Future of Governments, Politics and Democracy

Tamás Landesz

Abstract

This chapter discusses the decline of democracy and trust in political institutions worldwide, as well as the role of technology and AI in improving infrastructure, public services and policymaking. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index has measured the quality of political processes, civil liberties, the functioning of government, public participation and political culture every year since 2006, providing a ranking of nearly every country in the world on a 10-point scale. In 2020, the global average score fell to its lowest point since 2006, with the pandemic contributing to this decline. The Edelman Trust Barometer shows that people have fears about the future and how it may impact them, leading to a lack of trust in governmental institutions, businesses, NGOs and media. The European Union launched a project to explore the future of government beyond 2030, combining citizen engagement, foresight and design. Four scenarios emerged: DIY Democracy, Private Algocracy, Super Collaborative Government and Over Regulatocracy. The chapter concludes with predictions for democracy's future in the new digital age and how technology can both weaken and strengthen democracy.

Interviewees
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Mark Turrell
Arnaud Ventura
Lisa Witter

> "Government exists to protect us from each other. Where government has gone beyond its limits is in deciding to protect us from ourselves"—Ronald Reagan

How should governments best employ future technologies and AI for improving infrastructure and public services and devise effective policies to reap their benefits by 2050? Will the world still have refugee crises and poverty levels as today in 2050, and what can businesses and governments do to help them? These are just some of the questions we discuss in this chapter.

According to a recent British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Future series article (Heaven, 2017), trust in political institutions—including the electoral process itself—are at an all-time low. The global tide of democracy seems to be slowly eroding. New converts to democracy in Europe and the Middle East are sliding back into authoritarian rule. And populist leaders are winning votes. Societies around the world are experiencing a strong backlash to democracy, the hallmark of developed nations since World War Two.

The decline of democracy has been measured (Economist, 2021). Every year since 2006, Joan Hoey and her colleagues at the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) have produced a report called the Democracy Index, which provides a comprehensive ranking of nearly every country in the world on a 10-point scale. It combines regional data and multiple surveys conducted in 167 countries to measure the quality of political processes, civil liberties, the functioning of government, public participation and political culture. Each country is then classed as a full democracy, flawed democracy, hybrid regime or authoritarian regime.

Overall, in 2020, the global average score fell from 5.44 in 2019 to 5.37 in 2020. This is the lowest score since 2006, when the index started. The coronavirus pandemic was a key driver in this decline. Government measures taken to address the emergency contributed greatly. Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa saw the most pronounced democratic decline. Almost all the world's democracies were penalised for curbing their citizen's freedom, even if their goal was to save lives. Sixty-five out of 72 democracies had their scores downgraded. Only 8.4% of the world's population live in a full democracy while over a third live under authoritarian rule.

Concurrently, the Edelman Trust Barometer (2020) reveals that 'despite a strong global economy and near full employment, none of the four societal institutions that the study measures—government, business, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and media—is trusted'. The reason for this paradox has to do with people's fears about the future and how it may impact them. As a result, these institutions should find new ways to building trust, in other words combine competence with ethical behaviour.

The European Union (EU) launched a project asking citizens what they thought about the future of government beyond 2030 (Vesnic-Alujevic et al., 2019). Their project adopted a novel approach that combined citizen engagement, foresight and design. The central question they posed was 'how will citizens, together with other actors, shape governments, policies and democracy in 2030 and beyond?' Four scenarios emerged:

- *Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Democracy*, characterized by decentralization of power and self-organized communities
- *Private Algocracy*, large digital organizations enforce their power over citizens and governments
- *Super Collaborative Government*, high level of collaboration and co-creation between citizens, governments and other stakeholders
- *Over Regulatocracy*, characterized by over-protection by the government by overregulating with the aid of technology

The project demonstrated that technology is seen as a powerful driver. Future literacy, together with cyber and data literacy and the promotion of creative and critical thinking, are needed to withstand future challenges in society.

In this context, the Knight Foundation announced in 2019 a 50 million US dollars investment to 'develop new field of research around technology's impact on democracy, cross-disciplinary research centers and projects to fill knowledge gaps on how society is informed in the digital age'.

