

Self, Solidarity, and Civility: Foundations of Social Life

RVP International Seminar, 2026*

Final Report

Intensive Five-Week Seminar Phase

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* This report covers the intensive five-week phase of the seminar, conducted in hybrid format from Washington, DC, 17 August–18 September 2026. It was prepared with AI assistance under the supervision and responsibility of Professor João J. Vila-Chã, SJ, moderator of the proceedings.

Executive Overview

The 2026 Annual International Seminar of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP), “**Self, Solidarity, and Civility: Foundations of Social Life,**” was held in/out of Washington, DC, from **17 August to 18 September 2026** and assembled an intercultural and interdisciplinary and diverse group of scholars. The Program connected institutions in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the United States and was led under the assumption that in order to understand the foundations of social life we need to grasp the meaning of *self, solidarity, and civility* by looking at issues such as the following: the constitution of the self; ethical responsibility for others; solidarity across differences; civic discourse and democratic legitimacy; cultural memory; ecological vulnerability; and, last but not least, the institutions that sustain common life.

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1. WEEK I

The First Session of the Seminar, which included an Opening Address by the Director of the George F. McLean Center for the Study of Religion and Values at the Catholic University of America, Professor William Barbieri, was fundamentally dedicated to the mutual introduction of the confirmed Participants and, thereby, the confirmation of the human and intellectual potential of the five weeks ahead of us. The presentations of the Moderator and the effective Members of the Seminar can be summarized as follows:

João J. Vila-Chã, SJ, Professor of Social and Political Philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, and one of the Vice-Presidents of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (since 2011) and director of its international postgraduate program, will serve as Moderator of the proceedings ahead. His academic formation in Portugal, Germany, and the United States culminated in a doctorate from Boston College on Renaissance Philosophy culminating with a thesis on Leone Ebreo and the intelligibility of love.¹ His scholarship and teaching encompass history of early modern and contemporary philosophy, history of socio-political ideas, religion and politics, phenomenology, interculturality, pluralism, etc. He is also a member of the Steering Committee of the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP), of which the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy is a member. In his role as Moderator, he shall be particularly attentive to the intellectual mediation needed to connect multiple traditions, disciplinary vocabularies, and cultural experiences around a shared inquiry into the foundations of social life.

Dian Nafiatul Awaliyah is an Indonesian architect, researcher, author, and lecturer in architecture at Sultan Fatah University in Demak. Her work brings the built environment into direct conversation with cultural identity, ecological responsibility, community participation, and social inclusion. Her profile emphasizes two especially original research trajectories. The first concerns the coastal heritage of Demak and the use of local symbols, ecological memory, and community knowledge in adaptive design under conditions of tidal flooding, subsidence, and environmental degradation. The second concerns **neuroinclusive architecture**: environments designed with cognitive diversity, sensory awareness, clarity, predictability, participation, and spatial justice in view. Her contribution expands “solidarity” beyond interpersonal intention to include the ethical design of spaces in which diverse people can belong and flourish.

Maduabuchi Frank Dukor is Professor of Philosophy at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria, and a major exponent of contemporary African philosophy. His work develops *theistic humanism* as an African philosophical framework in which God, the human person, the universe, and the objective grounding of values belong to an integrated moral and metaphysical order. His career joins scholarship, institution-building, editing, poetry, journalism, and public commentary. He has written extensively on African philosophy,

¹ João J. Vila-Chã, *Amor Intellectualis? Leone Ebreo (Judah Abravanel) and the Intelligibility of Love* (Braga: Publicações da Faculdade de Filosofia, 2006), xvi, 1182 pp.

freedom, metaphysics, logic, values, and politics and serves as general editor of the *Dictionary of African Philosophy*. His perspective opens questions about whether solidarity is grounded principally in autonomous individuality or in a relational ontology in which personhood, community, nature, and transcendence are mutually implicating.

Lidia Godek-Ostrouch is Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Philosophy and Social Communication at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Her research lies at the intersection of democratic theory, the aesthetics of politics, Weberian political thought, the public sphere, academic freedom, and the relation between scientific inquiry, values, and political responsibility. Her work interprets academic freedom as both a methodological condition of knowledge and an ethical-institutional vocation. Her research on scientific responsibility treats it as an active process of anticipating and mitigating the social, ethical, and environmental consequences of inquiry. At the centre of her contribution to the Seminar is the idea that civility depends not only on personal virtue but also on public practices capable of sustaining responsible disagreement, trustworthy knowledge, and democratic judgment.

Franklin Ernesto Ibáñez Blancas teaches at the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, and the Universidad del Pacífico. He earned a master's degree at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP) and a doctorate in philosophy from the Pontifical Gregorian University (Roma) with a thesis on Nancy Fraser's concept of Justice. His principal fields of research are general and applied ethics and social and political philosophy and, in his writings, he is being addressing issues of social justice, globalization, poverty, political morality, dignity, and ecological justice. His presence will certainly contribute to the process of connecting the three terms that define the purpose of the Seminar with the normative question of *who* counts as a subject of dignity, justice, and social membership.

Oleksandr Kulyk is Ukrainian and professor in the Department of Philosophy at Oles Honchar Dnipro National University and, now that the war is ravaging his country, he is holding a position as Visiting Professor at Maynooth University, in Ireland. His work includes analytic philosophy, logic, research ethics, philosophy of international relations, Ukrainian philosophical identity, and philosophical reflection on Russia's war against Ukraine. In some of his most recent publications he is particularly concerned with issues such as the "will to freedom," war, and the problem of evil. His participation should be a guarantee of an exceptionally existential and political dimension in the proceedings of the Seminar.

Sivakaran Navaratnam is from Sri Lanka and a doctoral candidate at Keele University's School of Humanities and Social Sciences in the United Kingdom. Before beginning his doctorate, he served as Senior Lecturer and Head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Jaffna; his formation also includes law, analytic philosophy, Gandhian thought, and philosophical work on suicide and the meaning of life. His doctoral research centers on Habermas, discourse ethics, constitutional legitimacy, and legal authority. Together with his interests in human rights, peace, environmental philosophy, and post-conflict Sri Lanka, we can say that he is particularly equipped to contribute on how solidarity can become

institutionally effective, that is, how communicative reason, law, and civic participation might establish legitimate political relations amid deep historical division.

Nubong Henri Ndifor is from Cameroon, an independent researcher and teacher of philosophy in Yaoundé. He earned his doctorate in ontology and metaphysics at the University of Yaoundé in 2024. His dissertation, *The Crisis of Humanity in the Global Society: An Approach from the Levinasian Notion of Responsibility for the Other*, interprets contemporary moral, ecological, and social crises through alterity, responsibility, trust, transcendence, and the human search for meaning. In his contributions to the Seminar, he shall in particular help in the task of probing how universal moral claims can remain normatively meaningful without suppressing historical experience, cultural difference, or affective belonging. His Levinasian orientation will certainly help the common understanding of how responsibility precedes self-sufficiency and the emerging of a hermeneutics of the Other that is truly foundational when it comes to the questions of self, solidarity, and civility.

Indukuri John Mohan Razu is an Indian theologian, professor of social ethics, author, and social critic based in Bengaluru. His intellectual trajectory began in sustained social activism with Dalit and landless agricultural communities and later developed through theological education, legal studies, doctoral research on transnational corporations and development, and teaching in Christian social ethics and contextual theology. He has taught at the United Theological College and ACTS Academy of Higher Education, conducted field research through the Indian Social Institute, and held research appointments at Princeton Theological Seminary and the University of Birmingham. Thus, he brings to the seminar a praxis-centered understanding of solidarity, namely, one tested by caste, labor, migration, education, and the struggle of excluded communities for recognition and agency.

N. Ravi Vincent is an Indian scholar of English literature, poet, author, and Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Andhra University, Visakhapatnam (India). He holds a doctorate in English literature and has pursued wide interdisciplinary study in education, philosophy, history, psychology, communication, politics, and linguistics. In the Seminar, he is planning to look at a project he calls the “Unfolding the Unshakable Foundation for Spiritual and Social Life: Early, Medieval and Modern Theologians,” a research project that intends to bring together authors such as Tertullian, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Tolstoy, and Bonhoeffer. He is actually pursuing a second doctorate, but in the Seminar he shall be a guarantee of how a literary and theological approach to the issues at hand can enrich the proceedings by adding narrative, poetic imagination, conscience, faith, and historical witness to a conversation that is destined to be strongly shaped in terms of political philosophy and social ethics.

Xin Zhao is a doctoral candidate in ethics at Wuhan University’s School of Philosophy. Her dissertation, “Defending Virtues: Three Approaches to the Situationist Challenge,” examines whether stable virtues can withstand critiques emphasizing the power of circumstances over character and shall be presented/defended before the end of the year. Her broader interests include virtue ethics, moral psychology, Confucian philosophy, comparative political philosophy, gender, and philosophy of education. Thus, her doctoral work shall greatly reinforce

the generative question at the heart of the Seminar, namely, whether solidarity and civility should be understood principally as rules governing conduct, as virtues of character, or, rather, as transformations of the social situations that constrain moral agency.

Adrienne Black has been for many years based at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, and is now associated with the George F. McLean Center for the Study of Culture and Values. She participated in the 2024 edition of the seminar on modernity and multiple modernities. For many years, she was an Academic Coordinator in the Department of Physics and at present is in charge of the renewal of the institutional site of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy. Hence, besides an important role in the public dimension of the Seminar, we take for granted that her institutional experience and familiarity with Catholic University of America will continue to support and sustain the intercultural dialogue that makes the Seminar possible.

Wang En is a PhD. scholar from Xi'an, now affiliated with a School of Marxism in his native China. In the present academic year, he is a visiting scholar at the Catholic University of America and repeating the experience of being a member of the RVP International Seminar. Needless to say, that he is expected to make contributions on the analysis of selfhood, solidarity, and civic life through Marxist social philosophy, historical structures, labor, ideology, and the relation between individual agency and collective emancipation. This is all the more important as he also knows important aspects of the biblical and the Jewish-Christian tradition.

Michał Reka is a Polish researcher now associated with the John Paul II Center at the Catholic University of Lublin. He was also a participant in previous editions of the RVP International Seminar. At the 2024 World Congress of Philosophy in Roma, he addressed the transcendence of the person through values and solidarity in relation to the utopian project of transhumanism. He is expected, thus, to help the Seminar look at the issues from a personalist perspective and to look in particular to the many issues (philosophical and political) associated with the development of the concept of *Solidarity* in his native Poland at the end of the 20th century. The affirmation of the centrality of the *person* together with an understanding of a technologically mediated self-transformation shall be of special relevance whenever the Seminar will look at solidarity as arising from the inviolable value of embodied persons destined to survive projects directed toward radical enhancement.

Yeping Hu, is a Chinese national living in the USA for many years. She holds a master in Philosophy from the Catholic University of America and a doctorate from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Poland). She was a close associate of Father George F. McLean, OMI (1929-2016) and is now the Assistant to the Director of the George F. McLean Center for the Study of Culture and Values at The Catholic University of America and the Executive Director of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy. In that quality, she is co-organizer of the Seminar. Her work has proved essential for the sustainment of the institutional network, that is, for the promotion of scholarly exchanges, editorial projects, and the many publications through which the RVP's intercultural philosophical mission has been fulfilled for decades now. Her presence in the Seminar represents both scholarly

participation and the organizational memory of the RVP International Seminar as an enduring global community of inquiry.

Taken together, therefore, the participants in the present edition of the Seminar form a deliberately plural intellectual community. The group includes perspectives shaped by African theistic humanism, European democratic theory, Latin American social justice, Ukrainian philosophies of freedom, South Asian post-conflict and Dalit experience, Chinese virtue ethics and Marxism, Indonesian architectural and ecological thought, Levinasian responsibility, Christian social ethics, literature, theology, and intercultural philosophy. Through its composition, therefore, the Seminar is well placed to ensure the complementarity of at least the following levels of inquiry: 1) **The personal:** dignity, virtue, moral psychology, self-transcendence, conscience, affect, and responsibility. 2) **The relational:** alterity, recognition, community, cultural memory, care, and solidarity with marginalized persons. 3) **The institutional:** law, constitutional legitimacy, democratic communication, academic freedom, education, and the public sphere. 4) **The material and ecological:** architecture, place, labor, technology, environmental vulnerability, and the conditions that make common life inhabitable.

Thus, the distinctive promise of the Seminar lies in holding together different levels of thought. Indeed, the **self** shall be looked at neither as an isolated individual nor as a mere product of structures; **solidarity** will be treated neither as sentiment alone nor as compulsory uniformity; and **civility** will be approached not as superficial politeness but as an ethical, cultural, spatial, and institutional practice through which persons learn to inhabit a shared world amid difference.

In the remaining of the First Week of the Seminar (Sessions 2 and 3), we pursued a sustained intercultural reading of Norbert Elias's *The Civilizing Process*, Volume I, *The History of Manners*.² Session 2, held online on Wednesday, 19 August 2026, examined the opening fifty pages and established the conceptual framework; Session 3, held on 21 August, completed the collective treatment of the volume through assigned presentations on manners, bodily discipline, shame, aggression, knightly life, and the transformation from feudal to court society. Moreover, across the two sessions, Elias's central thesis was accepted as analytically powerful but subjected to sustained criticism. "Civilization" was interpreted not as a finished achievement or proof of moral superiority, but as a long, uneven historical process in which changing networks of interdependence transform external constraints into habits of self-restraint. At the same time, participants questioned the linearity, Eurocentrism, class hierarchy, colonial afterlife, and possible psychological costs of this process. In any case, the conversations held in the Seminar during its first week yielded at least three governing insights, namely: 1) the *self* is not an isolated or finished substance but a historically and socially formed achievement; 2) *civility* is embodied or "somatized" power as it becomes visible in gesture, speech, dress, eating, bodily privacy, emotional restraint, and the experience of shame; 3) solidarity depends on recognizing interdependence, yet it also requires critical vigilance whenever dominant groups universalize their own manners and classify others as uncivilized. – We look now in detail to Sessions 2 and 3 of the Seminar.

² Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987).

1.1 Session 2: Conceptual Foundations

Like all the others, Session 2 was facilitated/moderated by João J. Vila-Chã. The attendance during the Seminar as always high, even if not constant by all members in good standing of the Seminar. As an example, the present Session was attended by Xin Zhao, John Mohan Razu, Sivakaran Navaratnam, Franklin Ibáñez, Maduabuchi Dukor, Lidia Godek-Ostrouch, Dian Nafiatul Awaliyah, Yeping Hu, N. Ravi Vincent, Nubong Henri Ndifor, and Michał Ręka. As for the entire duration of the Seminar, the Session combined an initial global check-in destined to the building-up of an authentic community of research followed by structured and contained discussions of the texts at hand. In the present case, the text studied beforehand and duly presented was the one from Norbert Elias quoted above.

The sharing at the start of the Session was destined to connect our philosophical inquiry with our common contemporary (and global) experience of the world. Mohan described a self-sustaining movement of Dalit landless agricultural workers in southern India inspired by Paulo Freire's conscientization and Ambedkar's call to "educate, organize, agitate." Shiva raised the destructive consequences of racialized media and academic scrutiny in Britain; Franklin reported concern over an approaching El Niño event in Peru; and Maduabuchi described political, economic, ethnic, and academic tensions in Nigeria. These interventions established that civility cannot be reduced to etiquette; rather, it must also be judged by its relation to dignity, justice, truthful public communication, institutional responsibility, and collective agency.

