The New Pluralism
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Society in all developed countries has become pluralist and is becoming more pluralist day by day. It is splintering into a myriad of institutions each more or less autonomous, each requiring its own leadership and management, each having its own specific task.

This is not the first pluralist society in history. But all earlier pluralist societies destroyed themselves because no one took care of the common good. They abounded in communities but could not sustain community, let alone create it. If our modern pluralist society is to escape the same fate, the leaders of all institutions will have to learn to be leaders beyond the walls. They will have to learn that it is not enough for them to lead their own institutions -- though that is the first requirement. They will also have to learn to become leaders in the community. In fact they will have to learn to create community. This is going way beyond what we have been discussing as social responsibility. Social responsibility is usually defined as doing no harm to others in the pursuit of one's own interest or of one's own task. The new pluralism requires what might be called civic responsibility: giving to the community in the pursuit of one's own interest or of one's own task.

There is no precedent in history for such civic responsibility among institutional leaders. But there are, fortunately, signs that the leaders of our institutions in all sectors are beginning to wake up to the need to become leaders beyond the walls.
A Brief View Back

HE last pluralist society in the West existed during the early and high Middle Ages. The Roman Empire tried, quite successfully, to create a unitary state in which Roman law and the Roman legions created political uniformity throughout the empire while cultural diversity was preserved. But after the collapse of the Roman Empire, this unity splintered completely. In its stead arose a congeries of autonomous and semiautonomous institutions: political, religious, economic, craft oriented, and so on. There was the medieval university, autonomous and a law unto itself. But there were also the free cities, the multi-nationals of the medieval economy. There were the craft guilds, and there were the all but autonomous major orders and great abbeys of the Church.

There were any number of landowners, from small squires to great dukes, each all but independent. Next to them were autonomous bishoprics, paying at best lip service to both the pope in Rome and the local prince. At its height, medieval pluralism in western and northern Europe alone must have been embodied by several thousands of such autonomous institutions, ranging from small squires to great landowners, and from small craft guilds and equally small, local universities to transnational religious orders. Each of these pluralist institutions was concerned only with its own welfare and, above all, with its own aggrandizement. Not one of them was concerned with the community beyond its walls.

Statesmen and political philosophers tried throughout the Middle Ages to re-create community. It was one of the main concerns of the Middle Ages' greatest philosopher, Saint Thomas Aquinas, in the early thirteenth century. And it was equally the concern of the Middle Ages' greatest poet, Dante, in his late-thirteenth-century work, De monarchia. Both preached that there should be two independent spheres: the secular one, centralized in and governed by the emperor, and the religious one, centralized in and governed by the pope. But by 1300 it was much too late to restore community. Society had collapsed into chaos.

Beginning in the fourteenth century and enduring for five hundred years, the trend has been toward abolishing pluralism. This tendency underlies all
modern social and political theory, all of which preaches that there can be only one power in society: a centralized government. And one by one, over five hundred years, government either suppressed the autonomous institutions of pluralism -- such as the free cities of the Middle Ages and the craft guilds -- or it converted them into organs of government. This assumption of power is what is meant by *sovereignty* -- a term coined in the late sixteenth century, by which time, in most of Europe, government had already become the dominant though not yet the only power. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars following the French Revolution, there were no autonomous institutions left on the European continent. The clergy had become civil servants everywhere. The universities had become governmental institutions everywhere. By the mid-1800s, there was one organized power, the government, and there was a society consisting of individual molecules, without political or social power. This is still the accepted political and social theory of today.

The only exceptions to the universal centralization of power that we mean when we talk of *modern society* existed in the English-speaking world and especially the United States. Religious diversity, especially in the United States, maintained a substantial sphere of pluralism, and out of this then grew the uniquely American independent college and university, the equally uniquely American nongovernmental hospital, and so on. But even in the United States the trend ran strongly toward centralization in which one political institution, the government, has a monopoly on power whereas society itself consists of very large numbers of independent individual or small enterprises, each with considerable freedom but without any power. In fact, modern economic theory, whether Keynesian or post-Keynesian, denies that these individuals have even economic autonomy. Their economic behavior is assumed to be determined by the government's fiscal, monetary, and tax policies.

As said before, the United States was an exception all along, something on which all foreign observers commented: for example, Tocqueville in the early years of the nineteenth century and Lord Bryce in its closing years. But even in the United States the trend was toward increasing centralization of power, with the peak reached in the Kennedy and Johnson years of the 1960s. By that time, prevailing ideology in the United States
had come to believe that government could and should take care of every problem and every challenge in the community -- a thesis that clearly no one believes anymore but that only forty years ago was almost universally accepted.

The trend toward the total monopoly of power by one institution, the government, still dominated the first half of the twentieth century. The totalitarian regimes, whether Nazism in Germany or Stalinism in the Soviet Union, can be seen as the last, extreme attempts to maintain the unity of power in one central institution and to integrate all institutions -- down to the local chess club -- into the centrally controlled power structure. Mao in China tried to do exactly the same with a major effort to destroy the prime autonomous power in Chinese society, the extended family.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, political theory and political practice in Europe -- and in the West altogether -- proclaimed that the task, begun five hundred years earlier, had been accomplished. Government, to be sure, was subject to severe limitations on its power. But nobody else had any power: all institutions with power had either been abolished or had been made government agencies.

But just then a new pluralism began.