In 2020, the Pew Research Centre (Anderson & Raine, 2020) published a report, covering many predictive comments from technology experts and futurists as they were asked about the possible future of democracy in the new digital age. About half of the respondents think that humans' use of technology will weaken democracy between now and 2030 as a result of the speed and scope of reality distortion, the depreciation of journalism and the impact of surveillance capitalism. A third of the respondents hope for technology to strengthen democracy as reformers find ways to fight back against info-warriors and chaos. The main concerns for democracy's future included power imbalance and trust issues. The former refers to the risk of those in power seeking to maintain it by building systems that serve them and not the public. Not enough people in the general public have the knowledge required to counter this assertion of power in a meaningful way. However, the latter refers to the rise of misinformation that erodes public trust in many institutions. Experts suggest solutions around innovation and technology. Change is inevitable; we can see innovation happening at the level of individuals and social systems. Human

evolutionary adaptation pays off. Some of the tech tools now antagonizing democracy may come to its aid with time. Leadership and activist agitation will create the required change.

In a World Economic Forum article, Joseph S. Nye Jr. (2014), a Harvard University professor, referred to Ambrogio Lorenzetti's painting *Allegory of Good and Bad Government* (1337–1339) covering three walls of the Sala dei Nove in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena. The painting shows a dignified ruler sitting among the virtues of courage, justice, magnanimity, peace, prudence and temperance. The image of the city is one of stability, prosperity and happiness. If Lorenzetti was given the same space on the walls to cover 2050, what would his painting depict? Technology is evolving exponentially, often destabilizing, but also empowering. Leaders ought to develop a long-term strategic vision to identify the right tools and approaches required to shape the future of good government in their respective societies.

The Future of Government Smart Toolbox report (2014) by the Global Agenda Council on the Future of Government asks how governance could look in 2050. By analysing future trends, leaders can envision the future that they want for their countries and map out how to get there in a context of uncertainty. For instance, governments may choose to invest in improving the digital literacy of the population, or in infrastructure such as e-service kiosks in rural locations.

Public sector leaders around the world are held accountable to deliver good government, fit to address the challenges of the twenty-first century. They are under increased scrutiny to deliver to a growing urbanized population, while addressing complex issues, such as macroeconomic uncertainty or international conflicts, while trust in government is decreasing, and bureaucratic complexity is increasing.

The World Economic Forum's Strategic Foresight team explored the different ways in which major forces of change could play out in the future by 2050 and developed three distinct scenarios:

- *e1984*, a world in which big data has taken over everything, economic, geopolitical and cyber surveillance and threats are all around us, and collective solidarity is a central value of society.
- *Gated Community*, a world in which Big Government is gone, political power is exercised by individuals and private sector organizations; individual responsibility and choice are central values in the society, while the private sector has become the main provider of collective services.
- *CityState*, a world in which authority is transferred to the city level and pragmatism wins over idealism in addressing collective issues.

Joseph S. Nye Jr. (2014) warns us that 'today's trends left unattended could lead to dystopian futures'. Smart policymaking in the present would be required to ensure a positive future with gains for society at large.

1   Input from Interviewees

Asanga Abeyagoonasekera
Foreign policy specialist; founding director general of the Institute of National
Security Studies Sri Lanka

Inequality is one of the biggest issues to tackle. Democracy and liberal thinking would still be most widespread organizational constructs. Conscious capitalism is rising, with elements of socialism brought into the practice of capitalism.

There would be less power at the centre with more devolution of power towards people, giving people more say and influence. This will inevitably lead to the redesign of global institutions as we know them.

Özlem Denizmen
Opinion leader in women empowerment; founder of Para Durum

I feel women are going to be really ruling the world. I am expecting more women to come up to leadership positions, not just company Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The world needs more caring and nurturing, and nurturing comes from women mostly. So women will be taking up a lot of social positions, sort of like I am, but on a bigger scale. And they will feel increasingly stronger.

In a world where everybody can learn everything and can live up to any age, it becomes very important to have a regime that keeps things under control. Democracy may be less widespread than authoritarianism, because all things available through technology will have to be controlled somehow. There also may be a revolution of some sort.