Civilization as Process — Dian opened the textual discussion by emphasizing that Norbert Elias does not treat civilization as a possession acquired once and for all. It is a process through which social relations, emotional expectations, and patterns of conduct change over long periods. As societies become more differentiated and interdependent, direct external compulsion is gradually converted into anticipatory self-control; individuals learn to regulate themselves before correction is imposed from outside.

The session was particularly active in clarifying Elias's distinction between *Kultur* and "civilization." In the German usage reconstructed by Elias, *Kultur* tends to emphasize inward intellectual, spiritual, and artistic depth, whereas French and English uses of "civilization" emphasize outward refinement, political organization, progress, and social conduct. Xin found a comparable distinction in Chinese traditions between cultural-moral formation and institutional or material accomplishment, while Yeping stressed how Elias resists both fixed universal standards and complete historical relativism.

Sociogenesis and Psychogenesis — A central achievement of the session was the clarification of Elias's double method. *Sociogenesis* designates long-term changes in social structure—state formation, concentration of authority, class differentiation, and denser networks of dependence. *Psychogenesis* designates the corresponding formation of personality, affect, habit, shame, fear, foresight, and self-control. The two processes are inseparable: society becomes embodied in the person, while socially formed persons reproduce and modify the institutions they inhabit.

Xin identified three mechanisms of internalization: childhood socialization, adult dependence on social recognition, and the conversion of external pressure into inner self-monitoring.

Chinese pedagogical texts and Confucian practices of reputation and moral watchfulness were presented as analogues to Elias's model. Ravi added that "sociogenic fears" explain why practices once publicly accepted—such as spitting, nudity, or overt violence—can later provoke immediate embarrassment or disgust without any conscious recollection of how the standard arose.

Power and Exclusion — Lidia formulated the critical question that actually guided sessions 2 and 3: who possesses the authority to determine which conduct is civilized and which is barbaric? Courtly and aristocratic standards spread through education, law, the state, religion, and colonial administration until historically particular norms appeared natural and universal. Franklin therefore observed that Elias's descriptive aspiration cannot remove the moral and political weight carried by the word "civilization."

Civility emerged as radically ambivalent. Internalized restraint can protect others, moderate aggression, facilitate trust, and sustain cooperation. Yet the same codes can function as instruments of distinction: elites define their own speech, dress, diet, bodily practices, and emotional style as normative, then use those standards to rank classes, regions, races, and cultures. The civilized/uncivilized distinction can consequently conceal domination beneath the language of refinement.

Global South Critiques — The participants did not reject Elias's European account outright; instead, they placed it in dialogue with histories and ontologies obscured by a single developmental narrative. Maduabuchi argued that African civility is fundamentally moral and communal rather than merely courtly or behavioral. Drawing on Fanon, Rodney, Achebe, Soyinka, and Igbo thought, he interpreted colonial "civilization" as a bifurcation of African selfhood and proposed theistic panpsychic animism as a framework for reconstructing self, solidarity, and mutual respect.

Nubong maintained that Elias's historical method should logically permit many trajectories of civilization, even though the narrative remains tethered to Europe. He invoked African temporality, Achille Mbembe's plural orders of change, and Levinas's priority of the Other against ego-centered accounts of subjectivity. Mohan showed how British and missionary standards were internalized by Indian elites and reapplied to local populations, while Franklin used Garcilaso de la Vega to argue that claims to superior culture characterize empires beyond Europe, including the Inca, Roman, Greek, and Egyptian worlds.

Michał situated Elias's 1930s work against Nazism and the contested history of Silesia. Border changes, multiple cultural affiliations, and the Nazi appropriation of civilizational symbols demonstrated that state power, national identity, and civilization cannot be equated. The example of modern barbarity arising within a society that claimed cultural superiority also undermined every simple identification of refined manners with moral progress.

Summing-Up Session 2 — The closing discussion condensed the session into three core propositions: 1) **The self** must also be understood as a historical achievement since personality is formed through inherited languages, institutions, disciplines, and relations; 2) **Civility** needs to be recognized as a form of somatized power, inasmuch as social norms become bodily dispositions and apparently incarnate spontaneous feelings; 3) **Solidarity** emerges as an acknowledged form of interdependence, that is, since persons are formed through relations, solidarity becomes possible whenever dependence on others is made explicit and governed by mutual respect rather than hierarchy.

The assigned work for Session 3 followed directly from this synthesis, a motivation that should be operative throughout the rest of the Seminar: Participants were called to complete reading the previously assigned text, present the assigned sections critically, and conclude from their own cultural and intellectual contexts. As examples, Dian was encouraged to develop the relation between Elias and neurodiversity; Maduabuchi to elaborate an African ontological counterpoint; and Nubong to pursue the tension between European civilizational history and African traditions.

1.2 Session 3: Embodied Civility

Session 3 brought the participants from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the United States, together with several newly introduced participants so that the interdisciplinary context of the Seminar was briefly enlarged through the inclusion of Dr. Isaac Mutelo (Zimbabwe) and Dr. Mark Michalski (Poland/USA). Their backgrounds helped extend the discussion toward interreligious dialogue, higher education, artificial intelligence, philosophy of science, and, needless to say, the immediate experience of war.

Oleksandr's report from Ukraine gave the session an urgent moral frame. He described continuing missile attacks, the destruction of university buildings, the vulnerability of family and acquaintances, wartime democratic debate, conditions in occupied territories, and the absence of a near-term path to peace. Shiva responded from the memory of Sri Lanka's long ethnic conflict, while João condemned the invasion and called for international insistence on Russian withdrawal. We can say that the vivid exchange on Ukraine rapidly transformed solidarity from an abstract category into attentive reception of another participant's suffering, political judgment, and the need for public moral support.

Manners and Social Formation — Lidia's presentation on Elias's analysis of conduct manuals showed how apparently minor practices provide evidence of deep social change. Erasmus, Giovanni della Casa, Courtin, and La Salle record gradual shifts in thresholds of embarrassment, shame, and repugnance. The movement from shared dishes to individual plates, from eating by hand to regulated use of utensils, and from public correction to tactful private intervention exemplifies how external social expectations become bodily habit.

This transition was neither abrupt nor morally unambiguous. The "civilized body" is socially produced, but its tact and restraint may serve two contrary purposes: consideration for others or exclusion of those deemed unrefined. Erasmus's tolerance toward the shortcomings of others

was therefore identified as a potentially solidaristic core within civility, counterbalancing its use as social classification.

Franklin examined how courtly manners spread to aspirant middle classes seeking recognition. His family's familiarity with Manuel Carreño's nineteenth-century Venezuelan conduct manual illustrated the global diffusion of European codes. He also connected politeness, urbanity, and civility to the city, noting that Latin American rural populations were often made to experience themselves as inferior because they did not conform to urban standards.

Shame, Class, and the Body — Nubong analyzed Elias's treatment of coughing, spitting, flatulence, exposure, dress, and bodily modesty. Shame appeared as a historically mobile frontier rather than a biological constant. He questioned linear progress, insufficient attention to class power, the psychic cost of compulsory self-control, and the cultural imperialism that may accompany the globalization of Western bodily norms.

Mohan interpreted etiquette as a mechanism of bourgeois and class domination. Regulations governing servants, dress codes, utensils, and admission to public spaces reveal how dominant groups make their own conduct the price of social recognition. The Indian contrast between eating with the hand and eating with a fork showed how colonial codes can reinforce caste and class exclusion. His decisive question was constructive: if Elias diagnoses domination through manners, what alternative forms of civility can be proposed?

Ravi's presentation traced the historical privatization of the body through rules governing shared bedrooms, bathing, modesty, and religious discipline. Medieval conduct literature and Christian orders helped transmit new standards of bodily restraint and privacy. Ravi also raised the possibility of "de-civilization" under contemporary conditions, asking how legitimate freedom, changing institutions, social harm, and inherited norms should be distinguished without merely restoring repressive conventions.

Aggression and Court Society — Xin presented Elias's thesis that aggressiveness is historically variable rather than an unchanging human quantity. In medieval societies, warfare, hunting, cruelty, and open hostility were more publicly enacted and enjoyed. With stronger central authority and denser interdependence, aggression was not eliminated but redirected into regulated and representational forms such as sport, theatre, film, and spectatorship. Chinese examples of cockfighting and cricket fighting suggested possible comparisons beyond Europe.

Wang En examined the movement from knightly to court society. Knights inhabiting relatively autonomous rural domains gave way to courtier's dependent on complex urban hierarchies. Advancement increasingly required calibrated speech, gesture, gaze, and emotional restraint. What later appears as individual character was thus shown to be inseparable from social position, power relations, and strategies of survival.

Maduabuchi's treatment of Elias's appendix restated the civilizing process as a transformation of behavior, affects, relationships, and class structures rather than a simple accumulation of science, religion, education, or technology. He compared Elias with evolutionary theory, Marxian class history, and social-contract accounts while contrasting centralized court society with Igbo mechanisms of kinship, age grade, lineage, ancestral

authority, communal ethics, and cosmological sanction. Different institutions can therefore generate self-restraint without following the same European route.

Integrative Discussion — Yeping reconstructed a sequence from *courtoisie* through *civilité* to “civilization”: elite conduct becomes generalized public behavior and is then applied as a standard to social classes and nations. She questioned whether urbanization has replaced civility as the dominant metaphor of development and connected Elias’s attention to appearance, inwardness, and self-monitoring with Freud and Foucault. Mark related the same sequence to educational memory and urban development, while Isaac proposed Ubuntu—“a person is a person through other persons”—as a non-Western framework compatible with interdependence, self-restraint, and humane civility.

João’s synthesis linked Elias with George Washington’s *Rules of Civility*, Carreño’s manual, Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self*, and Foucauldian analyses of power. The history of manners was thereby interpreted as part of the political history of nations: ordinary acts disclose how authority enters bodies, emotions, domestic spaces, and self-understanding. Elias’s enduring contribution is to reveal the historical production of privacy, disgust, shame, emotional foresight, and the sense that certain acts are simply “not done.”

Combined Intellectual Results — Regarding the **Self**, the first week of the Seminar (Sessions 2 and 3) helped replace an atomistic concept of selfhood with a relational and historical one. The Seminar is now looking at the self as emerging through socialization, language, memory, bodily discipline, institutional belonging, cultural inheritance, and interaction with others. However, we also reinforce the idea that the idea of *formation* does not imply complete determination. The seminar’s intercultural critique was for the most part directed towards the idea that inherited norms can be interpreted and, thus, also resisted, decolonized, and reconstructed.

Solidarity was primarily understood as more than sympathy or uniformity as it begins in factual interdependence but becomes ethical and political when dependency is consciously acknowledged, vulnerability is heard, and institutions are ordered toward participation rather than exclusion. The Dalit movement in India, the response to Oleksandr’s account of Ukraine, Levinasian responsibility, African communitarianism, Ubuntu, and intercultural dialogue all exemplified forms of solidarity grounded in agency and reciprocal recognition.

Civility, proved to be the most ambivalent category during this first week of the Seminar. At its best, it restrains violence, protects others from humiliation, supports trust, and creates forms for coexistence. At its worst, it disguises class rule, caste hierarchy, colonial domination, urban prejudice, racial exclusion, and cultural homogenization. A normatively defensible civility must therefore be reflexive: it should discipline domination before disciplining difference, join restraint with tolerance, and remain open to plural cultural embodiments. Furthermore, the notion of **Civilization** was looked at in particularly critical terms as participants tended to reject the identification of civilization with technological advancement, urbanization, Westernization, or moral superiority. Elias’s process model was recognized and retained, but at the same time was pluralized and looked at from a hermeneutical distance. It was agreed that civilizations and civilizing practices arise through distinct configurations of authority, kinship, religion, class, colonial encounter, education, and communal memory, but at the same time there was a

prevalence of the idea that no single trajectory supplies an uncontested universal ladder of human development.

Summing-Up Week I: With Session 1 in the background, sessions 2 and 3 were successful in establishing a shared conceptual vocabulary while preserving genuine disagreement. Elias supplied the principal analytical grammar—interdependence, sociogenesis, psychogenesis, affect control, shame, and historical transformation—while the participants’ African, Asian, European, and Latin American interventions exposed the limits of treating one regional history as a universal norm. The principal unresolved question remained the passage from diagnosis to normativity. Elias explains how conduct becomes internalized, but explanation alone does not determine which restraints are humane, which traditions deserve preservation, or which standards reproduce domination. Therefore, it is to be expected from the upcoming Sessions the formulation of questions regarding how civility can protect dignity without enforcing conformity or how solidarity can unite persons without absorbing their differences.

The first week closed with a transition from Elias to Craig Calhoun’s treatment of civility.³ Oleksandr and Michał were assigned portions of Calhoun’s article, Adrienne was to comment on its opening claims, and all participants were asked to read the article before the next meeting. The shift promised to move the seminar from the genealogy of manners toward a more explicit normative and political account of civic coexistence.

Finally, we should also mention that at the start of the Seminar we counted with the presence of Professor Sally J. Scholz, from Villanova University (USA). Unfortunately, due to the coincidence of our future Sessions and her academic duties at Villanova University, she was unable to pursue the commitment with the Seminar. We register, however, that being a specialist in political and social philosophy, ethics, feminist theory, Simone de Beauvoir, and Rousseau, her work is especially distinguished and tailored for a project such as ours on «Self, Solidarity, and Civility». She is the author of *Political Solidarity* (Penn State Press, 2008), *Feminism: A Beginner’s Guide* (2010), *On Rousseau* (2001), and *On de Beauvoir* (2000), and is currently completing a project on *Feminist Philosophy and War* for Cambridge University Press. She has published intensely on solidarity across generations, solidarity and human rights, feminist political theory, war rape, humanitarian intervention, climate ethics, and the ethics of social risk. Beyond her research, professor Scholz has held significant editorial and professional leadership roles—including editor of *Hypatia*, associate editor for major encyclopedias of philosophy and global justice, and president of the North American Society for Social Philosophy. As of special relevance to the aims of the seminar we note in particular the following publications: Sally Scholz, “Solidarity across Generations: Transgenerational Political Solidarity for Global Justice,” *Global Justice (Downer, A.C.T.)* 14, no. 1 (2024): 28–52; “Political Solidarity and Violent Resistance,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* (Malden, USA) 38, no. 1 (2007): 38–52; “Political Solidarity and the More-Than-Human World,” *Ethics and the Environment* (Stamford, CT) 18, no. 2 (2013): 81–99; “Trust in Solidarity,” *Rivista Di Estetica* 82 (2023): 16–29.

³ Cheshire Calhoun, “The Virtue of Civility,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 29, no. 3 (2000): 251–75.

2.WEEK II

The second week of the 2026 RVP International Seminar comprised three meetings held on 24, 26, and 28 August, 2026. Moving from Cheshire Calhoun's normative account of civility, through Benet Davetian's cultural history, to Robert Bellah and his co-authors' diagnosis of American individualism, the week gradually shifted the question from how civility communicates moral regard to which historical cultures sustain it and, finally, to which moral languages and institutions connect a free *self* to the *common good*.

