations working to boost international cooperation, reform international institutions, and tackle various global issues such as disarmament, digitalization and climate change." <https://multilateralism.org/>

The Alliance's call to strengthen international institutions

has so far attracted nearly fifty nations of varying sizes and levels of development—from Norway to Niger, from India to Colombia, from Kiribati to Kazakhstan. I'm not sure how the Alliance will develop, but their statement that "the challenges we are facing can only be solved through cooperation" stands in stark contrast to the IC vision of vicious competition between isolated nations each standing alone.

### **Times of Change bring Fear and Anxiety**

I mention Trump when discussing the IC worldview simply because he is such a visible example of one who sees the world this way. Trump is not responsible for the rise of Individualistic and Competitive thinking. It's sort of the opposite, in fact: A culture in which IC thinking is dominant is bound to produce leaders who operate based on these beliefs. And when there is a perception that an alternative worldview is on the rise, one that might challenge the one upon which the current system rests, a great fear and anxiety arises. And the fear and anxiety will be felt not only among those who benefit the most from the current system, but among all who have internalized the values and logic of the prevailing worldview. And growing from such fearful and anxious soil can be expected to grow a noxious weed like Donald Trump. Trump, like all demagogues, is a master at sensing and exploiting this fear and anxiety.

We see the dominant Individualistic and Competitive worldview of Everyone for Themselves increasingly being challenged by a different way of understanding the world. And as this alternative rises, it becomes increasingly clear that we can't continue on the familiar path. This is at the root of the tension and 

→→ anxiety that is popularly known as “polarization.” And it’s not going away soon.

The new way of understanding the world—the world as it is and the world as it could be—I am calling Social and

Cooperative. Instead of Everyone for Themselves, the SC worldview sees a future in which everyone is “Working Together for the Common Good.” The following essay will explore this alternative. ♦

## Working Together for the Common Good

The slogan I am attaching to the Social and Cooperative worldview (abbr: SC) is “Working Together for the Common Good”. The common good has to do with the “social” part of Social and Cooperative, and the idea of working together is the “cooperative” part.

An IC thinker sees every problem as a personal problem. Recall the conservative pundit who held up as the ideal “The idea of individualism, personal responsibility and accountability for one’s actions.” That’s IC thinking. That idea of “responsibility” may be the greatest area of divergence between the IC and SC worldviews.

Seen through the SC lens, “personal responsibility” and “accountability” are only two aspects of a complex set of interlocking factors that need to be addressed when addressing problems.

On Christmas Day a story ran in the Business Section of the New York Times that illustrates the point. It began like this: “At a time when germs are growing more resistant to common antibiotics, many companies that are developing new versions of the drugs are hemorrhaging money and going out of business, gravely undermining efforts to contain the spread of deadly, drug-resistant bacteria.”

The fifth paragraph of the article told the story: “The problem is straightforward: The companies that have invested billions to develop the drugs have not found a way to make money selling them. Most antibiotics are prescribed for just days or weeks — unlike medicines for chronic conditions like diabetes or rheumatoid arthritis that have been blockbusters — and many hospitals have been unwilling to pay high prices for the new therapies. Political gridlock in Congress has thwarted legislative efforts to address the problem.”

Here we see a clear *social* need (more resources devoted to life-saving drug research) that is undermined by the decision-making of *individuals* seeking profit.

Another anecdote: I was getting my hair cut the other day and the conversation in the barber shop turned to health care. When I made the case for a universal system where we all pay into a common fund to cover the cost of providing health care to everyone, another customer spoke up. “What about somebody who smokes, then gets lung cancer? I shouldn’t have to pay their medical bills!”

I gently asked if he was suggesting that the smoker should go untreated and be left to die as a consequence of what he considered their poor decision making. He had no response to this.

The point my shaggy companion was making was coming straight out of the IC worldview: He, as an individual, was not responsible for another individual. And one could also hear in his comment the competitive aspect: People who behave in the “right” way win the prize, in this case lifesaving medical care. People who make bad decisions lose out.

Thinking in a Social and Cooperative way changes the focus entirely. SC thinkers think bigger, looking at the society as a whole. I’ve made this point before (NN #595: *What We Know and What We Don’t Know: Individualism and Health*) but it bears repeating. I suggested that “we think about health as a social issue, rather than as an individual issue,” and I went from there to say that “When it comes to health care, there are things that we know and things that we do not know. What we know is aggregate numbers. That is, we know (roughly) how many people will have heart attacks this year. We know how many people will need surgery, how many will need prescription drugs, and how many will need physical therapy. What we don’t know—and really cannot know—is which specific people will need any of these things. That is to say that we know the SOCIAL realities of health needs in the United States, but none of us know the INDIVIDUAL choices that will be facing us.