Florian Hoffmann
Social innovator and serial entrepreneur; founder of The DO

Our challenge is not one of understanding the problems we face but taking collective action with speed. We live in a time where too many people believe that their contribution won't matter anyways, that they have no part in tackling the big problems of our time. But our future is not that glum actually. There are millions of people who are taking positive action already—large and small. So my work and hope for the future is that we tell each other the stories of what is working and empower more and more diverse people to take action too.

Robert Krotzer
City councilor of Graz, Austria, for Health and Care

Thanks to democratization and participation, the divided society has grown together again.

Siegfried Nagl
Former mayor of the city of Graz

What does the ideal future of humanity look like? 'Forecasts are difficult, especially when they concern the future'. This bon mot has been trotted out so often by now that it would probably be trivial at this point to leave it at the mere

quotation. But this sentence has another punchline that is often overlooked: its authorship. After all, it is attributed to Karl Valentin, Kurt Tucholsky, Mark Twain, Winston Churchill and Niels Bohr—and this list is still incomplete. You see, history is (equally) difficult, especially when it concerns the past!

It is not only a widespread misconception that the future happens in the future; it also applies vice versa to the past. Alexander Kluge came up with the great formulation of the 'attack of the present on the rest of time' as early as the 1980s.

In other words, our images of the future are inextricably linked to our interpretive sovereignty over the past and the present. Strictly speaking, the question of an 'ideal future' for humanity therefore insinuates nothing more—but also nothing less—than the optimization of the present. Surplus progress is always also the result of the unpredictable; it is not continuity but the disruptive that usually creates dynamism.

The 'ideal future of humanity', as formulated in the question, is above all an 'open society' that promotes innovation, that keeps freedom and responsibility in a productive balance, that knows that in the long run there can be no rights without duties. This society will hopefully be able to accept the world as a place where easy answers are distrusted: discourse instead of dictation, participation instead of populism!

How do I envision the year 2050? First of all, I am convinced that in 2050 many people will think about how they can imagine the year 2080. And in 2050 we will remember that then, almost exactly 100 years ago, a clever person by the name of Bertrand Russell spoke of the most important question being to persuade humanity to consent to its own survival. This is probably the decisive point of departure: as an optimist, I assume that we will achieve the necessary turnaround, and that we will have practically implemented much of what we already know theoretically today. Specifically, I mean the recalibration of the three great freedom promises of modernity: individualisation, mobility and consumption.

The ME AGs (i.e., public enterprise driven by self interest) will no longer be a successful model in 2050. The expected profound reorganization of work and leisure—in view of developments in digitalization and demographics alone, but also in the 'science enterprise' as well as in medical care provision and likewise in urban housing—will lead to a far greater importance of social interaction than is the case today. The willingness to take responsibility for the community must and will be one of the key resources of the future.

We will still be consumers in 2050, unless we want to organize politics as an 'educational institution' again, despite all historical experiences. The task of politics will rather be to demand more ecological and social cost truth. Above all, this will also raise awareness for quality.

What should humanity do to achieve all of the above? Graz has been a human rights city for 20 years: incidentally, the first and thus the oldest in Europe. We have learned in the meantime that human rights are more than a fight against all forms of discrimination. We have realized that we must proactively shape them as a mandate for every human being. In concrete terms, every person deserves full respect, has a right to an environment that strengthens his or her resilience and opens up opportunities for free self-empowerment. However, this also includes an

understanding that, as already mentioned at the beginning, there can be no rights without duties in the long run and that a balance is needed between the should and the may that is suitable for the common good.

Olivier Oullier
Professor of behavioural and brain sciences; co-founder and chairman of the Board of Inclusive Brains

We will be able to mind-control everything and that will radically change the way people interact with other humans and with machines.

I think one of the major impacts on society will be a change of the legal system, totally rethinking the mere notion of responsibility and free will in light of the findings in neuroscience. Neuroscience will be changing the way we legally define and comprehend the notion of responsibility. We are talking about basically leveraging neuroscience in our everyday lives.

Another aspect is in understanding the brain. The big thing will be the merging between tech and the brain to help with neuro-degenerative diseases that we can't cure now.

My country, France, is complex. Resilient as it has survived many crises, but it is in dire need of change.

But if you want to reform this country, whenever a government moves the needle and people don't like it, there is a chance you end up with a million people down on the streets. Say that you want people to work one additional year to allow the country to fund its pension system, the great majority of people would not accept it. My country is very hard to reform. One could also argue this is a good thing because people don't accept everything blindly and have the right to voice their disagreement, which is not the case in all countries.

