

The Petals of Cooperation

by Robert J. Chassell

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This is a document about the political, constitutional changes needed for success as a species on this planet.

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1 The Petals of Cooperation

The title, *Petals of Cooperation*, suggests a flower. Perhaps the blossom is figurative. However, its petals offer us a natural political remedy, with an outer circle of three conditions, a middle ring of four criteria, and an inner envelope of five qualities.

The outer petals are the three conditions that enable a just and sustainable society to succeed: *consent*, *freedom*, and *law*. In my imagination, these petals are a friendly red.

Consent implies both trust and legitimacy. Freedom means both ‘freedom from’ and ‘freedom to’. Law, from which everyone benefits, not only the powerful, implies less corruption, more equality of opportunity, and more protection, both from hostile people and from dangers in the non-human environment.

The middle petals are the four general criteria through which a person may begin to evaluate a political proposal: *protect*, *preserve*, *prepare*, and *provide*. These are a light, but not too light, blue, like a clear summer sky.

The inner petals are the five qualities with which a citizen may further evaluate a social recipe: *reason*, *rigor*, *reality*, *responsibility*, and *honesty*. These petals are a warm brown.

The center of the flower are the vital details, which when wrong, hurt or kill the society. The details are for a legitimate government to decide. I always visualize these as black, like the dot on a letter i.

Consent is an outer petal. It has veins which supply it with nutrients and the growing leaf. In less figurative language, consent implies both trust and legitimacy.

Trust requires not only a mechanism for learning, as best anyone can, truth about the world, but also a mechanism for judging those who report truths.

Legitimacy not only reduces the cost of government, but enables complex government to succeed. Without legitimacy, a government can only rule by policing everything, which reduces freedom and prevents actions.

Because damage to the environment impacts vast regions, at times the whole planet, and because of lowered transport and communications costs and the consequent need for large scale and long distance dispute settlement, government must expand, as it already has, beyond the boundaries of the traditional nation states. Moreover, it must become legitimate, which it has not.

For such legitimacy, I suggest a three chamber government with many restrictions on its powers, but none the less the ability to settle critical disputes, mostly by bargaining, but when necessary by force.

As I said in *Choice and Constraint* (see section “Goals” in *Choice and Constraint*),

Peaceful dispute resolution is the first goal of government. . . . A second goal is justice. . . .

Justice means the least undesirable use of force.

Freedom is a second outer petal. It is necessary because, as Douglass C. North said¹, in . . . *a world of uncertainty, no one knows the correct answer to the problems we confront . . .* Moreover, freedom is preferred because people want it. Freedom means ‘freedom to’ undertake various actions, without however interfering with others’ ‘freedom from’.

An imbalance implies an injustice, and the possible need for force although peaceful dispute resolution is much better.

The balance is delicate: for example, the freedom of many individuals to act independently may well lead them as a whole to interfere with others’ freedom from, even when none desire to hurt others. The classic example is car drivers who interfere with others’ freedom from traffic jams.

Another kind of problem concerns the freedom of organization to build installations that waste less than smaller installations, but still hurt others: for example, coal burning plants that generate electricity interfere with others’ freedom from airborne poisons and freedom from dangerous climate change. Generally speaking one big coal burning installation is less damaging than many small coal burners, but nonetheless, it has a devastating impact

Law is the third outer petal. It is necessary to enable people and organizations to cooperate peacefully and to predict how others will behave.

To **protect** is a middle petal. The first necessity of any government is to protect people from immediate attack; a second immediate necessity is to protect people from a government. This is why legitimacy is so important. Illegitimate governments must always hurt their people. (Illegitimate governments are sometimes accepted, because people figure it is better to be hurt by local crooks and thieves, ‘devils they know’, than by foreigners, who are ‘devils they do not know’.)

Who should be protected? — only the members of a single clan or religion, or all humans in a small nation, or all humans on the planet, or all sapient beings? A ‘categorical’ or ‘nominal’ view changes depending on which populations are to be protected (see section “Guttman Scales and the Structures of Social Life” in *Choice and Constraint*).

Against what should people be protected? Besides the obvious short term dangers of war, both symmetric and asymmetric, of crime, of tyrannical governments, and of other powerful organizations, what of the long term

¹ *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance*,
Douglass C. North,
1990, Cambridge University Press, p. 81
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dangers to the environment, what of material poverty, what of spiritual poverty?

How to protect people? Currently, most people on this planet live in extralegal circumstances (see section “Developing and Extralegal” in *Choice and Constraint*). That is to say, people protect themselves by depending on family, clan, friends, and crooks. This succeeds locally, but not globally. Rule by law is necessary.