*continued on page 4*

SC from page 3

“So, if we were to set up a health care system based on what we actually know, hopefully we would decide to set up a SOCIAL program in which we would set aside an aggregate sum sufficient to pay for the overall costs of health care for the group as a whole. We could do this by socializing the entire care system, or we could compromise and set up a ‘single-payer’ system. Either way, there would be no mandates, no coercion, no infringement upon anyone’s liberties. Everyone would receive the health care they need, by virtue of being a human being, and everyone would chip in to help pay for it. This would actually be a form of insurance, but it would be *social insurance* rather than individual insurance.

“As long as we approach the problem of access to health care as a collection of individual decisions to get insurance, we’ll never get to where we want to be. The solution is to stop thinking Individualistically.”

### Social Wealth, Social Responsibility

A key concept when thinking about what’s so different about the SC worldview is the idea of the common good, sometimes referred to as Social Wealth. This is the idea (as I explained in NN #468, back in 2010) that some portion of the society’s wealth belongs not to you, nor to me, nor to Bill Gates, but to all of us. There are all sorts of terms for this: Social wealth; Social assets; The Commons; Common wealth; Common assets. I’m sure there are many more.

Some social wealth is created via public processes put in place with the intention of serving the public good. Things like roads, schools, sewage treatment plants etc. Part of the wealth claimed by corporate shareholders is thus subsidized by all of us, as when goods are shipped using public highways or when products are designed by people educated in public schools.

Some social wealth is in the form of The Commons, which includes the many non-owned things that are our common heritage. Things like the air, the water, the sun’s energy and, as we are seeing, the intertwined systems that produce our climate.

With social wealth in mind, let’s re-think the familiar

concept of taxation. The Libertarian right considers taxation to be “confiscation” and conservative IC thinkers see taxation as part of an irresponsible government culture of “tax and spend.”

If it is true that there are some forms of wealth that belong to all of us, then what we call “taxation” becomes a different creature entirely. Instead of “tax and spend,” we could say that what the government does is “pool and share.” Or, instead of “confiscating” wealth, what if taxation were considered a process of re-claiming wealth? That is, of returning wealth to its rightful “owners,” who would be ... all of us.

Deciding what to do with our shared wealth would require a major commitment to a democratic system. After all, to say that “we’ll all chip in” to pay for programs or investments that benefit everyone would mean that some individuals would have less to spend on themselves. In a culture Based on “Everyone for Themselves,” this makes no sense, in fact is illegitimate almost by definition.

Seen from a Social and Cooperative viewpoint—in a culture where “Working Together for the Common Good” is the guiding principle—the responsibility for addressing social problems would be shared by society as a whole. In fact, the decision about what wealth is private and upon what wealth the public has a claim would itself be a social process.

In a Social and Cooperative world, much time and energy would be devoted to developing the skills needed to create policy that makes life better for the largest number of people. How are priorities set? How are resources allocated?

Seeing something as primarily a social problem or a personal problem shapes how we perceive the origins of the problem, the consequences of the problem, the appropriate ways to cope with the problem, and even if it is a “problem” at all. When enough people change how they view the world, the world changes.

As with any major issue facing the United States, the role of racism is a key to understanding the origins and the persistent power of the prevailing IC worldview. So to that key we now turn. ♦

## Race And Individualism

Readers may have noticed an apparent contradiction in this issue of the Notes: If the dominant culture sees the world as being Individualistic and Competitive, then how do we explain the existence and power of social oppressions—racism, sexism, and the rest—that are after all *social*? That is, that are based on the Othering of whole groups of people?

Put most simply, modern-day racism developed during the Age of Conquest, surviving and thriving in part *due to its usefulness* in justifying the otherwise unjustifiable European conquest of the non-white world. The ideology of Individualism, in turn, survives and thrives in part *due to its usefulness* in denying the existence of racism. Let's have a closer look at this dynamic.

Author and Christian activist Jim Wallis tells us that “America’s problem with race has deep roots, with the country’s foundation tied to the near extermination of one race of people and the enslavement of another. Racism is truly our nation’s original sin.”