On the science and innovation front, France must make profound systemic changes: starting with the way it combines finance, innovation, science, technology and industry. These still feel to me like separate buckets instead of being efficiently coordinated to truly benefit society and the economy.

David Rodin
Moral and political philosopher; founder and CEO of Principia Advisory

What I see looking ahead is what I would describe as real megatrends. The first megatrend is the way we think about ethics, which over the past four to five decades has become progressively more focused on individuals, obligations that we owe both to ourselves, to our communities and to others. This is one big megatrend that I see continuing quite a way into the future. So what do I mean by that? The way societies and ethical constructs were structured around collective group of entities, coming out of the late medieval and into the early modern period. They were structured around entities like the state, like the church, like the community. Starting with the Renaissance really, we began to see an idea which placed the individual conceived as being a free rational agent bearing certain rights at the centre of that moral world. So the claims of collective entities like states had to be fundamentally recast. The way we understand the state today, I would argue, is very much one that derives its moral

status and its value from its relationship to individuals rather than the other way around which is the way that people would have thought about it, coming into the early modern period. Now this kind of change, putting the individual at the centre of these systems, has profound effects. One of the biggest vectors of this change has been the rise of the idea of individual human rights that were really codified after the second World War with the Universal Declaration. This has brought enormous transformational change in politics and society. This megatrend will continue and will accelerate over the next number of decades.

I think we will see the further empowerment of individual actors. Individuals acting in domains that previously were really monopolized by states, large corporations or other large collective entities in terms of seizing the authority to make claims about what is and is not appropriate forms of action. A kind of individualization of authority on the one hand, but also an individualization of action on the other. When individuals will see that things are not right in the world, where there is injustice or inequality, individuals I think increasingly will take action. Now, when I say individuals that obviously doesn't mean purely isolated individuals acting alone, but it means citizens, individual people often acting in concert using new technologies to take things into their hands to seize power in order to address things on their own.

The second big megatrend is that while ethics and our ideas about ethics are becoming individualized they're also in a sense becoming global. We are moving towards a global conversation about many issues rather than one that is necessarily structured around particular nationalities, states, or even regions. There are a large number of significant issues that the world is facing now which cannot be addressed on a local, national or regional level. They are truly global problems, like global warming, cybersecurity, nuclear weapons, management of pandemics and diseases, and management of the food system. These are global problems that just can't be addressed by individual communities, compelling us to think about values, principles and governance mechanisms that are really global in scope. The idea of a human right, for example, is something which is completely general in scope. It is possessed by human beings simply in virtue of being human, it is not associated to a particular religion, context or culture, so it really pushes us to think in terms of a global community of all mankind in a way that previous ethical frameworks did not.

Technological improvements and new gadgets will come and go with some having very profound impacts on our society and our lives. But what really matters the most is how human beings will relate to each other, whether we live well, we live badly or we thrive or fall into anarchy and war and genocide and all those things which cannot be solved by technology. While technology facilitates, what makes things really work is the relationships and structures between human beings. The most important transformative thing for how the world will be is not a tech gadget, but the institutions, structures and values we create together.

Nilmini Rubin
Chief of staff and head of Global Policy at Hedera, senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies

An increasing number of citizens worldwide are dissatisfied with democracy.

Stav Shaffir
Social entrepreneur; former member of Parliament, Leaders of the Green Movement; and founder of the Shira Special University
In the future democracy will be much more than voting: it will be a source of power, to use the creativity and dreams of every citizen in the world in order to improve our lives. Democracy will be integrated in city planning, in education and schools, in state budgets; it will be based on facts and knowledge that is constantly moderated and improved; and it will involve citizens not just passively, but actively, in creating solutions, taking responsibility over their communities, on climate, society and the future. It is a democracy to be proud of, to learn from, to constantly shape to become better.

Elaine Smith Genser
Adviser, United Nations, Joint SDG Fund
Technology is a tool that is increasing polarization, but it is also shedding light on people across the world demanding the authority to govern or choose their representatives. True democracy is an undeniable trend where we are witnessing the demand for voting protections and election participation.

