

The I, the WE, the IT, and the Third Estate

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My philosophical work over more than 20 years, including the last 11 books and dozens of articles, has attempted to show that democratic world government is inherent in our human condition from the very beginning. As part of this task, I have attempted to articulate the fundamental unity in diversity of our human project along with the emergent evolutionary nature of that project as rooted in the cosmic ground of our universe (often termed “the anthropic principle”). The following brief article expresses my argument for the *a priori* framework of democratic world government in a new way. It begins by describing the three phenomenologically grounded dimensions of our common humanity (the I, the WE, and the IT) and then draws out the implications of this by focusing on the French revolutionary concept of the constituent power of the Third Estate.

The objective world frames the actions of our subjective lives and the life of human civilization. The objective world is investigated by science and is elucidated by historians, sociologists, and those who study the emergent evolutionary ascent of our cosmos. Today we know that the objective world goes back some 13.8 billion years to the Big Bang, to the origins of our cosmos. Today we can trace the astonishing astronomical and geological history that chronicles the emergence of complexity and order over aeons of time up to and including the sudden flash of illumination that constitutes human consciousness. This is the world of the IT.

There is also the subjective world of the “I,” the immediate self-awareness of each person that is invisible to the objective world and from which emerges reason, aspiration, insight, meaning, and value. If there is value in some aspects of the objective world (for example, in its astonishing beauty, its life-forms, or its sheer existence), this value appears to be only recognized by the human subjective dimension. Even the higher animals do not appear to recognize value, whether in the subjective or objective dimensions.

Yet the “I” not only orients itself naturally to the objective world (which is necessary for the survival of the body, and the species, and all living things). It also has the awesome capacity to turn “inward,” to look within and find unfathomable depths within itself as described by mystics of every culture and every age in recorded history. It has the astonishing power of self-

transcendence. It can rise above itself, transform itself, liberate itself, and illuminate itself evermore deeply.

The third mysterious dimension of existence is the WE dimension. When the I swings outward beyond itself it finds not only the objective world of “things” but it encounters other “Is”. It recognizes immediately and intuitively their existence yet it sees only bodies, never subjectivities; it never sees other “Is.” Yet the encounter with the “thou” is entirely real and fundamentally different from the encounter with the IT. We are always in a community with others, and the universal translatability of all languages into one another places us in community with *all* others. All persons share in this astonishing mystery and dignity.

Every I knows that it is part of a WE, and that the WE is in some sense primary and constitutive of the I. Today, a number of philosophers, psychologists, and spiritual thinkers have revealed this inseparability of the I and the WE in compelling detail. We are born genetically predisposed to language and our language ability is evoked in children only through interaction with other “Is.” WE are born into community and live our lives in relation to community, even when we choose to be a hermit or become lost on an island like Robinson Crusoe.

The objective world of the IT has been evolving for 13.8 billion years. The subjective world of the I has emerged out of the process of the evolution of life very slowly, perhaps out of the 3.6 billion years of the evolution of life on Earth, but has blossomed only yesterday and today in human self-awareness. The community (our common human reality) of the WE has been emerging along with the I only throughout human history of the past 40-50,000 years (but, of course, like the I, the entire history of the Cosmos appears to be the precondition for its emergence).

The community of the WE is being more and more recognized today as awareness has increased that human beings are in the process of engineering their own extinction. People around the world are beginning to recognize themselves as human beings first, as members of one human community, prior to all secondary identifications like race, gender, nationality, religion, or culture. Just as the objective world is a real component of Being, and the human “I” is a recent, emergent genuine component of Being, so the WE is an emergent component of Being—emerging but not completed.

In human history, the WE has had idealized images of its more complete realization, for example, in Orthodox Christianity, there is the *Sobornost*, the harmony and unity of the entire community in Christ. In Islam there is the *Ummah*, the unity of the entire community of believers before God. These images can give us guidance and inspiration as we look forward to a genuine human community living with peace, justice and freedom on our beautiful planet Earth.

A number of thinkers have articulated the notion that *law* is one ultimate expression of community, of the reality of the WE. The *Ummah* is under the laws of God. The *Sobornost* is under the trinitarian laws symbolized in the Eucharist. In terms of enforceable governmental authorities, in medieval and early modern times the King was thought ordained by God to be the expression of the complete community. The King held the *constituent power* that was supposed

to symbolically embody the authority and reality of the community under his protection as sanctioned by God and God's natural moral laws.

Where in real life does the *constituent power* come from? This is the power to make enforceable laws, the power to claim *legitimate* authority of government over the governed. In many ancient and medieval societies this was said to come from God and be embodied in the authority of the monarchy. But gradually the democratic idea continued to emerge within human history. In the West this idea began to find a clear articulation in 17th century thinkers such as Althusius and Spinoza, both from the Netherlands in Western Europe.

Nevertheless, by 18th century France the idea of the constituent power was still centered on the monarchy and the nobility (known as the Second Estate) but this power derived some of its authority from the holy church that sanctioned the constituent power of the monarchy through conferring a divine blessing on the power of the King to make and enforce the laws of the realm (the clergy were known as the First Estate). The Third Estate was comprised of the vast majority of the people who, in the assembly of the Three Estates, were represented by one vote. One vote for the nobility dominated by the King, one vote for the clergy, and one vote for the vast majority of the people.