Yet many people would describe the United States as a Meritocracy, which is “a political system in which economic goods and/or political power are vested in individual people on the basis of talent, effort, and achievement, rather than wealth or social class.” Or, I would add, race, gender, ability, religion, or other characteristics.

So, which is it? Is the U.S. a noble Meritocracy? Or is it more of a racially-stratified society where an individual’s chances in life are highly impacted by membership in a certain group, either a dominant group or a despised group?

### The Discourse of Individualism

Back in September in these pages I published a piece called “The Sociology of Othering,” In that piece I quoted sociologist Herbert Blumer saying “that race prejudice [racism] exists basically in a sense of group position rather than in a set of feelings which members of one racial group have toward the members of another racial group.” Indeed, the history of the United States—from Day One—is a history of exclusion, dispossession, and dehumanization of groups of people identified as Other by the white, male, property-owning movers and shakers whose power includes the power to

decide who is fully human and who is not.

Almost exactly 10 years ago (January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010), the anti-racist organizer Robin DiAngelo published a paper in the UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies called “Why Can’t We All Just Be Individuals?: Countering the Discourse of Individualism in Antiracist Education.” She defines “the Discourse of Individualism” as “a specific set of ideas, words, symbols, and metaphors—a storyline or narrative—that creates, communicates, reproduces, and reinforces the concept that each of us are unique individuals and that our group memberships, such as our race, class, or gender, are not important or relevant to our opportunities” in life.

This aspect of Individualism probably deserves its own Nygaard Notes mini-series, but no space for that in this issue. For now, here is the official summary, or “abstract” (to use the academic term) of DiAngelo’s paper:

*Over many years as a white person co-facilitating anti-racism courses at the graduate and undergraduate levels and in the workplace for majority white participants, I have come to believe that the Discourse of Individualism is one of the primary barriers preventing well-meaning (and other) white people from understanding racism. Individualism is so deeply held in dominant society that it is virtually immovable without sustained effort. This article challenges the Discourse of Individualism by addressing eight key dynamics of racism that it obscures. I posit that the Discourse of Individualism functions to:*

- *Deny the significance of race and the advantages of being white;*
- *Hide the accumulation of wealth over generations;*
- *Deny social and historical context;*
- *Prevent a macro analysis of the institutional and structural dimensions of social life;*
- *Deny collective socialization and the power of dominant culture (media, education, religion, etc.) to shape our perspectives and ideology;*

**Race** from page 5

- *Function as neo-colorblindness and reproduce the myth of meritocracy, and;*
- *Make collective action difficult.*
- *Further, being viewed as an individual is a privilege only available to the dominant group.*

*I explicate each of these discursive effects and argue that while we may be considered individuals in general, white insistence on Individualism in discussions of racism in particular functions to obscure and maintain racism.*

The idea of the United States as a Meritocracy appeals to many people because of its usefulness in denying the existence of white supremacy. Here I think of the old sports adage: He was born on third base, but he thinks he hit a triple. That is, the myth of Meritocracy allows all the people born on third base—that is, those with white skin privilege—to think that they got there by hard work! And it also allows them to deny any responsibility for the injustice of race-based social stratification. “They should pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, like I did!”

Many people occupying less-than-lofty positions in life believe in the Meritocracy myth as well, including an increasing number of Trump voters. Why would this be? It’s explained by another dynamic that I’ve discussed in these pages. (Wow, I’m referencing myself a lot in this issue, aren’t I?) That dynamic is the widespread belief in a Just World.

### **Belief in a Just World**

The Just World Theory, simply put, says that we humans are psychologically inclined to think that the world is fair, and that people deserve their happiness and their suffering. To put it even more simply, to believe in a Just World is to believe that people get what they deserve, and that they deserve what they get. Why would people who haven’t got very much believe this?

In his 1980 book *The Belief in a Just World: A Fundamental Delusion* Melvin J. Lerner explained why people believe this. According to Lerner, “We do not believe that things just happen in our world; there is a pattern to events which conveys not only a sense of orderliness or predictability, but also the compelling experience of appropriateness expressed in the typically implicit judgment, “Yes, that is the way it should be.”

Yet we all have experience with the “real world,” which is a world in which we regularly witness injustice. How does a reasonably aware adult deal with the dissonance between the desire for a just world and the experience of the real world, where power, luck, privilege, and connections often prevail, and where rewards and punishments are often distributed without regard to who “deserves” them?