The discussions were consistently intercultural. Political and social reports from Ukraine, Poland, India, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, China, Indonesia, Italy, Peru, and the United States prevented *civility* from becoming an abstract synonym for good manners. Independence, war, gender-based violence, democratic fragility, corruption, education, religious pluralism, technological power, neurodivergence, and international law all tested whether the seminar's concepts could illuminate concrete experiences of freedom, domination, responsibility, and solidarity.

2.1 Session 4: Civility as Virtue

The session began with reports concerning independence and democratic life. Oleksandr presented Ukrainian independence as a multiethnic democratic choice and related it to the country's present struggle for sovereignty. Mohan and Ravi reflected on Indian independence through youth activism, educational reform, and Ambedkar's democratic legacy. Nubong described Cameroon's unresolved Anglophone crisis, while Isaac contrasted Zimbabwe's constitutional order with failures of implementation, corruption, nepotism, and weakened regional accountability.

A discussion of Nolan's movie on *The Odyssey* supplied a hermeneutic bridge to the seminar's themes. Lidia read Odysseus's return as an inquiry into war's continuing moral and psychological consequences; Franklin emphasized institutions, common rules, and hospitality as marks of civilization; and Yeping stressed the complexity of inner and outer journeys. João contrasted the Homeric return to origin with the Abrahamic departure toward an unknown future, presenting the self not as static identity but as transformation, responsibility, and openness to hope.

Calhoun's argument — Oleksandr reconstructed Calhoun's attempt to rescue civility from three reductions: etiquette or class distinction, mere conformity, and a redundant label for respect, tolerance, or considerateness. Calhoun's distinctive claim is that civility must **display** moral attitudes in socially intelligible ways. Shared conventions therefore function as a language through which persons publicly communicate that they recognize others as participants in a common moral world.

This communicative function distinguishes civility from inward moral disposition. A person may privately respect another yet fail to express it intelligibly; conversely, conventionally civil conduct may mask profound disrespect. Calhoun therefore recognizes a permanent gap between

civility and the virtues it displays, especially in morally imperfect societies where established codes embody racial, class, gender, or other forms of injustice.

Oleksandr compared this position with Hume, Habermas, Kant, Foucault, and Elias. Calhoun's reliance on convention resembles Hume's understanding of socially structured moral interaction and Habermas's concern for communication across disagreement. It contrasts with Kant's grounding of respect in universal rational principles and with Foucault's suspicion that norms operate as disciplines of power. Elias explains the historical formation of restraint; Calhoun asks how socially formed conventions can perform a moral function.

Norm, conscience, and truth — Michal's response exposed the central normative difficulty. If civility is measured by the successful communication of socially recognized attitudes, ethical obligation risks being displaced by communicative effectiveness. Socrates, Antigone, Thomas More, and Franz Jägerstätter were invoked as examples of conscience resisting accepted social norms. Their cases suggest that moral truth may require dissent from the very conventions through which a community ordinarily recognizes virtue.

The ensuing discussion distinguished *social-moral norms* from genuine *moral norms*. Convention is indispensable for shared meaning, but agreement does not establish truth. Tolerance likewise cannot mean unlimited relativism: it requires judgments about acceptable difference, injustice, and the point at which accommodation becomes complicity. Civility consequently needs standards by which its own conventions can be criticized.

Power, culture, and resistance — Adrienne criticized the absence of an adequate ontological and teleological foundation in Calhoun's approach. Extending Elias's treatment of the fork, she interpreted technology as *technē* that can become an autonomous system: the object first created to extend human agency eventually reorganizes life and makes its creators dependent upon it. The "fork" thus became a metaphor for technological civilization, unlimited production, environmental accumulation, and a Hegelian reversal in which humanity begins to serve what it has produced.

Lidia proposed that civility need not be treated primarily as an individual virtue. It may be better understood as an *ethical practice of coexistence* or a *social grammar of recognition* that enables morally imperfect persons to share a world despite disagreement about the good. Yeping reinforced the communicative dimension, while Xin asked whether civility is more appropriately classified as a political than a moral virtue.

Mohan, Nubong, Isaac, Franklin, and Maduabuchi pressed the analysis toward power and intercultural difference. Caste, colonialism, apartheid, patriarchy, and imposed democratic models demonstrate that conformity can reproduce domination. The marginalized may bear an unequal burden when they are expected to remain civil before hateful or unjust speech. At the same time, plural societies require some common language of respect; the challenge is to distinguish civility from submission and use critical reflection to reject oppressive customs without dissolving the possibility of dialogue.

Summing-Up Session 4 — The session did not settle whether civility is strictly a moral virtue. It produced a more differentiated conclusion, namely, that civility is a convention-dependent communicative practice with moral and political importance, but it is virtuous only when the respect it displays is answerable to justice. Its conventions are neither dispensable nor self-justifying; they make recognition possible while remaining open to criticism from conscience, equality, truth, and the experience of marginalized persons.

2.2 Session 5: Democratic Civility

Davetian's cultural framework — Franklin presented Davetian's account of civility⁴ as culturally encoded concern for the welfare of other persons and for a shared form of life. Small differences in table conduct—whether honoring a host requires finishing food or leaving some behind—show that no isolated behavior is universally civil. Davetian shares Elias's configurational approach but gives greater attention to the emotions connecting social organization and personal agency. The comparison among French, English, and American styles distinguished expressive, restrained, and informal forms of civility. American civility arose in explicit reaction to aristocratic Europe and emphasized equality, independence, mobility, association, directness, and relative informality. Conduct literature, political discourse, religious communities, schools, and voluntary associations transmitted this ethos beyond elites.

Yet the idea of a democratic civility contains unresolved tensions. Puritan discipline existed beside economic mobility; communal cooperation beside self-reliance; liberty beside the need for shared rules. Franklin described this as a form of “socialized individualism”: the citizen was expected to be independent but capable of cooperation, personal ambition, and mutual respect. He also identified exclusions in the cultural narrative. A history of American freedom that treats the continent as a new beginning can obscure Indigenous peoples, slavery, and the wider meanings of “America” throughout the hemisphere. The very language of democratic inclusion can therefore reproduce symbolic exclusion unless its historical frame is widened.

Late-modern transformation — Lidia interpreted Davetian's eighth chapter not as a simple story of decline but as a transformation of civility's foundations. Traditional civility grounded restraint in hierarchy, conformity, and stable roles. Democratic civility relocates its ground in equal dignity, rights, identity, recognition, reciprocity, and concern for well-being. One limits oneself not because the other has superior rank, but because the other counts as an equal person. Every liberation, however, generates a new problem. Freedom from hierarchy raises the question of legitimate restraint; freedom from fixed roles requires continual negotiation; emotional liberation can weaken attention to others; and rights detached from responsibility can turn relationships into defensive encounters. As inherited norms recede, individuals must increasingly interpret feelings, communicate needs, and negotiate boundaries for themselves.

The session distinguished emotional regulation from emotional denial. Civility properly requires recognition of anger followed by responsible choice about its expression; repression prevents the subject from acknowledging the feeling at all. The therapeutic and human-potential

⁴ Benet Davetian, *Civility: A Cultural History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

movements reacted against rigid conformity, but the imperative to “be yourself” was subsequently commercialized, turning authenticity into both a consumer product and another social demand.

Justified incivility — The discussion of twentieth-century protest produced a decisive paradox: behavior judged uncivil by an unjust order may help create a more civil society. Formal manners can coexist with slavery, racism, patriarchy, or authoritarianism; refusal of prescribed deference may then express deeper fidelity to equality and dignity. Greater self-control and polished conduct do not by themselves constitute moral civilization.

The distinction helped sharpen the relationship between civility and solidarity. Civility cannot mean preservation of every existing order, while solidarity cannot be reduced to emotional sympathy. Both require attention to the persons excluded by prevailing conventions and willingness to transform the conventions through which recognition is distributed.

Contemporary applications — The reports shared at the opening of the session helped once again to connect the theoretical debate with very specific and concrete issues such as gender-based violence in countries represented such as Cameroon and Italy. Participants questioned whether law can curb femicide without educational and cultural formation capable of teaching that the other person counts regardless of difference. Dian’s work on neurodivergence and architecture prompted a conclusion that was in perfect relation with the central question of the Session, specifically, how designing spaces for different modes of embodiment and perception constitutes not merely acts of courtesy but are rather modes of responding the demand for justice at the core of life in society.

The session also included discussions on democratic fragility, political polarization, corruption, consumer culture, media formation, multiculturalism, and, no less, American cultural influence around the world. Franklin argued that democratic institutions require citizen education, republican spirit, and shared values. Yeping emphasized the combined influence of corporate cooperation and consumerism, while Adrienne drew attention to the worldwide diffusion of American categories through media, clothing, music, and popular culture. Particularly noteworthy was the resistance offered to the simplism of oppositions such as the one between “the West” and the “rest”. Colonial domination and global cultural power requires criticism, but historical responsibility and internal diversity must also be acknowledged. Hence the importance of Nubong’s assuming Levinasian responsibility for the other as an alternative to instrumental reason or Maduabuchi questioning whether “late modernity” adequately captures a multicultural society continually trying to exceed inherited modern categories.

Summing-up Session 5 — The session concluded that *civility* remains necessary, but its moral basis has changed. A democratic society cannot rely on aristocratic deference; rather, it must cultivate restraint through equality, recognition, and reciprocity. The danger in civility is no longer to be simply seen in excessive conformity, but rather in the understanding of freedom as detached from obligation, that is, when authenticity becomes narcissism, rights are reduced to entitlement, and consumer choice takes over the place of the common good.

2.3 Session 6: Habits of the Heart

The final meeting of Week II opened with a sustained discussion of Ukraine and international law. Oleksandr described attacks on civilian infrastructure and the effects of inadequate defensive support; participants debated Russian propaganda, the historical complexity surrounding Stepan Bandera, Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation, the vulnerability of the Baltic region, and the responsibilities of other states. Lidia distinguished support for Ukrainian sovereignty from endorsement of nationalist ideologies and argued that unresolved historical crimes should be addressed through honest dialogue rather than weaponized against present solidarity.

The exchange widened to Palestine, Iran, Venezuela, and the misuse of power by dominant states. The central philosophical question was whether rights and international norms remain effective without institutions capable of defending them. Civility at the international level therefore appeared as more than diplomatic language: it requires truthful public judgment, legal accountability, resistance to aggression, and solidarity strong enough to bear political costs.

Bellah's central diagnosis — The presentations on *Habits of the Heart*⁵ interpreted American life through the classical question, “How should one live?” Maduabuchi introduced the central paradox: Americans value both independence and community, but their dominant moral vocabulary often makes the former easier to articulate than the latter. Persons are never formed in isolation; family, friendship, schooling, religion, work, and civic association constitute a moral and social ecology.

Lidia organized the cultural history of the American experience around the following four traditions: 1) *Biblical*, or the idea that freedom is nothing but the capacity to pursue the good and the just within a covenantal community; 2) *Republican*, or the idea that freedom is achieved through civic participation, political equality, public virtue, and concern for the common good; 3) *Utilitarian individualism*, that is, the idea that freedom amounts to the disciplined pursuit of achievement, efficiency, calculation, and material success; 4) *Expressive individualism*, here understood in terms of authenticity, self-realization, emotional fulfilment, and the freedom to construct one's own life.

The biblical and republican traditions supplied languages of duty and shared destiny; utilitarian and expressive individualism increasingly centered moral authority in the choosing self. Industrialization and professionalization deepened material interdependence while making it harder for individuals to perceive their lives as morally connected. Freedom became fragile when separated from institutions and narratives that explain responsibility to others.

Finding and choosing the self — Franklin described “finding oneself” as a process of detachment from inherited family and religious authority. Faith, occupation, and lifestyle remain meaningful, but their legitimacy is increasingly based on personal choice. Work ranges from job to career to calling, yet the idea of calling has often yielded to competitive identity and self-designed lifestyle enclaves. This produces a paradox of private value. If the self validates its

⁵ Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 1st Perennial Library ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1986).

own commitments, those commitments appear autonomous but lack a language explaining why they should bind the person through sacrifice, change, or conflict. Personal election becomes simultaneously powerful and fragile: the self chooses everything but may be unable to justify why any choice deserves permanence.

Dian extended this question through neurodivergence. If community forms the person but also excludes those whose perception or behavior differs from prevailing norms, adaptation cannot be demanded only from the individual. A civil community must itself become capable of transformation, accessibility, and recognition of diverse forms of participation.

Love, work, and commitment — Oleksandr presented Bellah’s contrast between evangelical and therapeutic models of marriage. The evangelical model stresses duty, sacrifice, will, and commitment beyond changing feelings; the therapeutic model emphasizes autonomy, self-knowledge, emotional needs, and personal development. Modern individualism makes intimate relationships freer and more egalitarian, yet it also makes enduring obligation difficult to justify when the relationship no longer fulfills the choosing self. He also cautioned against treating the two models as mutually exclusive. Indeed, freely assumed commitment may itself be part of autonomous fulfillment. Therefore, the deeper task is not to choose obligation against freedom, but to develop an account in which freedom can generate fidelity and fidelity can sustain rather than erase the self.

Mohan applied the same tension to work and civic service. Cases involving fundraising and ecological activism showed that community engagement can produce genuine joy and growth, but may compete with career advancement. Market society links success and happiness to earning capacity while obscuring the persons and communities excluded by competition.

Civic participation — Nubong examined voluntary association and local involvement. A. de Tocqueville’s insight was that participation initially motivated by self-interest can educate citizens toward public responsibility. Bellah’s “concerned citizens” demonstrate that civic action persists, but participants often explain it through personal satisfaction, development, or enlightened self-interest rather than a robust language of public duty.

The decline of mediating institutions—local associations, clubs, congregations, neighborhood organizations, and other face-to-face settings—weakens the practices through which citizens learn trust, cooperation, and responsibility. National procedures, administrative expertise, welfare policy, populist inclusion, markets, and economic democracy each offer partial visions of the common good, but none can simply replace lived civic formation.

Xin’s presentation on the national society showed the resulting ambivalence: strong emotional attachment to the nation exists beside suspicion of government and politics. Constitutional procedures are indispensable but insufficient. Institutions cannot manufacture virtue; they can only create or destroy the conditions in which civic character, participation, and public judgment develop.

Religion and moral language — Ravi traced the movement from publicly authoritative religion to individualized spirituality. “Sheilaism” symbolized the therapeutic privatization of faith, in which religion becomes a personal creation rather than a shared source of obligation. By

contrast, Martin Luther King Jr. exemplified a public religious language that joined biblical imagery with democratic ideals and addressed the nation as a moral community.

The group was concerned to distinguished religious liberty from irreligion. Adrienne emphasized that rejection of state-imposed religion was compatible with diverse and serious spirituality. Mohan argued for recovering the ethical content of biblical traditions—compassion, mercy, and neighborliness—rather than merely increasing institutional observance. Yeping summarized Bellah’s diagnosis as a conflict between two languages. The “first language” of preference, self-interest, and personal reward dominates modern life; the “second language” of tradition, community, sharing, and public obligation has become difficult to speak. The problem is thus not simply selfish behavior but a poverty of moral vocabulary through which communal commitments could be understood and defended.