Moran Sol Broza
Sustainable impact entrepreneur; founder of Be. and Sol Food
Transparent democracy will be introduced, making it easier for people to influence local and regional policies and self-organize accordingly. People may relocate to regions of the globe based on values and principles, rather than observing an increase in 'nationalism'.

Ian Solomon
Professor of practice of public policy; dean, Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy
Geography will still matter; people will still care about their home. I believe that we will not recognize the world 30 years from now the same way people 30 years ago would hardly recognize our world today. I would expect that the pace of technological change will actually increase so the degree of change will be even greater in the future. What worries me is that even though we'll have this great capacity, it's not clear to me that our skills and tools and institutions for collaboration and cooperation and problem-solving will keep up with the pace of technological change.

You would expect that technology for voicing your political position by casting a ballot would advance dramatically. Our ability to cast votes, audit, validate and verify our vote will grow. That will change how we think about our democratic process. You can imagine that democracies will be far more interactive. You will be able to give feedback much more regularly than it is currently the case. Why not just click the 'like button' on a particular legislation? This would make governments

more accountable, transparent and engaged with their people, giving them more voice. But due process of debate may be harmed. Having a healthy debate is an important aspect of governance in a true democracy. That goes beyond just having your voice heard. It is the ability to have your voice and your opinion changed and to change others in the process.

I do think that it will get much harder for authoritarian regimes to maintain power. That trend will continue. But it won't necessarily mean that all non-authoritarian regimes will be always genuinely democratic in the sense of being participatory and raising the standards of their people. Democracy needs checks and balances, which will vary in degree from country to country.

Lucian Tarnowski
Hindsight futurist; founding curator of United Planet Game

Most importantly, we're entering the human age or the age of empathy.

I think we will see a crisis of the financial system at the same time as a crisis of the nation state. I basically, don't think the nation state is fit for purpose anymore. They are nineteenth-century creations.

The problem is that all nation states are independent. What happens when you get 192 sovereign nation states together, to vote on something that has global importance, do their duty and try to act in the best interest of their electorates of their nation state, rather than the best interest of the world? You get as a zero sum game where everybody will want to give as little as possible and take as much as possible. That's why we can't get any agreement on major global issues facing our planet, such as globalization, population growth, climate change, nuclear proliferation, disease control, etc. All major threats to humanity are global in nature. We are basically completely terrible at acting as a global, united world. Like we just don't have any true global leaders. No such a thing. People are still leaders of their countries, and they try and act on a global level, but often, they're just acting in the best interests of their electorate. We can see this in the failure of COP 15 or Kyoto.

Benjamin Barber, one of my mentors, who wrote 'Jihad versus Macworld' (1995) and 'If Mayors Ruled the World' (2013), thinks that cities are more efficient systems. Cities have more in common with each other than nation states. Rio, London, Shanghai, Paris, LA and New York have more in common with each other than Brazil, China, UK, United States (US) or India. City mayors could become really powerful in the future. Like, it's back to the future. In the past, we had city states like Florence, Venice and Athens. And if we went back, what worked was that it was hyperlocal, in that nobody wanted pollution in their own city. Everybody is aligned to reducing pollution in their own backyard. Today, 75% of the world's wealth sits in 40 cities. Therefore, if we could somehow create a governance model for those 40 city mayors to have decent power, what might happen is that we get hyperlocal governance, technology enabled, returning to true democracy. So rather than electing your representatives, you're actually voting on what you think should happen in your city. And as we move to a human age or an age of empathy, more and more people become educated about what needs to happen, they'll vote both with their wallets and technology, in what will be a lot more integrated democracy.

I think technology will radically change how governments are elected and how they operate. It's going to be a lot more participatory. I don't even know if there will be countries in the future, given that I expect a major crisis. Part of the trigger of this crisis will be a tipping point where a huge number of people is going to suffer if not die from something that's going to happen. And it's either going to be a major disease, nuclear war of some sort or similar major meltdown crisis. It's going to get pretty bad before we can completely reboot. What we have is not sustainable.

My father used to say that 'we are one missed meal from anarchy'. There will be a catalyst that makes people wake up; it is not going to be a slow-boiling frog. It is a very popular belief that we are going to innovate our way out of the world's problems. This is hyper dangerous as it makes us complacent. When we will look back, we will likely say about today, 'amazing innovation, bad leadership'. Davos shows the lack of global leadership around the world.