The first new institution that was not part of government was the large business enterprise, made possible around 1860 to 1870 by the two new technologies of transportation and information. The large business enterprise was not subordinated to government, and it had to have substantial autonomy and substantial power. Since then, modern society has become totally pluralistic again. Even institutions that are legally governmental now have to be autonomous, have to be self-governing, have to have substantial power. Only thirty years ago, education in France was so totally controlled by government that the French minister of education could know at every moment what every teacher in every French school was teaching. By now even the French schools are heavily decentralized. And the European university, although still legally a government agency, has increasingly had to become autonomous, in control of its own research, its own faculty, its own disciplines, its own
degrees. And just as the late Middle Ages tried to accommodate the reality of pluralism by preaching the existence of two autonomous and separate spheres of influence, the secular sphere and the religious sphere, twentieth-century social theory has tried to salvage the political and social theory of the unitary state with its sovereign government by talking of two sectors, the public sector of government, and the private sector of business.

By now we know that government cannot take care of community problems. We know that business and the free market also cannot take care of community problems. We have now come to accept that there has to be a third sector, the social sector of (mostly nonprofit) community organizations. But we also know that all institutions, no matter what their legal status, have to be run autonomously and have to be focused on their own tasks and their own mission. We know, in other words, that it is almost irrelevant whether a university is private or is tax supported and owned by the state of California. However funded, it functions like other universities. We know that it makes little difference whether a hospital is a nonprofit institution or owned by a profit-making corporation. It has to be run the same way, that is, as a hospital. And the reality in which every modern society lives is therefore one of rapidly increasing pluralism, in which institutions of all kinds, sizes, values, missions, and structures constitute society. But we also know that this means that no one is taking care of the community. In fact the same degenerative tendencies that led to the revolt against pluralism in the fourteenth century are clearly at work in developed societies today. In every single developed country, single-cause interest groups are dominating the political process and are increasingly subordinating the common good to their own values, their own aggrandizement and power.

And yet, we need pluralism.

Why We Need Pluralism
HERE is one simple reason why the last 150 years have been years in which one institution after the other has become autonomous: the task-centered and autonomous institution is the only one that performs. Performance requires clear focus and narrow concentration. Multipurpose institutions do not perform. The achievements of the last 150 years in every single area are achievements of narrow focus, narrow concentration, and parochial self-centered values. All performing institutions of modern society are specialized. All of them are concerned only with their own task. The hospital exists to cure sick people. The fire department exists to prevent and to extinguish fires. The business enterprise exists to satisfy economic wants. The great advances in public health have largely been the result of freestanding organizations that focus on one disease or on one part of the human body and disregard everything else (consider the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, the American Lung Society, the American Mental Health Society, and so on).

Whenever an institution goes beyond a narrow focus, it ceases to perform. Hospitals that tried to go beyond sickness care into "health education" and "illness prevention" have been miserable failures. There are many reasons why the American public school is in trouble. But surely the one reason that stands out is that we have, of necessity, tried to make the school the agent of social and racial reform and social and racial integration. Schools in all other countries, including countries that have serious social problems of their own (for example, France, with its large immigrant population), have stuck to the single goal of teaching children to read. And they are still successful in this single endeavor. One may argue (as I have) that the present concentration on "creating shareholder value" as the sole mission of the publicly owned business enterprise is too narrow and in fact may be self-defeating. But it has resulted in an improvement in these enterprises' financial performance beyond anything an earlier generation would have thought possible—and way beyond what the same enterprises produced when they tried to satisfy multiple objectives, that is, when they were being run (as I have to admit I advocated for many years) in the "best balanced interests" of all the stakeholders, that is, shareholders, employees, customers, plant communities, and so on.
A striking social phenomenon of the last thirty years in the United States, the explosive growth of the new "mega-churches" (now beginning to be emulated in Europe), rests on these institutions' dedication to a single purpose: the spiritual development of the parishioners. The decline of their predecessors, the liberal Protestant churches of the early years of the twentieth century, can largely be traced to their trying to accomplish too many things at the same time -- above all, in their trying to be organs of social reform as well as spiritual leaders.

The strength of the modern pluralist organization is that it is a single-purpose institution. And that strength has to be maintained. But at the same time the community has to be maintained -- and in many cases it has to be rebuilt.

How to balance the two, the common good and the special purpose of the institution, is the question we must answer. If we cannot accomplish this integration, the new pluralism will surely destroy itself, the way the old pluralism did five hundred years ago. It will destroy itself because it will destroy community. But if at the same time institutions abandon their single purpose or even allow that purpose to weaken, the new pluralism will destroy itself through lack of performance.

Leadership Beyond the Walls

We know that this integration can be achieved. In fact there are already a good many success stories. What is needed is for leaders of all institutions to take leadership responsibility beyond the walls. They have to lead their own institutions and lead them to performance. This requires single-minded concentration on the part of the institution. But at the same time the members of the institution -- and not just the people at the top -- have to take community responsibility beyond the walls of their own institution.

There is a financial dimension to this integration: the financial support of autonomous community organizations by both government and business.
There is a *performance* dimension to it: the organization of partnerships for common tasks among various types of institutions. There is a *personal* dimension to it: work as volunteers in community organizations by the people of institutions; development of second careers by successful people who in middle age switch from, for example, being division controller in a big company to being controller in a nonprofit hospital; and development of parallel careers by people who in the second halves of their lives take on a major task and a major assignment outside while keeping on with their original work.

But above all there is need for a *different mind-set*. There is need for the acceptance of leaders in every single institution and in every single sector that they, as leaders, have *two responsibilities*. They are responsible and accountable for the performance of their institutions, and that requires them and their institutions to be concentrated, focused, limited. They are responsible also, however, for the community as a whole. This requires commitment. It requires willingness to accept that other institutions have different values, respect for these values, and willingness to learn what these values are. It requires hard work. But above all it requires commitment, conviction, dedication to the common good. Yes, each institution is autonomous and has to do its own work the way each instrument in an orchestra plays only its own part. But there is also the score, the community. And only if each individual instrument contributes to the score is there music. Otherwise there is only noise.