Critiques and reconstruction — Adrienne questioned whether Bellah’s representative figures adequately capture the racial, Indigenous, immigrant, gendered, and industrial complexity of American history. An account centered too narrowly on selected white male experiences risks overlooking enslaved labor, Indigenous dispossession, Asian labor, and the industrial actors who reshaped capitalism.

Maduabuchi nevertheless identified a constructive program in Bellah: rebuild social connections, recognize cultural and individual differences, expand meaningful democratic participation, cultivate institutions of trust, pursue economic and social justice, retrieve tradition without becoming imprisoned by it, and renew the idea of the common good. Consumerism, self-centered freedom, and the “poverty of affluence” obstruct this reconstruction by weakening relationship, citizenship, and spirituality.

Summing-Up Session 6 — The conclusion of this Session of the Seminar was that American society’s problem is not individuality as such, but individuality deprived of adequate moral, civic, and relational connections. The self is collectively formed even when it experiences itself as self-made. João expressed the required balance through the image of a “Statue of Responsibility” answering the Statue of Liberty: freedom approaches its democratic promise only when liberty and responsibility remain in conversation.

Integrated Findings of Week II

The self — Across the three sessions of Week II, the self emerged as communicative, historical, culturally formed, and institutionally dependent. Calhoun showed that moral attitudes require public expression; Davetian showed that the forms of expression change with social structures and emotional cultures; Bellah showed that apparently autonomous selves depend on inherited traditions, intimate bonds, workplaces, associations, and civic institutions. Autonomy is therefore not isolation but the reflective appropriation of relations that make agency possible.

Late modernity has expanded choice, authenticity, rights, and emotional freedom, but also transfers the burden of regulation from stable roles to individual negotiation. The result can be maturity and recognition, or anxiety, narcissism, consumer identity, and unstable commitment.

A viable account of selfhood must protect interior freedom while explaining why persons remain responsible to relationships and institutions they did not create alone.

Solidarity — Solidarity appeared in multiple forms during the week: support for national self-determination, defense of marginalized groups, civic participation, association, hospitality, public religious language, inclusive design, and responsibility toward future generations. Naturally, all those things require more than affinity; they demand persons capable of hearing experiences outside their own social location and to accept obligations that cannot always be translated into immediate self-interest.

The week also revealed solidarity's risks. National memory can be selectively mobilized, communities can exclude neurodivergent or minority members, and calls for civility can silence protest. Critical solidarity must therefore combine loyalty with truth, historical reckoning, justice, and openness to transformation.

Civility — Civility is neither etiquette alone nor an infallible sign of virtue. It is a culturally mediated way of making recognition public, regulating conflict, and sustaining coexistence among persons who disagree. Because its grammar comes from social conventions, it can facilitate mutual regard but also encode hierarchy and domination.

Democratic civility changes the justification of restraint. It replaces deference to superior rank with recognition of equal dignity, rights, identity, and well-being. Yet equality requires forms: without shared expectations, communication and trust become unpredictable; without criticism, shared expectations can preserve injustice. The proper task is therefore neither obedience to convention nor abolition of convention, but continual democratic evaluation of whether conventions serve recognition and justice.

Freedom and responsibility — It must be added that freedom was, perhaps, a governing tension to the entire proceedings of Week II. Independence from domination is indispensable, but freedom understood only as absence of obligation cannot sustain intimacy, democratic institutions, or the common good. The discussions repeatedly moved toward a relational conception: freedom is exercised through commitments, associations, truthful communication, and responsibility for the conditions enabling others to be free.

Questions to be carried forward — From the multiple and varied discussions had during the week, the following seven questions emerged: 1) What criterion distinguishes genuinely moral civility from successful conformity to an unjust norm? 2) When does uncivil protest become a legitimate or necessary service to a more civil order? 3) How can democratic societies stabilize shared expectations without suppressing authenticity, cultural difference, or dissent? 4) Which institutions can restore a language of common good amid consumerism, privatized religion, weakened associations, and political polarization? 5) How should communities change when their norms exclude neurodivergent persons or other minorities? 6) Can international law remain credible without effective solidarity and institutional power to resist aggression? 7) How can freedom generate durable obligation without returning to oppressive hierarchy?

Transition to Week Three — The progression from Elias through Calhoun, Davetian, and Bellah prepared the seminar to examine the institutional space in which private persons become a *public*. The next session was assigned to Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.⁶ Shiva was to introduce the historical genesis of the bourgeois public sphere; Nubong its institutions of rational-critical debate; and Xin the relationship among family, intimacy, literature, and political subjectivity.

This transition follows directly from Week Two's unresolved problem, namely, that if indeed *civility* constitutes a communicative practice, democratic *recognition* a transformed cultural norm, and the *common good* fundamentally dependent on civic association, then the decisive question becomes something like the following: *what institutions, media, and social conditions can better enable free persons to reason together as a public without reproducing exclusions of class, gender, property, race, or status?*

⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

3. WEEK III

Week Three of the Seminar comprised Sessions 7, 8, and 9, held respectively on 31 August, 2 and 4 September. The three meetings formed a coherent study of Jürgen Habermas's understanding of what he called the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*: Session 7 reconstructed the historical genesis and institutions of the bourgeois public sphere; Session 8 examined its political functions, normative justification, and contradictions; Session 9 recovered a critical concept of public opinion and assessed Habermas's later response to digitalization, platform capitalism, and democratic fragility.

The central question for Week III was to research how private persons become a public capable of holding power accountable. Guided by Habermas, the seminar treated the public sphere neither as a physical location nor as the mere aggregate of individual opinions, but as a historically produced network of institutions and communicative practices through which citizens exchange reasons, test claims, form judgments, and influence political action. Its promise lies in rational-critical publicity; its recurrent dangers are exclusion, inequality, media capture, state manipulation, commercialization, fragmentation, and the loss of reciprocal communication.

3.1 Session 7: Public Formation

The session began with an yet another intercultural roundtable connecting public reason to present crises. Participants discussed a catastrophic flood reported in Nepal, land fires and political-religious tensions in Indonesia, femicide and electoral rhetoric in Cameroon, Iceland's relationship with the European Union, political transition in Peru, and Sri Lanka's shared Sinhalese-Tamil New Year. These interventions framed the public sphere as the arena in which ecological vulnerability, scientific explanation, spiritual meaning, electoral language, national self-determination, and governmental accountability are contested.

Mohan interpreted the Nepal disaster through global ecological inequality, while Adrienne proposed a sacred and relational conception of nature rather than a purely instrumental causal model. Maduabuchi called for “epistemic solidarity” capable of connecting scientific explanation, cultural interpretation, and shared responsibility. Nubong's emerging concept of a “War of Conscience” described personhood's ethical resistance to impersonal systems that normalize dehumanization.

That some of the participants, namely the ones present physically in Washington, followed an invitation by a member of a previous edition of the Seminar and attended a Mawlid al-Nabi celebration in Virginia was shared with all in terms of a more immediate experience of intercultural hospitality. Mark, Xin, and Lidia emphasized ritual, music, historical depth, and welcome, while Dian (out of Indonesia) took the opportunity to clarify variations in Muslim observance. The exchange exemplified a public sphere grounded not only in argument but also in encounter, narration, and the reception of unfamiliar traditions.

First reception of Habermas — Participants generally found Habermas's 1962 study intellectually powerful, particularly its combination of philosophy, sociology, history, political

economy, law, architecture, literature, and media analysis. Franklin immediately identified the contemporary “war of the public sphere” produced by streaming, social media, YouTube, and information overload. Dian asked whether publicity is genuinely equitable, while Michal raised questions concerning metaphysics, ideal speech, secular reason, and Habermas’s later philosophical development.

A South Asian critique questioned whether the text describes genuine structural transformation or a sequence of European historical transitions. Mohan and Ravi argued that the public/private distinction remains unstable in caste societies where Dalits and lower-caste persons can still be excluded from temples, exhibitions, hotels, and other nominally public spaces. Accordingly, Habermas’s bourgeois subject should not be universalized without attending to caste, colonialism, religious hierarchy, and regionally specific mechanisms of exclusion.

Historical genesis — Shiva introduced Habermas’s interdisciplinary reconstruction of *publicness*. In the Greek model, the *polis* was the sphere of free citizens’ speech and action, while the *oikos* concerned household and economic necessity. Medieval “representative publicness” did not involve citizens deliberating about authority; rulers displayed status and power ceremonially before a largely spectatorial people.

The modern bourgeois public sphere arose when educated, property-owning private persons assembled to discuss matters of common concern and criticize state authority. Rational-critical discourse replaced, at least normatively, the display of rank. Habermas also recognized plebeian or counter-public formations through which workers and subordinate groups developed alternative spaces of articulation.

Institutions of publicity — Nubong examined the institutions that made a critically reasoning public possible. English coffeehouses, French salons, and German table societies and lodges linked private life with political authority. Although differing in membership and style, they cultivated three defining aspirations: temporary disregard for status, criticism of previously unquestioned authorities, and expansion of access through the circulation of cultural commodities.

The town displaced the court as the center of civil society. Newspapers, journals, correspondence, moral weeklies, art criticism, reading societies, theatres, museums, and concerts turned culture into an object of discussion. Material institutions and normative expectations were inseparable: communication required places, media, literacy, and economic access, while those structures gained public significance only insofar as participants could question claims and answer one another.

The seminar emphasized the gap between openness in principle and exclusion in practice. Women were largely absent from English coffeehouses, salons depended on elite social networks, and literacy, leisure, property, and education restricted participation. The historical public sphere was therefore emancipatory and exclusionary at once.

Family and subjectivity — Xin traced the relation among domestic architecture, intimate family life, literature, and political subjectivity. The aristocratic open household organized

continuity around title, lineage, and representation; the bourgeois conjugal family presented itself as an enclosed community of affection, voluntary attachment, and interior cultivation. Architectural changes—from the great hall to specialized rooms, living spaces, and salons—materialized the new differentiation of authority, intimacy, and reception.

This family ideal contained a contradiction. It imagined itself as a sanctuary from economic coercion while depending materially on the husband's success in the capitalist market and preserving patriarchal authority. Yet Habermas did not treat intimacy as mere illusion: letters, diaries, epistolary novels, subscription libraries, and reading circles fostered real practices of interiority, emotional disclosure, and audience-oriented self-reflection.

The literary public sphere trained private persons for political criticism. Readers learned to judge, respond, imagine other perspectives, and submit personal experience to a public. Yet the bourgeois model rested on the fictitious identity of the property owner pursuing private interest and the universal human being exercising public reason. Women, servants, workers, and the unpropertied were excluded from political citizenship despite their active participation in literary culture.

Summing-Up Session 7 — Session 7 established that the public sphere is historically produced rather than naturally given. It requires institutions, spaces, media, literacy, economic conditions, and communicative norms. Its normative contribution is the claim that authority must justify itself before reasoning citizens; its constitutive weakness is that the citizens initially authorized to reason were defined through classed, gendered, propertied, and European assumptions.

3.2 Session 8: Public Legitimacy

The session opened with reports from Xin and Lidia's visit to New York and with evaluation of the RVP website. Their encounters with museums, religious architecture, Chinese collections, the Statue of Liberty, the US Open, and urban density connected cultural institutions with public memory and identity. Participants then assessed the website's visual quality, loading speed, archival accessibility, incomplete content, and usability under weaker network conditions.

Adrienne proposed a gallery through which remote participants could share images of their cities, institutions, and local environments. This practical discussion reproduced Habermas's central question at the seminar's own scale: how can a communicative infrastructure remain inclusive, navigable, reciprocal, and attentive to users with unequal technical conditions?

Political functions — Mohan presented the public sphere as a mediating space between private life and state power. Citizens unable to enter executive, judicial, or legislative institutions directly can nevertheless articulate concerns, exchange reasons, form opinion, organize pressure, and require rulers to justify decisions. Public opinion in its normative sense does not merely report preferences; it makes authority accountable.

In Britain, struggles involving censorship, parliament, petitions, parties, organized opposition, private law, markets, and the press helped institutionalize political publicity. Yet constitutional recognition also enabled bourgeois actors to control the sphere through property, media,

and formal structures. The institutions created to constrain power could themselves be captured by economic and political power.

Mohan linked early mercantile capitalism to colonialism and compared European coffeehouses with stratified Indian spaces: coffeehouses often served intellectual and dominant-caste publics, while tea stalls provided more popular or subaltern arenas. In the contemporary media environment, a small number of corporate actors and technology owners can control the channels through which public communication occurs.

The ensuing debate concerned who can become an agent of transformation. Mohan questioned whether the middle class, oriented toward capitalist advancement, can act as a genuine vanguard; Ravi cited bourgeois reformers capable of changing oppressive practices; Adrienne pointed to grassroots civil-rights and suffrage movements. The discussion suggested that transformative agency cannot be assigned automatically to one class: it depends on organization, moral purpose, access, and the capacity to connect local experience with broader publics.

Opinion and publicity — Ravi reconstructed the transformation of opinion from uncertain belief or private judgment into a public norm of legitimacy. Bayle’s republic of letters subjected dogma to criticism; Locke distinguished social reputation from divine and civil law; the Physiocrats combined appeals to enlightened opinion with authoritarian assumptions; Rousseau’s general will offered a radical but problematic alternative to bourgeois mediation.

Kant supplied the decisive normative principle. Enlightenment requires the public use of one’s own reason, and publicity connects politics with morality by exposing laws and political actions to criticism. Legitimate public opinion is therefore not whatever a majority happens to believe. Its authority depends on how judgments are formed—whether participants can access information, exchange reasons, challenge claims, revise positions, and connect discussion with law.

Lidia stressed that Kant transformed opinion from a social fact into a criterion of legitimacy. Yet the model remained socially restricted: women, workers, and persons without property were excluded. Habermas inherited both its universal aspiration and its historical limits.

Liberal contradictions — Maduabuchi distinguished Habermas’s normative idea of the public sphere from the historically specific bourgeois public sphere. The latter emerged with capitalism, print culture, commercial society, and civil society, proclaiming universal reason while restricting effective participation through property, education, class, gender, and status.

The discussion drew on Hegel, Marx, Mill, and Tocqueville to expose structural contradictions: Freedom coexisted with social exclusion; Legal equality coexisted with material inequality; Public reason coexisted with ideological manipulation; Political participation coexisted with unequal access to communication; Independent civil society coexisted with economic domination; Expansion of democracy created risks of conformity and majority tyranny; Universal citizenship concealed bourgeois class interests.

Marx supplied the material critique: formal emancipation cannot compensate for relations that prevent effective participation. Mill and Tocqueville revealed the ambivalence of expanded

public opinion, which can democratize power while generating conformity. Under mass communication, the debating citizen is increasingly replaced by the consumer of messages.

Maduabuchi argued that Habermas remained committed to modernity as an unfinished project rather than abandoning it. The seminar further questioned whether this project sufficiently addresses colonialism, non-Western cultures, alterity, and forms of subjectivity excluded by Enlightenment accounts of the autonomous ego.