Mark Turrell
Strategist, educator and entrepreneur; founder and CEO of Orasci

The ability of people to rise up at scale is exponentially increasing. Democracy will dramatically change in the next 30–50 years. What is missing is the organizational model. So, I believe it is entirely plausible that our notion of democracy will be radically different in 2050. The voting cycle will likely be much more frequent. It would not be impossible to imagine votes taking place every week through mobile devices, instead of every five years. Probably we will still have party structures because they have got benefits, but parties may get formed around causes for shorter periods of time, given that the electoral system would allow for more frequent voting.

Most people's votes don't count, most democratic governments elected over recent decades have been elected with 15–30% of the voting population. Because of the party system, parliamentary seats are often subject to coalition agreements. This means that you can rule without any majority support for five years. New more participatory forms of democracy will have to necessarily replace this.

There should be nothing profound happening with the nation states, largely because most systems are fairly rigid. To change fundamental pieces of systems is pretty bloody hard. So, I don't see any huge change taking place to nation states by 2050. I do see, though, that the current sort of power balance between nation states will change.

Arnaud Ventura
Financial inclusion specialist; co-founder and vice president of Positive Planet Group

Poverty will disappear as we know it. In the next 50 years, at the latest in the next century, one of the most radical change on the planet will be that poverty and underdevelopment as we knew it 50 years to 100 years ago would have disappeared. Nobody will be dying from hunger, infant mortality would have been dramatically reduced and only a few countries will be considered as poor by international standards. But from a population of 9 to 10 billion people, less than 10% will be

considered as poor. Asia will be well developed and Africa would be following with only some spots of poverty remaining.

If most countries would have been able to escape poverty, inequality would still exist and be strong in most countries and obviously most countries will have rich and poor, but the poorest citizen of those developed countries will benefit from a number of safety nets (minimum wages, basic health coverage, etc.) that will allow them to escape from radical poverty.

Lisa Witter
Award-winning executive, serial entrepreneur, writer and public speaker; co-founder and executive chair of Apolitical

The world will be much more collaborative and interconnected. I am seeing a reorganization of the ideas around interconnectedness. If you extrapolate that into the future, we are going to hear a lot more voices and a lot more input into how things really happen. There will be a need for trusted advisers or curators to say whose voices are right and whose voices are wrong. This role may be offered by institutions, governments or otherwise. People will look for nodes of influence in a much larger way. That has fantastic implications for the world in terms of solving problems.

Another thing we are going to see a lot more going forward is power sharing versus power grabbing. I predict that the world will become much less violent which makes me super happy. I am also excited about what looks like a rush of political entrepreneurship happening. I see new models for organizing people emerging, new models for thinking about democracy in different ways, party structures redefined or broken down entirely and the role of them changing greatly. This could be the beginnings of a real revolution around political entrepreneurship. People around the world are fed up with how politics works now and they are looking for new models. It is nascent right now, so the next 30 years may see the complete disruption of politics as we know it. Whenever these shifts happen, they can be good, bad and ugly, all at once, but I am positive about it.

Democracy will continue to be an important notion of direct representation and of the people's voices being heard. But there will be a radical makeover of it, less focused on the process of governance and more on the outcome of governance. I realized this in Myanmar when conducting a training for young political leaders. They kept saying that they want democracy, but could not really articulate why is democracy important for them. There wasn't a sense that they have rights as individuals and I actually think the whole concept of human rights will go through a major shakeup. There will be really interesting discussions in 30 years, between what's my right as an individual and how I live as an individual, versus how I live in a community and a collective. I am not saying that we're going to go to communism, but we can't all have individual rights to do whatever we want; we have to think about how we fit into the tribe within our community. Democracy will be seen not just as who I directly elect, but how my direct election impacts how we fit into the world.

At one point the caveman woke up and he's like, I'm alone, and then he realized that he will have to work together with others. The world will be much more collaborative in 30 years; it will just have to be. Democracy will feel more collaborative; politics will feel more collaborative; governance will feel much more collaborative; gender relations will feel much more collaborative; the notion of an individual will be less highly valued.

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