Lerner lists two “psychological defenses” against the pain caused by awareness of an injustice. The first defense is Denial/Withdrawal which, Lerner says, “is a primitive device, but it works. All it requires as an intelligent selection of the information to which one is exposed.” Think here of social media.

Another tactic employed to reduce the pain of facing injustice is to blame the victim. “After all, they ‘have it coming’—they brought it on themselves.” Foundational to this dynamic is the “othering” of entire groups of people, which is the basis of racism, indeed for all forms of social oppression.

The Individualistic and Competitive worldview allows for a denial of structural/systemic racism and reinforces the idea of a colorblind Meritocracy, making it useful to defenders of the status quo. But the rise of a new generation, ever more diverse, ever more dissatisfied with the status quo, brings great hope. What most people see as an increasing “polarization” in U.S. society can also be seen as evidence that the contradictions in the body politic are beginning to push open some long-closed doors, behind which lies a vision.

It’s a vision of a Social and Cooperative society, a society where we’re all in this together, cooperating to make a nation where everyone belongs, where everyone has a place. A nation where Othering has no usefulness.

Imagine transforming the “Everyone for Themselves” culture of the United States into a culture where we’re all “Working Together for the Common Good.” It will be a huge transformation, and it will likely be led by people who today are labeled as “other.” The period of cultural sea change, which has already begun, will be polarizing. It will be divisive. And it is long overdue.

The following essay, on Systems Thinking, includes some hopefully encouraging thoughts that I originally offered on the eve of the re-election of George W. Bush. It seems timely again in the 2020 election year. ♦

*The following is a verbatim reprint of an essay that originally appeared in Nygaard Notes Number 266 on August 27, 2004. I'm not sure if I've ever re-published my own work without updating and revising it. If I have, it was many years ago. But this piece seems so directly relevant to the subject matter of this issue (#650) that I had*

*to pass it along. I publish this piece in the context of challenging the dominant Individualistic and Competitive worldview, and the point I am making is this: A "worldview" is made up not only of the ideas in which we believe, but also in the way we think about those ideas.*  
Nygaard

## Thinking "Systems"

For centuries many people in the West sought to explain events – including human behavior – in terms of cause and effect. In their 1988 book, "Family Systems and Beyond," Jason Montgomery and Willard Fewer put it like this:

"In the beginning there was 'cause,' and explanations of human behavior sought this cause. Some thought that original sin was the cause, others believed in instincts. The 'will to power' had its true believers as did the profit motive, race, and gender. Each of these causes was thought to be the basis of human behavior."

However, people came to see that this cause-based thinking doesn't explain things very well. For example, social scientists can show that crime increases when unemployment increases. But everyone who is unemployed does not commit crimes. See the problem? So people came up with ideas like "multicausation," and "mutual causation," both of which basically said that human behavior might have more than one cause. These theories were somewhat better, as they acknowledged that the reasons people do what they do might be rather complex. But they still weren't good enough; too much behavior remained inexplicable, even weird. Eventually people came up with the idea of Systems Theory.

### A Different Way of Thinking

I came into contact with Systems Theory many years ago in my training as a family therapist, where we focused on the work of people like Murray Bowen, Gregory Bateson, Salvador Minuchin, and others. While the focus was on family therapy, it seemed clear to me that there was a *way of thinking* involved in this worldview that seemed to explain behavior far better than the way I had assumed. Up to that point I – like 'most everyone I knew – thought in terms of causation: What is it that makes people do what they do? I've stopped looking for that answer. I've adopted a different way of thinking.

And it's really different. Once you learn to think this way, in other words, you can't switch back. As family therapist Michael Kerr says in his 1981 essay Family Systems Theory and Therapy: "Individual and systems thinking are two distinctly different ways of conceptualizing human behavior, and attempts to mix them reflect a failure to appreciate their difference." And this doesn't just apply to human behavior, I might add. It also applies to social structures and institutions, since they are, of course, created by humans.

So, why is "thinking systems" so different from "thinking individually?" First and foremost, as Montgomery and Fewer put it, "Consider the 'cause' of behavior. In systems theory, there *is* no cause, since behavior is interactional and processual and has no discernible beginning." They add that "The importance of context, the mutuality of interaction, the interpenetration of one system with another are elements of individual and group behavior that cannot be addressed in a cause-based analysis." Forgive the big words; these guys are academics, I guess.