Accountability and shrinking space — João interpreted *Öffentlichkeit* as critical accountability rather than spectacle or mere visibility. Publicity means that power must expose itself to questioning. Because the public sphere is historically produced through states, markets, media, and cultural institutions, it can be degraded, captured, or abolished; fascism and Stalinism exemplified the destruction of public reasoning through violence, propaganda, and control.

Mohan asked whether the subaltern can speak amid restrictions on protest and expression in contemporary democracies. Nubong applied Habermas to authoritarian African contexts, where communication is often subordinated to political power. The group therefore treated the shrinking of public space as a global problem rather than a feature only of formally authoritarian regimes.

Summing-Up Session 8 — The Session established that public opinion has normative force only when formed through accessible, reciprocal, and critical communication. Neither voting, polling, mass reach, nor institutional endorsement is sufficient. Publicity is democratic when citizens can question authority and receive an answer; it becomes manipulative when concentrated powers manage appearances, determine agendas, or reduce citizens to audiences.

3.3 Session 9: Digital Publicity⁷

The final session of Week III began with reports concerning attacks on Ukrainian publishing and educational infrastructure, deaths associated with oil theft and economic desperation in Nigeria, political instability in the United Kingdom, educational digitalization in Cameroon, climatic and infrastructural concerns in Indonesia, and geopolitical tensions among the United States, Russia, China, and India. These reports again connected communicative order to material conditions: books, schools, energy governance, elections, media, international commitments, and civic education shape who can know, speak, learn, and hold institutions accountable.

Oleksandr described strikes on Ukrainian printing houses, warehouses, and bookstores as attacks on cultural identity and learning. Maduabuchi connected the Nigerian tragedy to failed governance, poverty, and disregard for law. Nubong emphasized that educational digitalization without infrastructure, trained personnel, and civic formation cannot by itself strengthen citizenship.

⁷ For this session, participants also read Jürgen Habermas, “Interview with Jürgen Habermas,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy*, ed. André Bächtiger et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 871–82; and Habermas, “Reflections and Hypotheses on a Further Structural Transformation of the Political Public Sphere,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 39, no. 4 (2022): 145–71.

Recovering public opinion — Lidia addressed whether a meaningful concept of public opinion can survive the transformation described in Habermas’s 1962 book. Her qualified answer was affirmative, provided public opinion is not imagined as a single collective voice or as the restoration of an eighteenth-century institution. Publicness should instead be treated as a graded, comparative standard for evaluating communication. An opinion becomes more genuinely public whenever the following criteria are present: 1) Access to participation widens; 2) Speaking, answering, criticism, and revision become more reciprocal; 3) Communication gains autonomy from concentrated political and economic power; 4) Information can circulate between everyday experience, organizations, and institutions; 5) Criticism can influence collective decisions and action.

The welfare state revealed the limits of formally *negative liberty*. Rights to property, association, speech, and press cannot secure effective autonomy when economic concentration and media power prevent meaningful participation. Education, social security, and communicative access become conditions of citizenship rather than optional benefits.

Habermas’s concept of “refeudalization” describes a reversal of accountability. Powerful organizations negotiate privately and then present their decisions through managed publicity to obtain approval. The public sphere divides between manipulative publicity, which manufactures plebiscitary support, and critical publicity, which opens institutions to transparency, internal democratization, response, and citizen influence.

Polls cannot by themselves constitute public opinion. Aggregated private answers show distribution of preferences but not whether positions were publicly tested. Drawing on the distinction between a public and a mass, the seminar emphasized that in a public many can speak and answer, whereas in a mass few communicate and many receive with little effective possibility of response.

Counter-publics and plurality — Lidia identified exclusion as structural rather than accidental. Property, education, status, gender, and colonial power shaped who could participate in the original bourgeois sphere. Working-class, feminist, anti-colonial, and other counter-publics may deepen democracy by making excluded experiences audible.

Plurality nonetheless creates a further problem: separate publics must preserve difference while retaining channels of translation, contestation, and common action. If counter-publics become entirely closed worlds, fragmentation replaces democratization. Publicness therefore depends both on protected spaces for marginalized voices and on communication across boundaries.

Habermas’s renewed position — Dian presented Habermas’s later reconsideration of democracy and legitimacy. His renewed theory rejects a rigid division between empirical description and abstract norms: democratic institutions contain “unsaturated” normative promises that existing reality never fully exhausts. Protest becomes legitimate when citizens expose contradictions between constitutional ideals and actual conditions.

The public sphere does not make legally binding decisions. It forms opinions and political wills that enter elections, legislation, administration, and adjudication; institutional decisions

then return to public scrutiny. Democratic legitimacy requires citizens to recognize themselves as participants in this recursive process of collective self-legislation.

Pluralism increases rather than eliminates the need for deliberation. Disagreement can be productive when parties share procedures of inclusion, reason-giving, criticism, and peaceful decision. Yet formal access is insufficient: citizens need education, time, information, security, recognition, and communicative resources if participation is to be substantively equal.

Dian also emphasized the tension between capitalism and democracy. Economic systems seek profitability and growth, while democratic governments must protect justice, social autonomy, and legitimacy. Globalization, financialization, and inequality can narrow governments' capacity to respond, causing citizens to experience democracy as formally open but practically powerless.

Platform capitalism — Franklin presented digitalization as a communicative revolution comparable in scale to writing and print. Traditional mass media operated largely through one-directional broadcasting; digital platforms allow users to produce, comment, answer, and circulate content across temporal and spatial boundaries. This can transform passive audiences into active participants.

The same architecture creates fragmentation, echo chambers, disinformation, and chaotic information environments. Platform business models compete for attention and optimize engagement rather than the quality of discourse. Algorithms are not neutral: they pursue goals defined by owners, advertisers, data extraction, and retention strategies.

Digital platforms also weaken professional journalism by circulating truth-sensitive information without stable editorial practices of verification, contextualization, and correction. Shared public reality fragments into semi-public environments whose members encounter reinforcement more readily than challenge. Some online counter-publics widen participation, while others become ideological fortresses.

Franklin identified a national limitation in Habermas's framework. Financial crises, pandemics, climate change, platform governance, and geopolitical conflict cross borders, while public opinion and political accountability remain largely organized within states. Persons affected in the Global South may have no voice in the institutions or publics where consequential decisions are made. A transnational public sphere is therefore necessary but institutionally underdeveloped.

AI, literacy, and regulation — The discussion extended Habermas's argument to artificial intelligence. Oleksandr and Franklin suggested that AI intensifies digital multiplication, ownership bias, and the production of false or decontextualized content. Xin asked how democratic pluralism can survive when different systems embed different value orientations, while Dian asked which communicative styles count as legitimate when neurodivergent participants engage differently from neurotypical expectations.

Ravi emphasized media illiteracy, sensationalism, doctored images, synthetic content, paid news, trolling, and unverified messaging as threats to deliberation. Michal invoked anew "techno-feudalism" to describe platforms that function less like competitive market actors than

owners of communicative territory charging rent for access. Nubong distilled four practical needs: stronger deliberative institutions, transparent and accountable digital-media rules, civic education, and limits on capital's control of communication.

João distinguished technological development from communicational formation. Expanding computational capacity without forming citizens in interpretation, patience, complexity, and political judgment magnifies manipulation and alienation. Regulation can constrain platform power, but no regulatory system substitutes for education capable of producing critical selves.

Summing-Up Session 9 — In the final session of Week III, the Seminar concluded that digitalization has not abolished the public sphere; rather, it has transformed its infrastructure and redistributed its powers. Democratic potential has expanded because more persons can publish and respond, but concentrated ownership, algorithmic selection, commercial incentives, weakened journalism, unequal resources, and fragmented realities threaten the conditions of common judgment. The decisive task is to design institutions in which digital participation becomes answerable, inclusive, truth-sensitive, and connected to effective political action.

Integrated Findings of Week III

Self — Week III clearly deepened the seminar's relational conception of selfhood. The bourgeois intimate sphere formed persons capable of interior reflection, letter writing, literary judgment, and public criticism. Contemporary digital media likewise form habits of attention, expression, identity, and reaction. The self that enters public debate is never pre-political; it has already been shaped by family, architecture, education, literature, class, media, algorithms, religion, and cultural memory.

Critical autonomy therefore requires more than freedom from censorship. It requires formation in reading, listening, evidence, historical consciousness, self-correction, and the ability to encounter unfamiliar viewpoints. Neurodivergent participation further shows that communicative rationality must not identify one style of speech, tempo, embodiment, or interaction with reason itself.

Solidarity — The proceedings of the third week were particularly helpful in the communicational understanding of *solidarity*, that is, in the process of framing it as a communicative achievement linking experiences that would otherwise remain merely private or completely invisible. Ecological disasters, caste exclusion, femicide, cultural destruction, economic desperation, colonial histories, and digital marginalization become public concerns only when affected persons can narrate them and others accept responsibility to listen and respond.

Epistemic solidarity is especially important. It does not require uniform belief, but shared commitment to truth-seeking, correction, contextual understanding, and protection of communicative conditions. Without it, publics divide into mutually inaccessible realities and solidarity becomes vulnerable to propaganda and manipulation.

Civility — Civility acquired a distinctly political meaning during this week as well. Definitely, it is not simply politeness within discussion, but participation in a structure of reciprocal accountability. Civil communication allows persons to speak, answer, challenge, revise, and remain recognized as members of a common world despite disagreement.

In such understanding, therefore, civility appears incompatible with both enforced silence and unanswerable power. It also differs from passive tolerance at least inasmuch as rulers, corporations, media owners, and institutions must provide reasons and remain open to criticism. A public sphere is civil insofar as it distributes communicative agency and refuses to reduce citizens to the condition of mere spectators, consumers, data profiles, or targets for marketing.

Publicity and power — Put together, the three sessions of Week III traced a recurrent historical movement: 1) *Representation*: rulers display power before spectators; 2) *Criticism*: private persons assemble and require power to justify itself; 3) *Institutionalization*: rights, parliaments, parties, and media formalize public influence; 4) *Capture*: states, organized interests, and commercial media manage publicity; 5) *Digitalization*: platforms expand expression while reorganizing visibility through ownership, development of algorithms, and markets for attention; 6) *Reconstruction*: democratic theory seeks communicative criteria capable of evaluating unequal and fragmented publics.

The public sphere is therefore neither a lost golden age nor an automatically progressive system. It is a fragile field of struggle over who may speak, whose experience becomes visible, how claims are tested, and whether criticism can affect institutions.

Inclusion and universality — Habermas's model was found to contain a universalizable principle—authority should justify itself before those subject to it—but no historical embodiment has yet fully realized that principle. The bourgeois sphere excluded women, workers, servants, the unpropertied, colonized peoples, and many racial, caste, and religious groups. Digital access has not eliminated exclusion; it has added disparities of infrastructure, literacy, visibility, platform governance, and algorithmic recognition. Therefore, a global public sphere must combine universal accountability with plural institutional forms. Coffeehouses, salons, tea stalls, religious communities, associations, counter-publics, websites, classrooms, and digital networks can all contribute, provided their boundaries and hierarchies remain open to criticism.

Unresolved questions left open at the end of Week III: 1) Who counts as “the public,” and how can the term avoid appropriation by governments, bureaucracies, corporations, media, or self-appointed elites? 2) How can counter-publics protect marginalized voices without becoming isolated echo chambers? 3) What material conditions—education, income, time, connectivity, security, accessibility—are necessary for equal communicative participation? 4) Can rational-critical publicity be reformulated across caste, colonial, religious, and non-Western social structures without imposing a European bourgeois model? 5) How should journalistic judgment, freedom of expression, platform regulation, and algorithmic transparency be balanced? 6) What institutions could support transnational publics capable of addressing global problems that exceed national democratic systems? 7) How should artificial intelligence be governed when it

mediates knowledge, visibility, and value-laden communication? 8) Can communicative rationality recognize neurodivergent styles of participation without forcing conformity to a single model of the rational speaker? 9) How can criticism influence binding decisions rather than remaining symbolic expression?

Transition to Week Four — Week Three concluded the seminar’s concentrated engagement with Habermas and prepared the transition to Hartmut Rosa’s *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*.⁸ Nubong was assigned the introduction and the second part, Mohan the first part, and Xin the third part. The transition follows logically from the analysis of digital publicity. Habermas asks under what communicative conditions citizens can form legitimate public judgment; Rosa asks how the accelerating temporal structures of modernity affect institutions, identities, relationships, and possibilities of meaningful action. The next stage would therefore examine whether a public sphere can remain reflective and civil when technological change, social transformation, and the pace of life continually outstrip the time required for attention, deliberation, commitment, and democratic response.

⁸Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

4. WEEK IV

Week Four of the Seminar comprised Sessions 10, 11, and 12, held respectively on 7, 9, and 11 September, 2026. The week moved through two major philosophical frameworks. Sessions 10 and 11 examined Hartmut Rosa's diagnosis of social acceleration and his constructive concept of resonance; Session 12 began the seminar's engagement with Sungmoon Kim's reconstruction of Mencian and Xunzian virtue politics.⁹ Throughout, theoretical discussion was tested against religious discrimination, poverty, war, democratic instability, institutional mistrust, education, technology, intercultural experience, and the memory of September 11.

The week's central problem was identified in the relationship between personal formation and institutional order. Rosa lead us into asking how accelerated modern societies unsettle identity, corrode durable solidarity, and make politics reactive rather than self-directing. On his part, Kim asks how moral cultivation, ritual, public welfare, and constitutional structures can enable legitimate rule while restraining arbitrary power. Read together, the two frameworks yielded a common insight: neither virtuous persons without adequate institutions nor efficient institutions without ethically formed persons are sufficient for a civil political order.

4.1 Session 10: Acceleration

The session opened with reflection on a shared day in Washington that combined remembrance, worship, fellowship, and music. Participants attended Mass at the Franciscan Monastery in memory of George F. McLean on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of his Passing (September 6, 2016), shared a communal meal, and later attended a National Symphony Orchestra concert (also in anticipation of the celebrations of Labour Day in the USA). The experience was interpreted as an immersion in American spiritual, historical, and cultural life and as a concrete instance of community formed through shared time rather than hurried consumption.

The irony was not lost on the seminar: participants studying social acceleration were themselves under pressure to read, present, and meet an intensive schedule. This reflexive recognition gave Rosa's theory an experiential dimension. Acceleration was not only an external social object but also a structure affecting scholarly work, attention, leisure, and the seminar's own temporal organization.

Country reports situated the theory amid unequal global realities. Participants discussed Nigeria's debt, industrial weakness, and poverty; volcanic activity in Indonesia; religious-freedom concerns and anti-conversion laws in India; educational unemployment and administrative fragmentation in Cameroon; justice and peace in Ukraine; anti-corruption initiatives in Sri Lanka; resource-driven geopolitics concerning Venezuela; and the perceived incapacity of the United Nations to resolve major crises. These reports showed that acceleration

⁹ Sungmoon Kim, *Theorizing Confucian Virtue Politics: The Political Philosophy of Mencius and Xunzi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

is uneven: some societies experience hyper-connected competition and institutional speed, while others face infrastructural stagnation, exclusion, or state incapacity.