Drawing on the preparatory work of thinkers like Spinoza and Althusius, who claimed that the governing authorities ruled on behalf of the people who represented the true constituent power in any society, the French democratic revolutionary forces began to recognize the people, the Third Estate, as the true constituent power, even though the king and the clergy continued to make and enforce the laws. The king and the clergy called this notion that the people are the true constituent power "treason," an illegitimate rebellion against the true, divinely gifted, source of the constituent power.

The French revolutionary idea, like the American revolutionary ideal that took place in this same era, was the understanding that the *people are sovereign* and the true source of legitimate law and governmental authority—the authority that binds any authentic community into a common WE under universal laws ideally directed to the common good of the whole. The "common good" means that the WE are a collective reality that supercedes the I if that I egoistically wishes to assert itself in violation of the good of the whole.

Yet, as we have seen above, the I is a genuine reality within being, like the IT and the WE. Hence, the constituent power, as understood in authentic democratic theory, protects the I, with its innate, universal human rights and dignity, *at the same time* that it protects the reality and common good of the WE. These two dimensions of existence, of course, must be protected and harmonized within the framework of an objective world that requires producing food, clothing, shelter, protecting the health of the environment, and providing other objective necessities that help ensure the life and well-being of both the I and the WE.

From the 18th century recognition of the Third Estate as the true, legitimate constituent power, to the crises of the 21st century involves a two-century long, complex development. But one thing is clear—the 18th century recognition of the Third Estate was framed within a parochial view of the world as divided into races (along with slavery), nation-state power centers with absolute

boundaries, male domination of women, and religious discrimination. When Thomas Jefferson penned the great words: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,” he was expressing the foundations of the constituent (and revolutionary) power in an ideal form (like the *Sobornost* or the *Ummah*). The reality on the ground was horrific slavery, male domination of women, class divisions, religious fragmentation, and the on-going genocide of indigenous peoples.

Since that time women have struggled to be effectively recognized as part of the Third Estate, and oppressed races have struggled to be recognized as part of “all men are created equal” (with the voting rights that this entails), and religions have continued to interact toward global mutual recognition, as has been happening within the periodic World Parliament of Religions meetings that first began in Chicago in 1893. Humanity is struggling to become the WE that we know we are and should be. That WE is the Third Estate, the true constituent power.

Today, governmental authority worldwide lies with so-called “sovereign nation-states.” Each state is ruled by a small group dominated by the wealth and power of a few. Each state claims a separate constituent power for itself (nearly 200 separate constituent powers), independently of the rest of humanity. The result is chaos, endless war, internecine struggle, pervasive suspicion, unbridled competition, environmental destruction, hate, and fear. This false, so-called “Third Estate” is hopelessly fragmented in a suicidal race toward armageddon, and the reason is that a Third Estate fragmented into some 200 competing slices can in no way represent the true constituent power.

This is precisely the significance of the *Constitution for the Federation of Earth* and its active manifestation in sessions of the Provisional World Parliament. Supporters of the *Earth Constitution* today represent the Third Estate of the people of Earth who are truly sovereign and represent the true constituent power for all law and governmental authority. Even though the power to make and enforce laws today still lies with the elite-dominated, militarized nation-states, the Provisional World Parliament meets and votes and makes “provisional world laws” under the understanding that it truly represents the Third Estate. It represents the true constituent power, which lies with the people of Earth, a power that is rationally organized and manifested in the *Earth Constitution*.

As philosopher Errol E. Harris reasons, the authority of the nation-states to make and enforce laws has today become “illegitimate.” They cannot and do not represent the constituent power of the people, for the Third Estate is precisely all the people who live on Earth. The constituent power lies with the Provisional World Parliament. Today, with this profound realization, we are in a position to unite the IT of our objective situation on Earth, with the I of infinite dignity and value, together with the WE of the universal human community.

Peace, justice, and freedom, as well as human survival, can only happen when these three dimensions of Being have become integrated in a profound unity in diversity, recognizing and respecting each within the communion and coherence of them all. This is the unity in diversity on which the *Earth Constitution* is founded. This is the truth of the IT, the I, and the WE. The people of Earth are the true Third Estate. The people of Earth are the true constituent power.

Citation Notes:

1. The analogy between the Provisional World Parliament and the French Third Estate was first explicitly raised by World Constitution and Parliament Association's Distinguished Advisor, Peruvian High Court Justice David Percy Quispe Salsavilca, in his essay on behalf of the upcoming 15th Session of the Provisional World Parliament, December 10-12, 2021. More about this Parliament can be found at www.wcpa.global.
2. For the history regarding Althusius and Spinoza, see my *Ascent to Freedom* (Institute for Economic Democracy Press, 2008, section 4.8).
3. For Errol E. Harris on the illegitimacy of nation-states, see his *Twenty-first Century Democratic Renaissance* (Institute for Economic Democracy Press, 2008, Chapter 7).
4. See also the dialogue concerning my recent essay on the *Earth Constitution* published with the Great Transition Initiative forum at: <https://greattransition.org/gti-forum/an-earth-constitution-has-its-time-come>.
5. My latest book is about our planetary climate crisis in relation to the *Constitution for the Federation of Earth*. It is called *The Earth Constitution Solution: Design for a Living Planet* (Peace Pentagon Press, 2021).