To **preserve** is the second middle petal. A long term necessity of any government is to sustain its people’s economy and environment; else they die. This means to sustain the planet.

To **prepare** is the third middle petal. What should the next generation of Chinese ‘prepare’? Should they prepare cities that are designed primarily for cars? Regardless of energy sources, cars take up much space when being driven. Or should they design cities for trains or buses that follow specific routes? This action implies linear cities; cities laid out along the lines followed by train or bus routes. Is there time for that? Or should we hope for yet a different kind of transport? For example, should we hope for hanging cable cars can change from one line to another? (This is technically feasible, but such cars cannot carry weight like a railroad.) Should we hope for hanging cable cars that can steer themselves to various destinations and that can be made small, able to carry no more than four people?

To **provide** is the fourth middle petal. What should we, as a country or planet, ‘provide’? As a practical matter, most wish to emulate the rich. What the rich have now becomes the goal of people in a productive society. Consequently, if the rich seek cars, then most will seek cars; if rich seek private jets, then when their society becomes rich enough, most will seek personal air transport, or air cars.

The control over what we ‘provide’ can be done with taxes, presuming a rule of law and not too much corruption. Rather than offer unscalable dreams for most people, the rich should be encouraged to seek alternatives that cause less damaging environmental impact. For example rather than hope that billions of humans can learn to live in traffic jams, we had better encourage the rich to desire ‘private rail cars’ again, or ‘rented, computer controlled cars’. The numbers of this kind of vehicle can scale and eventually become available to every one, regardless of continent.

Voice and video communications mean that slower travel, such as dirigible or train, could become acceptable to the rich. But then, also, for others, vacations must be longer; or some other way for people to spend lots of time not at their work and not at their vacation destination.

Or would high density, low impact energy sources, such as small sized but powerful hydrogen fusion devices enable fast transport, such as by suborbital rocket, without having too much impact on the planet?

A major political issue is that damaging actions be prevented, but that the polity permit and provide for the unknown.

This is where the inner petals become important: reason, rigor, reality, responsibility, and honesty.

For example, the numbers of hot air balloons do not scale. They are noisy and clutter the sky. But a few are fine: they are fun both to ride and to watch. And an occasional large event is entertaining.

So the current policy in the US with regard to hot air balloons is reasonable.

The current policy with regard to private cars is not. The numbers of cars fail to scale; yet, for good reason, people want cars. Some other equally convenient transport method is necessary, one that works in bad weather, unlike bicycles, and that works with the young, old, and the injured, unlike contemporary cars.

In empty lands, we can freshly design cities, suburbs, and rural areas for different modes of travel. But few lands are empty. Cities, suburbs, and rural areas already exist.

Political deals must reasonably meet the situation. Rural areas, for example, may always need automobiles. A political analysis must be rigorous, otherwise, important elements will be forgot, elements that endanger the deal. Proposals must match reality; in an unreal world, people will irreversibly die. Thus, any settlement must consider water over the long term, not merely to determine whether aquifers will be depleted or poisoned, but also whether its use will change climate.

Thus, political discussions must be both responsible and honest. The people who undertake them need not be; their temperament is not relevant. But their actions are.

Details: the center of our flower. I am not going to discuss details since their resolution is the task of legislatures. Legislatures must specify and decide on important details, and determine which are unimportant and would be left to civil servants and courts.

Together, all these conditions, criteria, and qualities mean to nurture the **true**, the **good**, and the **beautiful** (in that order, not the more usual order).

Discovering the ‘true’ means to figure out ‘reality’. Such a search is practiced intensely by only a few. Specifically, for robust communications across cultures (see section “What is Science?” in *Choice and Constraint*), three methods generate internal experience in another listener. These methods are strong, since internal experiences are undeniable.

Instead, as a practical matter, a matter of everyday convenience, most people accept as true those statements whose tellers they trust. That is why we must develop more mechanisms for determining trust.

The ‘good’ means to figure out a good way for an individual, family, and society to live. How to protect, sustain, and nurture.

In each of our different societies, in the United States or in China, the ‘good’ means figuring out what makes for the best city transport – cars or something else – and the geographic layout that such figuring implies. Since

it takes decades to change patterns of building and behavior, perhaps the US needs to come to depend on computer controlled small cars, since old people become dangerous drivers and since computer controlled vehicles will take up less space. Among other consequences, this either implies US improvements in its local computer programming or yet more US dependence on foreign computer programming.

The 'beautiful' means to figure out the social parts of life and the physical parts that individuals and communities seek, both built and natural.