Rosa's diagnosis — Nubong presented Rosa's central paradox: modernity promises liberation from inherited constraints and material scarcity, yet produces restlessness, instability, and the persistent experience of having too little time. Acceleration is not simply a personal preference for speed. Individuals and institutions are compelled to accelerate in order to preserve their position; standing still means falling behind.

Three interdependent processes constitute this regime: 1) *Technological acceleration*, that is, faster communication, transportation, production, and circulation; 2) *Acceleration of social change*, i.e., more rapid transformation of institutions, practices, values, relationships, and knowledge. 3) *Acceleration of the pace of life*, that is, a constant intensification of action and experience within shrinking periods of time, accompanied by subjective and multiple pressures put on time. The idea is that such processes reinforce one another. Technologies intended to save time increase the number of possible and expected activities; accelerated change shortens the period during which knowledge and commitments remain dependable; individuals respond by increasing their pace, thereby generating demand for further technological and institutional acceleration. The result is a circular system rather than a sequence of isolated innovations.

Rosa's temporal analysis was put in connection with Reinhart Koselleck's distinction between the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation." This means that when change becomes rapid, inherited experience loses its power to guide future action, and expectations become unstable. The *present* contracts inasmuch as knowledge, skills, institutions, and relationships remain reliable for ever more shorter periods.

Modernity and inequality — Mohan placed Rosa within the Frankfurt School tradition of critical theory: diagnostic, normative, interdisciplinary, and empirically attentive. Acceleration was related to industrialization, capitalism's continual transformation of production, globalization, the disappearance of traditional crafts, class formation, and the compression of time and space.

The discussion resisted the idea that there is homogeneous account of modernity. Class and caste intersect; mobility and speed are distributed unequally; and many persons remain outside the technological and economic circuits usually taken to define late modernity. Dalit, African, working-class, and other historically marginalized experiences must therefore enter the phenomenology and sociology of time rather than appear as secondary examples.

This intercultural critique distinguished at least three temporal conditions: 1) Hyper-accelerated groups compelled to update skills, roles, and identities continually. 2) Precarious groups exposed to market and administrative acceleration without enjoying its benefits. 3) Excluded groups living amid institutional delay, inadequate infrastructure, unemployment, and restricted mobility.

Acceleration and stagnation are thus not opposites. They can coexist within the same society: capital, information, and elite actors move rapidly, while marginalized citizens wait for employment, education, justice, social services, or recognition.

Lived time and selfhood — Participants explored the difference between measured time and lived time. Lidia summarized the paradox as possessing watches without possessing time. Time is not merely an objective container; technologies, work regimes, expectations, communication systems, and social obligations shape its meaning and experience.

Franklin contrasted informational accumulation with Ignatian “savoring”: knowing more and moving faster do not necessarily deepen understanding. Michal’s historical example of an individual who assumed a new identity after the Second World War illustrated a “double self” capable of adapting biography to changing ideological circumstances without moral integration. The case raised the question whether accelerated identity is genuinely transformed or merely reconstructed for survival and advancement.

Maduabuchi placed Rosa in dialogue with Heraclitean flux, Hume’s succession of perceptions, African recursive conceptions of time, and classical accounts of human flourishing. He distinguished mechanical, linear time from temporalities organized through memory, ancestry, communal continuity, spiritual meaning, and the interdependence of past, present, and future. This raised a central methodological issue: does Rosa diagnose modernity as such, or primarily a Western, capitalist experience of modernity?

Transformation versus speed — João drew the session toward an ontological distinction. Social acceleration describes changes in the frequency and velocity of events, but it does not establish that persons have become wiser, freer, more responsible, or more fully themselves. Speed is not equivalent to transformation; technical and social change can coexist with moral or spiritual stagnation. Therefore, we can say that the question “Who am I?” precedes the question “How fast is society changing?” The decisive measure of time is not simply the number of events or innovations but the quality of personal and communal transformation they make possible. Without an account of human ends, acceleration risks becoming movement without direction.

Summing-Up Session 10 — Session 10 established acceleration as a structural principle of modernity rather than an individual lifestyle choice. Its critical significance lies in showing how a society may become faster while losing the temporal stability needed for coherent identity, durable institutions, meaningful relationships, contemplation, and democratic deliberation. The session also insisted that Rosa’s analysis be pluralized through non-Western temporalities and the experiences of those who undergo exclusion, delay, or forced immobility.

4.2 Session 11: Resonance

Session 11 opened with a brief guest presentation by Dr. Rubina Bhatti on the position of Christian minorities in Pakistan. Her account connected religious discrimination with poverty, gender, bonded labor, stigmatized sanitation work, educational exclusion, legal vulnerability, and weak political representation. Formal quotas and scholarships can remain ineffective when the intended beneficiaries lack the material and educational prerequisites needed to use them.

The key analytical point was that recognition cannot be separated from economic structure. Political voice and social acceptance require access to education, dignified work, safety, mobility, and institutional representation. Bhatti therefore proposed moving beyond narratives

that present minorities only as victims and developing research and economic initiatives that recognize them as agents, professionals, leaders, and contributors to national development.

Comparisons with Nigeria and India showed different configurations of religious power. Numerical majority or minority status alone does not determine vulnerability; regional concentration, constitutional arrangements, state ideology, security institutions, economic position, and control of political authority are equally decisive. Participants diagnosed a wider South Asian danger in which formally democratic states may become increasingly majoritarian or theocratic.

Accelerated politics — Reports on European populism, political propaganda in the United States, fiscal surveillance, university strikes in Cameroon, the war in Ukraine, and institutional mistrust supplied the political background to Rosa’s analysis. Rapid media cycles, fear, taxation, digital identification, geopolitical insecurity, and administrative reaction can produce democratic systems that continually manage crises without regaining public trust or articulating long-term direction.

This condition corresponds to Rosa’s problem of political desynchronization. Democratic formation requires time for learning, debate, organization, legislation, implementation, and review, while markets, digital media, security crises, and technological systems operate at much greater speed. Political institutions become reactive; citizens experience them as both intrusive and ineffective.

The accelerated self — Lidia explained the “contraction of the present” as a weakening of the span during which experience, knowledge, expectations, and orientations remain stable. Acceleration does not mechanically destroy identity, but it erodes the temporal conditions under which a coherent biography can be sustained. The self shifts from a narrative of continuity—“I was, I am, I am becoming”—toward a situational identity that must be continually updated.

Yeping distinguished inherited premodern identities, reflexively achieved modern identities, and late-modern situational identities. Franklin noted a related tension between the ambitions of the accelerating self and the finite rhythms of the body. Ravi’s “social chameleon” captured both adaptive intelligence and the danger that flexibility becomes compulsory self-reconstruction.

The resulting self is not necessarily more autonomous because it has more options. If institutions determine the tempo of adaptation, optionality can become obligation. Careers, affiliations, knowledge, technologies, and even moral vocabularies must be repeatedly revised simply to remain socially legible.

Contemplation and commitment — Xin argued that acceleration does not make contemplation logically impossible; it erodes the social conditions it requires. Sustained reflection depends on silence, attention, continuity, and freedom from competing claims. Overload makes time painful, while the inability to commit can make even busy time feel empty or frozen.

“Greedy” institutions demand undivided availability and make durable commitments difficult. Against this background, the seminar itself functioned as a deliberately protected interval—a temporary “oasis of deceleration” sustained by a shared decision to reserve time for

reading, conversation, correction, and response. Such spaces do not arise automatically; they must be institutionally defended.

Wang En introduced an Augustinian anthropology of desire through James K. A. Smith: persons are shaped not only by ideas but by what they repeatedly love and practice. Consumerism, technological solutionism, and social-media performance function as formative liturgies of control and acceleration. Counter-practices are therefore needed to reorder desire toward attention, care, common purpose, and receptive presence.

Solidarity under pressure — Franklin argued that acceleration turns institutions and communities into competitive arenas in which colleagues, firms, states, and universities race for position. Michal distinguished transformative solidarity from charity or symbolic identification, recalling the Polish Solidarity movement as an example of overcoming fear and egoism through organized recognition of others' dignity.

Maduabuchi traced a movement from inherited identity, through the modern biographical project, to fragmented situational identity. When selves and institutions lose continuity, solidarity also loses duration. It becomes episodic reaction rather than a stable commitment carried across generations.

Nubong proposed Ubuntu—"I am because we are"—as a corrective to an excessively individualistic sociology. A relational and metaphysical account of the person resists reducing the self to a biological or economic unit compelled to perform. Technology can mediate relations but cannot determine the essence or final purpose of the person.

Resonance — Rosa's concept of resonance supplied the constructive center of the session.¹⁰ Resonance is a non-alienated relation in which another person, practice, work, landscape, political claim, or transcendent horizon genuinely addresses the subject; the subject answers in a distinctive voice; and the encounter changes the relationship and those involved. Resonance is not mere agreement, emotional intensity, or the confirmation of existing preferences. In it, four dimensions were specifically identified:

1) *Being affected*, that is, the understanding of how another's reality reaches and how it matters to the subject. 2) *Responsive movement*, which takes place whenever the subject answers rather than merely stand as an observer. 3) *Transformation*, or when the encounter modifies both the self-understanding and the relation to the world of the subject. 4) *Uncontrollability*, i.e., when *resonance* cannot be manufactured or guaranteed, so that we must understand that institutions can cultivate the conditions for resonance and yet cannot command its occurrence.

These dimensions offer a phenomenological grammar of solidarity. Another's suffering first becomes significant, then elicits a response, then changes the participants' orientation. Because the other remains irreducible, solidarity differs from assimilation, management, or instrumental alliance.

¹⁰ For an additional reading, see Hartmut Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020).

Alienation appeared as a “relation of relationlessness”, that is, as the situation in which persons remain surrounded by people, objects, tasks, and information, yet experience the world as mute, indifferent, threatening, or merely usable. The image of “frenetic standstill” captured this condition to the perfection, that is, when unceasing movement has no correspondence to a shared sense of historical progress or meaningful destination.

Civility and institutions — The session implied furthermore that civility must be more than behavioral restraint. A civil institution creates time and space in which participants can be affected, speak, answer, revise, and influence outcomes. It limits the demand for total availability and refuses to treat persons as replaceable units of performance.

A resonance-oriented institution would not simply “slow everything down.” It would differentiate between beneficial speed and destructive acceleration, protect intervals for judgment, preserve institutional memory, recognize bodily and relational limits, and allow citizens to experience their voices as efficacious. Such an institution would remain open to unpredictable responses rather than seeking total control.

Summing-up Session 11 — Session 11 concluded that acceleration threatens selfhood and solidarity by shortening the temporal horizon within which commitments, institutions, and relationships can endure. *Resonance* offers a normative alternative, but it cannot be reduced to personal wellness. Rather, it requires economic dignity, educational opportunity, reciprocal institutions, protected time, political efficacy, and relations in which difference can answer instead of being merely compliant.

4.3 Session 12: Virtue Politics

Session 12 opened on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the September 11 attacks. Participants recalled where and how they encountered the event, how later commemorations shaped younger generations’ memories, and how the attacks affected international relations, security policy, religious perceptions, and conflicts such as the civil war in Sri Lanka. The spontaneous boat evacuation of Manhattan was remembered as an extraordinary expression of practical solidarity amid terror.

The discussion treated September 11 as both a historical rupture and a moral test. Fear can generate solidarity, but it can also be politicized to justify exclusion, surveillance, restrictions on freedom, and simplified divisions between “us” and “them.” The democratic challenge is to condemn violence unequivocally without allowing fear to destroy the values a society seeks to defend.

João emphasized the transnational character of the victims and interpreted the memorial’s reflecting pools as an image of the depth of human violence against humanity. Intelligence and technical capacity do not guarantee moral purpose; terrorism cannot be overcome through security technology alone without ethical and spiritual transformation. Participants also related September 11 to subsequent wars, civilizational narratives, democratic crisis, and the continuing openness of history.

Progressive Confucianism — Xin introduced Sungmoon Kim within “progressive Confucianism,” an approach joining personal moral development with political reform. Its double orientation is often described as inner sageliness and outwardly good government: moral cultivation and public order are mutually dependent. A progressive interpretation cannot justify gender oppression, deny equal dignity, or exclude citizens from political participation.¹¹

Two broad tendencies were distinguished. Confucian meritocrats justify political inequality when highly qualified rulers promote public welfare; Confucian democrats defend political equality, broad participation, and equal voting. Kim belongs to the latter tendency and seeks to reconstruct Confucian resources for pluralism, public reason, constitutionalism, distributive justice, and democratic life.

Interest and public purpose — Kim’s distinction between negative and positive Confucianism structured the first presentation. Negative Confucianism restrains rulers’ private interests and arbitrary power. Positive Confucianism authorizes and equips rulers and institutions to act for legitimate public purposes. Good government must therefore both limit power and make responsible action possible.

Mencius and Xunzi do not simply demand the elimination of interest. They seek to redirect desire away from narrowly private gain toward public welfare. Mencius emphasizes the extension of familial affection and compassion into benevolent government. Xunzi emphasizes ritual, law, offices, rewards, punishments, education, and patterned practice as means of ordering desire and cultivating durable attachment to a common order.

Their convergence should not conceal their anthropological difference. Mencius identifies incipient moral capacities within human nature; Xunzi treats unregulated desire as a source of competition and disorder requiring deliberate formation. Yet both refuse a politics based either on unchecked self-interest or on the ruler’s private moral intuition alone.

Xin cautioned that Kim’s positive/negative framework is a modern reconstruction, not an indigenous classical Chinese distinction. Its usefulness must be balanced by careful attention to textual context, the history of interpretation, ruler-minister reciprocity, the people as the root, ritual hierarchy, remonstrance, and the historical marginalization of Xunzi within later Neo-Confucian orthodoxy.

Virtue and ritual constitutionalism — Lidia explored Kim’s constitutional reading of Mencius and Xunzi. The claim is not that classical China possessed written constitutions, judicial review, separated powers, or modern individual rights. Rather, Confucian traditions contain norms and institutions that organize authority, define public purposes, criticize arbitrary rule, and make legitimacy conditional.

The narratives of Yao, Shun, and Yu provided a test case. If exceptional virtue rather than heredity determines worthiness, who authorizes succession? In Mencian “virtue constitutionalism,” the ruler may recommend a successor, but Heaven’s mandate is disclosed through the people’s acceptance. The people’s welfare and response are indispensable, though political

¹¹ Kim, *Theorizing Confucian Virtue Politics*.

action remains mediated by rulers, ministers, and elites rather than organized through popular sovereignty.

Xunzian “ritual constitutionalism” shifts attention from exceptional sages to enduring offices, laws, norms, and ritual structures. Rulers die, but institutions preserve standards across generations. Removing a tyrant may restore rather than destroy political order because the office and normative system exceed the individual officeholder.

The metaphor of the ruler as a boat and the people as water expresses conditional authority: popular support can carry rule, while popular withdrawal can overturn it. Yet this should not be equated with democracy or a legally defined popular right of revolution. Both Mencian and Xunzian systems remain hierarchical, monarchical, and elite-mediated, even as they provide resources for criticizing misrule.