Here's what they mean: They mean that a systems approach rejects simple answers, since it accepts that people live in the world and thus have all sorts of influences on them, including their families, their schools, their societies, their biology, their social class, their neighborhood, and on and on. And not only do all of these things help to determine what we do, but everything we do has an effect on these systems. So, the context affects our behavior, and our behavior affects the context. Everybody's context. All the time.

My mother used to say to me, "Jeff, why do you make things so complicated?" She would be saying that right now, if she were reading this. If you are saying that right now, my response is that I don't *make* things complicated. Rather, I am willing to accept that they *are* complicated. Is it so complicated that there is no point to even trying to change anything? No, it's not *that* complicated, as I will show in coming weeks.

This is not just a theoretical point I'm making here. Things will change for you – in your actual day-to-day life – when you stop thinking in terms of "cause," and start to see human behavior as stemming from a complex mix of what's inside of us and what is outside of us.

First and foremost, you will stop struggling with the debate about whether people's behaviors are dictated by the environment in which they live or by their innate biological nature, sometimes called the "Nature vs. Nurture" debate. It's both, and we'll never know how much of each one makes you who you are. In fact, if you want to look at it in an even deeper way, you may begin to see that the "inside" and the "outside" are the same thing. Now I'm getting into what some might call the spiritual realm, so I'll leave it at that. Let's just say that you can dispense of the "Nature vs. Nurture" debate when you start "thinking systems."

*continued on page 8*

Systems from page 7

### Some Other Changes You Can Expect

1. You will stop blaming other people for your problems. You'll also stop taking the blame for the problems of others. Since someone else's behavior can't "cause" you to feel or act a certain way, it doesn't make any sense to blame them, and vice versa. A little slogan from my counseling days says it well: "When you're praising or blaming, you're not thinking systems." This doesn't mean you will become an insensitive, self-centered jerk. You will of course remember that your behavior contributes to the context in which we all live – including YOU.
2. It will be much harder for you to judge other people. Once you understand that everyone's behavior grows out of a complex web of experience, genetics, opportunity, and who-knows-what, it becomes nearly impossible to think of people in terms of "good" and "evil." (Including yourself!) Actions, policies, and behaviors can be judged in relation to personal or social values, to be sure. So I can condemn, for example, domestic violence, since it goes against my values. And I can condemn the behavior of certain institutions, for the same reason. Judge behavior, yes. Judge individual people, no. It doesn't make sense if you're thinking systems.
3. You will take increased responsibility for your actions. Once you stop believing that someone else can "make" you do something, you also have to let go of the idea that you need

someone else to change in order for you to be the type of person you want to be. At the same time, a systems approach says that context and interactions have a large influence on behavior. Systems thinking is not some "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" type of thinking.

4. The slogan "Don't believe everything you think" will become meaningful. That is, once you understand that everyone's view of the world – including your own – is influenced by all sorts of things out of the individual's control, it is a very humbling experience. My own youthful view of what determines success or failure in life, for example, was heavily influenced by the circumstances of my upbringing. And by my race. And by my gender. And by my status as an able-bodied person. And by my genetic endowment. And so forth.

If you really start "thinking systems," it can have a positive impact on your mental health, on your relationships, and on your stress levels. In the coming weeks, I'll talk about some other approaches to these ideas and their implications for how – and why – we act in the larger world, and how we make change happen. You'll probably figure it out on your own, but at the end I'll tell you in my own words how I think this can help you live in the world and not get depressed (no matter who wins the next election).

If you are interested in reading the other essays in this series (I called it the "How Not To Get Depressed" Series), they ran in issues 268, 278, and 279. ♦

### "Quote" of the Week: *"The Context of Democracy"*

Looking through the Socialist magazine/website Jacobin, I ran across their very useful 2016 publication *The ABCs of Socialism*, in which I found this issue's "Quote" of the Week:

*When an action by a person affects only that person, then he or she ought to be able to engage in that activity without asking permission from anyone else. This is the context of freedom. But when an action affects the lives of others, then these other people should have a say in the activity. This is the context of democracy.*

**Nygaard Notes**

**P.O. Box 6103**

**Minneapolis, MN 55406**

**E-mail: [nygaard@nygaardnotes.org](mailto:nygaard@nygaardnotes.org)**

**Web: [www.nygaardnotes.org](http://www.nygaardnotes.org)**