Modern constitutionalism and Confucian constitutionalism begin with different emphases. The former typically highlights rights, procedures, divided authority, and legal constraints capable of surviving bad rulers. The latter emphasizes virtue, ritual, remonstrance, public-minded administration, popular welfare, and the moral formation of officeholders. Both confront the common danger of making political order depend entirely on the character of whoever possesses power.

Moral and civic virtue — Wang En distinguished *li* as moral virtue from *li* as political institution. As moral virtue, ritual propriety is a stable disposition of respect, care, restraint, trustworthiness, and role-sensitive responsibility. As institution, it is a durable arrangement of norms, offices, practices, and relationships that coordinates action and serves public order.

For Mencius, compassion, shame, respect, and moral discrimination precede their complete ritual expression. Ritual cultivates and gives intelligible public form to capacities already present in germ. Moral development nevertheless requires social and material conditions; persons struggling under desperation cannot easily cultivate or express humane dispositions. Benevolent government must therefore secure livelihood as well as moral education.

For Xunzi, desires without measure or distributive boundaries produce competition, conflict, and insecurity. Ritual is a political achievement that allocates roles and goods, regulates desire, coordinates behavior, and makes cooperation possible. Through education and habituation, initial civic discipline can become internal moral character.

Ritual must remain an ongoing practice because anger, envy, competition, and resentment do not disappear even in a well-ordered state. The discussion raised a modern question: can ritual continue to regulate desire when the metaphysical authority of Heaven has weakened and digital visibility continually displays what others possess?

Democracy and modern China — Participants debated whether Confucian constitutionalism can be called democratic. Lidia argued that Mencius and Xunzi do not recognize popular sovereignty, universal participation, or a citizen’s equal right to select and remove rulers. Popular acceptance matters, but the people do not constitute an autonomous political subject in the modern democratic sense.

Yeping proposed understanding democracy as a way of life as well as a governmental mechanism. Confucian humanism may contribute moral cultivation, family and civic responsibility, education, and public-minded administration to democratic modernity. Economic modernization or Confucian cultural influence, however, does not itself establish democracy.

Xin and Wang En distinguished contemporary Chinese state ideology from Confucianism's continuing cultural influence. Filiality, benevolence, family responsibility, and social convention remain present, while scholars seek to reinterpret Confucianism in relation to freedom, dignity, human rights, democracy, and justice. Mohan pressed the practical question of whether these resources have political efficacy where rights and freedoms are constrained.

The broader discussion compared Mencius and Xunzi with Adam Smith's tension between self-interest and moral sentiment, Ambedkar's demand for equality of political voice and human value, Buddhist ethics, and debates over innate versus acquired goodness. Confucian virtue politics thus entered the seminar not as an exotic historical system but as a partner in a global argument about desire, institutional restraint, leadership, equality, and moral education.

Summing-Up Session 12 — Session 12 established that legitimate politics cannot be secured by institutional mechanisms alone, but neither can it rely on the presumed goodness of rulers. Mencius highlights moral beginnings and their extension toward public care; Xunzi highlights the formative power of ritual and enduring institutions. Kim's reconstruction places both within the modern problem of enabling public authority while restraining arbitrary power.

Integrated Findings of Week IV

Self — Week Four deepened the understanding of the self as temporally and ethically formed. Rosa demonstrated to us how identity depends on continuity, commitment, bodily rhythms, institutional stability, and relationships capable of lasting. Mencius and Xunzi taught how moral agency develops through affection, education, ritual, habituation, livelihood, and political order. In neither framework is the self an isolated chooser existing prior to society.

The central contrast is between the *adaptive self* and the *formed self*. The adaptive self continually updates itself to meet external demands; the formed self acquires dispositions and relationships that permit responsible judgment across changing circumstances. Adaptability remains necessary, but without continuity and moral purpose it becomes conformity to acceleration.

Solidarity — Rosa's *resonance* helped clarify solidarity as being affected, responding, and becoming transformed by another whose independence cannot be controlled. Confucian moral extension clarifies how concern originating in concrete relationships can widen into public responsibility. Xunzian ritual adds the institutional structures through which solidarity can persist when spontaneous sympathy is absent or insufficient.

The guest presentation on Pakistani Christians demonstrated that solidarity must become structural. Sympathy without education, dignified employment, legal protection, representation, and economic access cannot overcome inherited exclusion. Conversely, quotas and formal rights without social capacity may remain unusable.

Civility — Civility continued to emerge as both a temporal and formative achievement. It requires enough time for attention, response, correction, and trust; it also requires habits and institutions that restrain domination, order desire, and sustain recognition amid disagreement. Accelerated reaction, propaganda, fear, and competitive self-presentation undermine these conditions.

Another of Rosa's important contributions was the principle of *uncontrollability*, that is, the idea that another person or public cannot be civilly encountered if reduced to a mere object of management. On the other hand, Confucian ritual led us to the recognition of the importance of patterned forms of respect and restraint. We also looked at democratic constitutionalism as capable of bringing into the social realm the importance of equal status, rights, participation, and the procedures that allow for the citizen to challenge power. The understanding in the Seminar was that a contemporary theory of civility must hold all these dimensions together.

Institutions and virtue — Across the week, it was manifest that a sharp choice between character and structure was something to be rejected. Institutions without virtue can become formally correct but manipulative, exclusionary, or indifferent. Virtue without institutions can become paternalistic, unstable, dependent on exceptional rulers, or incapable of surviving succession. Hence, it emerged that a civil order in order to succeed needs at least the following elements: 1) Institutions that limit arbitrary power and enable effective public action. 2) Material conditions that make moral and civic participation possible. 3) Education and practices that cultivate attention, restraint, courage, judgment, and care. 4) Protected time for deliberation, memory, contemplation, and response. 5) Mechanisms through which marginalized persons can exercise agency rather than receive benevolence passively. 6) Political cultures capable of distinguishing technological change from human development.

Intercultural convergence — African relational philosophy, Ignatian depth, Christian metanoia, Polish Solidarity, South Asian minority experience, Ambedkarite equality, and Confucian ritual all challenged the image of the autonomous, competitive individual. Although these traditions differ in metaphysics and political implications, they converge in treating personhood as relational and morally educable.

Their convergence, however, should not erase conflict. Hierarchical traditions may preserve community while restricting equality; democratic institutions may protect rights while neglecting moral formation; technological modernization may expand capability while accelerating alienation. Intercultural philosophy is therefore not the collection of harmonious parallels but the disciplined testing of each tradition by the others.

Questions left unresolved at the end of Week IV: 1) Can late-modern societies reduce destructive acceleration without undermining livelihoods, innovation, or institutional effectiveness? 2) What concrete institutional designs can protect contemplation, memory, and democratic deliberation from constant urgency? 3) Is resonance a sufficiently precise political norm, and how can institutions cultivate its conditions without attempting to manufacture it? 4) How should Rosa's theory be revised by African, South Asian, Latin American, Eastern European, and other experiences of exclusion, recursive time, infrastructural delay, and forced immobility? 5) Can

solidarity endure without stable institutions and intergenerational narratives? 6) How can formal quotas and rights become materially usable by impoverished or stigmatized communities? 7) Can Confucian virtue politics support full political equality, pluralism, religious freedom, gender equality, and citizens' effective power to remove rulers? 8) How can ritual discipline desire without hardening hierarchy or depending on a shared metaphysical authority? 9) What balance should be struck among virtuous leadership, institutional checks, popular sovereignty, and civic education? 10) How can democratic societies respond to terrorism and political fear without normalizing surveillance, exclusion, or retaliatory violence? 11) Does artificial intelligence intensify acceleration and control, or can it support education, deliberation, and more resonant relations?

Transition to Week Five — The next session was assigned the second part of Kim's *Theorizing Confucian Virtue Politics*. Shiva was to present pages 117–146, Oleksandr pages 147–177, and Ravi Vincent pages 178–217. Franklin was assigned pages 1–56 of Tingyang Zhao's *All Under Heaven: The Tianxia System for a Possible World Order*,¹² extending the inquiry from virtue and constitutional frame toward a possible philosophy of global political relations. The idea was to preserve the seminar's movement from self to solidarity to polity. Indeed, Rosa diagnosed the temporal structures that fragment selfhood and weaken democratic agency; Kim introduced traditions in which character, ritual, popular welfare, and political office are mutually formative. Thus, the forthcoming discussions were expected to test whether these resources can support democratic citizenship, intercultural constitutionalism, and a world order capable of addressing conflict without domination.

¹²Tingyang Zhao, *All Under Heaven: The Tianxia System for a Possible World Order*, trans. Joseph E. Harroff (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021).

5. WEEK V

Week Five brought the first, intensive phase of the 2026 RVP International Seminar to a conceptual and institutional conclusion. Its three sessions moved through three related frameworks: Sungmoon Kim's reconstruction of Confucian virtue politics; Zhao Tingyang's *Tianxia* or "All-under-Heaven" as a world-political horizon; and Dimitris Vardoulakis's account of the agonistic condition. Across these texts, the seminar examined how moral authority, institutional order, political conflict, practical judgment, and global coexistence might be related without reducing politics either to coercive power or to an unattainable final consensus.

The week also consolidated the seminar as a lived intercultural community. Reports on political developments in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the United States repeatedly connected theoretical questions to present conditions: democratic fragility, war, nationalism, technological acceleration, artificial intelligence, minority exclusion, institutional trust, and the search for a global common good. The concluding evaluation confirmed that participants regarded the seminar's intellectual diversity, dialogical ethos, and international fellowship as its greatest achievements, while also identifying the need for broader non-European sources, slower and more focused reading, stronger continuity with the RVP tradition, and sustained collaboration in the monthly second phase.

5.1 Session 13: Confucian Virtue Politics

The session opened once again with a "world tour" in which participants presented developments from their own regions. Topics included electoral and ethnic tensions in Nigeria; crises reported from Indonesia; food security in the United Kingdom; the democratic memory of the 1973 Chilean coup; Russia's war against Ukraine and its effects on transport and energy infrastructures; the growth of far-right politics in Poland and Germany; and the geopolitical significance of BRICS. These interventions were not treated as a collection of disconnected news items. They supplied concrete cases for examining whether political authority can remain legitimate when it is separated from moral restraint, institutional accountability, public trust, and responsibility for vulnerable populations.

A recurrent concern was the relation between self and state under conditions of technological mediation. Adrienne Black asked whether citizens remain agents or increasingly become spectators who receive reality from states, platforms, and artificial-intelligence systems. The response developed in discussion was that democratic transformation still begins with the formation of persons, but that contemporary individuals can influence public life through narrative, art, networks, and communication on a historically unprecedented scale. The same communicative power can, however, be weaponized through disinformation, automated propaganda, and technologically amplified manipulation.

Mencius and Negative Confucianism — The first academic presentation, led by Sivakaran Navaratnam, addressed Kim's "psychology of negative Confucianism." Negative Confucianism does not mean a rejection of Confucian political morality. It designates the restraints placed upon rulers: benevolence, righteousness, ritual norms, remonstrance, responsibility for popular

welfare, and the conditional character of political legitimacy. On this reading, Mencius makes authority answerable to a moral order that no officeholder can simply possess by virtue of rank.

The Mencian moral person acquires freedom through self-cultivation. This “moral individualism” is not atomistic independence from community; it is the ability to resist fear, wealth, prestige, coercion, and the arbitrary will of the ruler. Ministers consequently owe rulers truthful remonstrance rather than passive obedience. If political office becomes gravely corrupt, principled refusal or withdrawal may be morally required. The seminar connected this argument to the dangers of political hero-worship: genuine moral exemplarity strengthens judgment, whereas the sacralization of leaders disables criticism and prepares authoritarianism.

Kim’s qualified use of Nietzsche helped illuminate the independence and self-overcoming of the Confucian moral hero. Yet the Mencian figure does not create values *ex nihilo* or pursue domination. Moral greatness consists in fidelity to *ren* and *yi*—humaneness and righteousness—against the Warring States valuation of force, wealth, rank, and strategic advantage. Moral independence thereby becomes a source of political liberty and resistance.

Xunzi and Positive Confucianism — Oleksandr Kulyk presented Kim’s reconstruction of Xunzi and “positive Confucianism.” Whereas the Mencian emphasis falls upon limiting arbitrary power, positive Confucianism asks how legitimate authority can actively construct and maintain a decent order. Institutions, ritual, education, administration, material provision, capable officials, and civic norms are necessary if virtue is to become politically effective rather than remain a personal aspiration.

The distinction between the Kingly Way (*wangdao*) and the hegemonic way (*badao*) structured the analysis. The Kingly Way remains the highest ideal: authority grounded in humane government, virtue, righteousness, and willing moral allegiance. Nevertheless, Xunzi does not equate every imperfect hegemonic regime with tyranny. Under non-ideal conditions, a ruler who exercises moderation, appoints capable ministers, honors commitments, secures livelihoods, and generates trust may establish a morally limited but socially valuable order. This “tempered virtue monism” keeps virtue as the final standard while recognizing degrees of political achievement.

The discussion drew a direct lesson for the understanding of civility. Common life cannot await morally perfect rulers or citizens. Self-restraint, reliability, and public trust make cooperation possible among imperfect persons and even former adversaries. Civility therefore appeared not as superficial politeness but as a practical achievement through which conflict is constrained, commitments become credible, and social relations remain inhabitable.

Global Order and Constitutionalism — N. Ravi Vincent’s presentation examined Kim’s account of global vision, just war, and Confucian constitutionalism. Two elements were decisive: *de*, the moral efficacy or virtue that makes authority ethically credible; and *li*, the ritual and normative order that forms conduct, regulates relationships, and gives social expression to respect, responsibility, and hierarchy. Political legitimacy requires both morally cultivated persons and institutions capable of embodying normative restraints.

The analysis of Mencius and Xunzi also yielded a differentiated account of political responsibility. Rulers can remain responsible for suffering caused by famine or disaster even

when they did not directly cause the event, because office entails duties of preparation, provision, relief, and equitable distribution. The discussion of righteous punitive war similarly emphasized limits on violence: protection of noncombatants, rejection of indiscriminate destruction, restraint toward those who surrender or flee, and preservation of the material basis of common life.

Kim's synthesis was therefore read as a form of Confucian constitutionalism. Mencius supplies the predominantly negative moment: authority is conditional and must be checked by moral judgment, remonstrance, and popular welfare. Xunzi supplies the predominantly positive moment: power must be organized through ritual, education, differentiated offices, material provision, and public norms. Virtue needs institutional force, while institutions require moral orientation.

Intercultural Discussion — The session extended the role of ritual beyond ceremonial observance. Confucian *li* was presented as a comprehensive grammar of conduct—shaping family relations, diplomacy, mourning, public office, hospitality, and everyday courtesy. An African comparison identified analogous functions in traditions where ritual communicates values, mediates conflict, repairs relations, and connects communities with ancestral or spiritual agencies. The discussion nevertheless resisted equating the traditions: Confucian ritual is principally articulated through ethical and role-governed propriety, while many African practices explicitly place spiritual and ancestral relationships at the center of social restoration.

The exchanges on monism, dualism, transcendence, and the Jesuit mediation of Confucian thought into Europe established a question that would continue through Sessions 14 and 15: can an immanent moral-political order provide a sufficient foundation for freedom, judgment, and the common good, or does political normativity require transcendence? Rather than resolving this issue, the session clarified it as one of the seminar's deepest philosophical fault lines.

5.2 Session 14: *Tianxia* and Agonism

Session 14 joined participant updates with two major presentations. Xin Zhao reported on her academic visit to Christian Miller at Wake Forest University, where she discussed his theory of mixed character traits, observed classes concerning evil and divine-command theory, and received advice for her dissertation and scholarly career. Other reports concerned democratic decline, institutional checks and balances, artificial intelligence and space technologies, security in Eastern Europe, cultural politics in India, and Sri Lankan constitutional conflict. The common issue was how disagreement can remain political rather than becoming violent, militarized, or institutionally destructive.

Zhao Tingyang's *Tianxia* — Franklin Ibáñez introduced Zhao Tingyang's reconstruction of *Tianxia*, or "All-under-Heaven." The theory begins not from sovereign individuals or competing nation-states but from the world as the primary political unit. Because nothing can stand outside the world, a properly constituted global order cannot depend upon a permanent division between insiders and outsiders. Its aspiration is to transform enemies into participants in a shared world rather than merely regulate hostility among bounded powers.

Tianxia was presented simultaneously as geographical, psychological, and institutional. It concerns the whole earth, the possibility of a shared human orientation, and the political forms capable of sustaining world-level coexistence. Its metaphysical background is processual: order arises through generation, transformation, and responsiveness to the patterns of the cosmos rather than through fixed and self-enclosed substances. Political legitimacy therefore rests less upon conquest than upon virtuous, inclusive governance capable of attracting and sustaining allegiance.

The discussion identified both the promise and the risks of this framework. *Tianxia* offers an alternative to the Schmittian logic in which politics begins by distinguishing friend from enemy. It imagines a political order without a constitutive outside. Yet the aspiration to all-inclusiveness raises questions concerning plurality, dissent, freedom, and who interprets the harmony of the whole. The seminar therefore treated *Tianxia* not as a ready-made global constitution but as an ontological and normative provocation inasmuch as it is understood that political thought should begin from humanity's shared world rather than from the strategic advantage of separate states.

Vardoulakis's Agonistic Condition — Dian Nafi Hasfa presented the introduction to Vardoulakis's *The Agonistic Condition*.¹³ Agonistic theories hold that pluralism and conflict cannot be removed from political life. Their democratic task is not to abolish disagreement but to transform destructive antagonism between enemies into contestation among legitimate adversaries. Vardoulakis accepts the irreducibility of conflict but argues that many agonistic theories mistakenly repress instrumentality by treating genuine political action as detached from means, ends, and effects.

Vardoulakis' alternative retrieves the Aristotelian distinction between *technē* and *phronesis*. Technical production aims at outcomes that can be specified and assessed by comparatively determinate standards. Practical wisdom concerns action in contingent circumstances and deliberation about a common good whose content cannot be fully measured in advance. Political action remains instrumental because it must judge means, ends, and consequences; it is nevertheless phronetic rather than merely technical because the common good remains uncertain, revisable, and contested.

Agonism thus follows from the structure of political judgment itself. Communities must act, but no final calculation can conclusively determine what their good requires. Different judgments are unavoidable and fallible, generating continuing contestation. Dian's application to architecture illustrated the argument: public authorities and diverse users may disagree about safety, access, mobility, comfort, cost, ecology, and inclusion. Technical standards can inform design, but they cannot by themselves settle the common good embodied in a civic space.

The Metaphysical Dispute — The discussion brought *Tianxia* and the agonistic condition into a productive confrontation. Both theories reject a politics severed from practical orientation and seek alternatives to narrow utilitarian calculation. Yet Zhao emphasizes relational inclusion and

¹³ Dimitris Vardoulakis, *The Agonistic Condition: Materialism and Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2025).

world-harmony, while Vardoulakis begins from conflict, contingency, and judgment without transcendent guarantee. Participants debated whether Vardoulakis's immanent monism can sustain truth, freedom, and normative obligation, or whether some account of transcendence is needed to orient political action toward justice.

Several interventions argued that without an external or transcendent measure, the common good risks becoming indeterminate or reducible to power. Others suggested that appeals to transcendence can themselves conceal political authority and suppress disagreement. The session did not settle the issue. It clarified the alternatives: universal harmony without adequate space for difference may become totalizing, while agonism without sufficient normative orientation may become endless contestation. The philosophical task is to preserve plurality, judgment, and freedom while sustaining a world in common.

5.3 Session 15: Power and Agonistic Democracy

The final session of the Five Week Seminar examined Vardoulakis's argument in greater depth. Lidia Godek-Ostrouch's presentation asked what allows politics to remain political. The answer was that conflict must neither be suppressed through fictitious consensus nor intensified into existential enmity. Political contestation remains possible when actors disagree about the common good while preserving the shared space, institutions, and relationships through which future disagreement and transformation can occur.

Power was understood as exceeding formal institutions; difference precedes fully settled identities; and freedom includes the capacity to question inherited rules and refound institutions. No political order possesses an absolute foundation. Vardoulakis's distinctive intervention is to insist that political action is unavoidably instrumental, but that its instrumentality is phronetic. Political actors must assess means and consequences without possessing a determinate measure that settles the good once and for all. Agonism is therefore not conflict for its own sake but collective action and judgment under uncertainty.

State, Institutions, and Phronesis — Indukuri John Mohan Razu explored instrumentality through the state, constitutional institutions, class conflict, modern technology, and resistance movements. Legislatures, executives, and judiciaries are instruments of political order, but the political cannot be reduced to their procedures. Relations of power and collective judgment permeate social life, while institutions remain necessary arrangements whose operations and effects must be publicly assessed.

The discussion distinguished Vardoulakis's position from both technocracy and anti-instrumental romanticism. The alternative is not to celebrate technology, administration, or strategic calculation as self-justifying. Nor is it to imagine a pure political action without effects. *Phronesis* requires agents to deliberate about communal goods, foreseeable consequences, and the relationship between means and ends, while acknowledging uncertainty and remaining answerable to contestation.

Nubong Henri Ndifor's assigned presentation could not be delivered because of unstable network access. This practical interruption itself illustrated one of the seminar's recurring

concerns: global intellectual solidarity increasingly relies upon digital infrastructures whose uneven reliability affects participation and voice.

The Ruse of Power — Adrienne Black presented Vardoulakis’s “ruse of power.” Power can hide its instrumentality by portraying political effects as spontaneous, natural, purely ethical, or free of strategy. When political thought denies calculation, interests, and consequences, those elements do not disappear; they return in concealed forms and become harder to criticize.

Her example of an automated PowerPoint feature supplied an experiential analogy: a technical system transformed a slide in a way that momentarily felt like the user’s own achievement. The episode illustrated how systems can produce an experience of free action while obscuring the rules and mechanisms shaping the result. In politics, rights, tolerance, humanitarian actions, and moral principles may be genuine while also operating through strategic interests and unequal power. The critical task is neither cynical reduction nor moral naïveté, but disclosure of the means, effects, and interests at work.

Vardoulakis’s response is again phronetic judgment. Political actors must orient action toward the good of a shared world, but this good is not a predetermined endpoint. Because neither ends nor consequences can be established with certainty, disagreement persists. Accountability requires making instrumentality visible and subjecting it to continuing public judgment.

Deliberation, Agonism, and Transcendence — The plenary discussion compared agonistic democracy with Habermasian deliberation. Both begin from disagreement and reject coercive settlement, but they differ in emphasis. Deliberative theory highlights communicative justification and the possibility of rationally motivated agreement; agonistic theory emphasizes the permanence of conflict, the instability of every settlement, and the constitutive role of power and exclusion. The group questioned whether these are irreconcilable alternatives or complementary correctives.

Participants also distinguished agonistic democracy from Vardoulakis’s broader “agonistic condition.” The former can reject instrumentality or reduce it to utilitarian calculation; the latter treats practical orientation toward ends and effects as ontologically unavoidable. Repressing instrumentality risks either unacknowledged violence or the disguised domination described as the ruse of power. The proposed corrective is practical judgment directed to communal good, constrained by law and open to challenge.

The metaphysical question remained unresolved. Some participants argued that immanent agonism cannot provide a stable criterion of justice and therefore requires a transcendent moral anchor. Others emphasized the political danger of claiming privileged access to absolute truth. The seminar preserved this tension as a continuing research problem: how can politics remain open, plural, and contestable without surrendering truth, moral judgment, or the protection of minorities to shifting majorities and power struggles?

Integrated Findings of Week V

The Self — The week rejected both atomistic individualism and the absorption of persons into an undifferentiated whole. The self is formed through moral cultivation, ritual, institutions,

practical judgment, and relationships with others. Yet selfhood also requires independence, that is, the capacity to remonstrate, resist coercion, question inherited norms, and accept responsibility for judgment. Mencian moral independence, Xunzian formation through ritual, *Tianxia* relationality, and agonistic freedom each illuminated a different dimension of this socially constituted but critically capable self.

Solidarity — Solidarity emerged as neither emotional unanimity nor the abolition of disagreement. It requires the material and institutional conditions that allow persons to remain participants in a shared world: welfare, reliable institutions, protection from violence, trustworthy commitments, public communication, and practices of mutual recognition. The Washington gathering further showed that solidarity is embodied through hospitality, attention, shared time, and friendship.

Civility — Civility was interpreted as a political and ethical discipline of maintaining common life under imperfection. Confucian *li* gives form to respect and responsibility; Xunzian moderation restrains resentment and private interest; *Tianxia* challenges the production of permanent outsiders; and agonistic politics seeks to transform enemies into adversaries who preserve the space of contestation. Civility is therefore more demanding than politeness: it joins self-restraint, truthfulness, institutional accountability, and protection of the shared world.

Political Order — The week exposed a recurring tension between harmony and conflict, virtue and institutions, immanence and transcendence, consensus and agonism. No single framework resolved all four tensions. Confucian constitutionalism showed why virtue must be institutionalized; *Tianxia* expanded political imagination to the world as a whole; and Vardoulakis showed why judgment and contestation remain unavoidable when the common good cannot be conclusively calculated. Together, the texts suggested that legitimate order must orient power toward shared goods while preserving dissent, plurality, revision, and accountability.

Transition to Part Two of the Seminar — Participants agreed to continue with monthly online meetings, normally on the third Saturday, beginning in October at 8:00 a.m. Washington time. The December meeting was to be adjusted to avoid the Christmas period. The October gathering would allow unfinished material—possibly including Nubong’s deferred presentation—to be revisited, while paper presentations would begin no later than November.

Each participant in good standing is expected to develop and present a draft paper for collective criticism, with the strongest papers intended for a published volume on *Self, Solidarity, and Civility*. Participants were asked to submit a corrected evaluation form containing a provisional title, subtitle, abstract, bibliography, and preferred presentation month by 30 September 2026. The moderator also undertook to circulate a synthetic account of the five-week intellectual journey to assist participants in refining their topics.

FINAL EVALUATION

The oral evaluations of the Five-Week Part of the Seminar were broadly and strongly positive. Participants described the seminar as intellectually provocative, personally transformative, and unusually rich in national and cultural perspectives. Several emphasized the disciplined escalation of the readings—from accounts of the self and civility, through public life and acceleration, to Confucian order and agonistic democracy. The moderation was praised for combining intellectual firmness with openness, hospitality, and respect.

The most frequently recognized achievement was the formation of an intercultural philosophical community. Participants from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America did not merely offer regional examples; they interpreted common texts through distinct political histories, religious traditions, and social realities. This plurality prevented the seminar from becoming a one-directional transmission of theory and transformed it into a shared inquiry into globally differentiated forms of selfhood, solidarity, and civility.

The Washington gathering and potluck hosted by Hu Yeping gave embodied expression to this intellectual community. Participants observed that physical meeting disclosed dimensions of personality and relationship unavailable in online interaction. Hospitality, shared food, attention, and friendship appeared not as peripheral social additions but as practices of solidarity and civility in their own right.

Intellectual Effects — Several participants highlighted Hartmut Rosa’s theory of acceleration as especially important because it prompted reflection on the pace of work, reading, knowledge, and life. Others emphasized the contribution of Confucian political thought to questions of virtue, civility, institutional responsibility, and non-Western pathways to modernity. The seminar also deepened awareness of metaphysics as politically consequential: accounts of transcendence, immanence, personhood, truth, and the good shape how authority, conflict, and responsibility are understood.^[^3]

Participants reported intentions to apply the seminar’s insights in teaching, research, local philosophical networks, and future seminars in India, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, China, and elsewhere. The program thus generated not only individual learning but also a prospective network of intellectual dissemination and collaboration.

Critiques and Improvements — The evaluation also identified limitations. One participant noted that the reading list remained weighted toward European intellectual traditions, notwithstanding the significant Korean and Chinese contributions. Future programs could deepen the intercultural method by placing African, Latin American, South Asian, Islamic, Indigenous, and other traditions in sustained conceptual dialogue rather than using them chiefly as applications or examples.

The density and speed of the five-week program created difficulties for participants balancing teaching, research, employment, and time-zone differences. The value of slow reading, thematic concentration, and more time for conceptual assimilation emerged as a

practical lesson. Network failures and hybrid participation also produced unequal access, demonstrating that technological connection does not automatically create equal participation.

A further recommendation was to make fuller use of the extensive intellectual resources produced by George F. McLean and the RVP tradition. Greater continuity with this archive could prevent the repetition of already-developed questions while allowing contemporary debates to extend, criticize, and renew the Council's intercultural philosophical work.

Shared Orientation — Hu Yeping observed that five weeks—or even much longer periods—cannot solve the constitutive problems of self, solidarity, and civility. The seminar's purpose was therefore not to eliminate disagreement or convert participants to one position, but to create a platform for dialogue and peaceful coexistence. Her appeal to *Tianxia* presented compatibility and coexistence as an East Asian counterpoint to agonistic language, while leaving open the relation between harmony and conflict.

Maduabuchi Dukor emphasized that the humanities must interrogate science and technology in an age of acceleration, and argued for transcendence as the moral ground of action. Other evaluations stressed democratic agency, social responsibility, hospitality, and the duty to communicate philosophical learning beyond the seminar. The closing orientation was thus neither final consensus nor theoretical closure, but commitment to a continuing pursuit of truth larger than any participant or tradition.

Concluding Assessment

Week Five successfully completed the intensive phase by turning the seminar's three guiding terms into a common research agenda. The self must be cultivated yet capable of critique; solidarity must sustain shared life without erasing difference; and civility must organize conflict without concealing injustice or abandoning truth. Confucian virtue politics, *Tianxia*, and the agonistic condition supplied contrasting but complementary resources for this work.

The final evaluation demonstrated that the seminar's most important result was not agreement upon a single philosophical system. It was the creation of a disciplined intercultural community able to connect metaphysical questions, political institutions, technological transformations, regional experiences, and everyday practices of hospitality. Part Two is therefore not an appendix to the seminar but its necessary continuation: the stage at which shared reading must become original research, mutual criticism, and publishable contributions to the global inquiry into self, solidarity, and civility.

Washington, DC, 21 September 2026