



Introduction

This special issue of the *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, “Polycentric Political Economy: A Festschrift for Elinor and Vincent Ostrom,” began as a conference at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University that was organized in conjunction with an award ceremony celebrating a lifetime of scholarship and teaching by Elinor and Vincent Ostrom. Former students, colleagues, and admirers gathered at George Mason University to honor the Ostroms’ work as scholars, teachers, and mentors. The award was the first in a series of initiatives begun by the Fund for the Study of Spontaneous Order. The Fund is the brain-child of Richard Cornuelle, the author of *Reclaiming the American Dream* (1965), *The De-Managing of America* (1975) and *Healing America* (1983). Cornuelle was Ludwig von Mises’s research assistant at New York University in the mid- to late-1940s. Cornuelle learned from Mises the idea that the economic way of thinking (*praxeology*) could be applied to areas outside of the domain of the market economy to understand the societal forces at work that either lead to, or hinder, peaceful social cooperation. After leaving New York University, Cornuelle worked in various jobs, including as a Program Officer at the Volker Fund, which in the 1950s and early 1960s was instrumental in helping establish the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Study of Political Economy at the University of Virginia, the *Journal of Law and Economics* at the University of Chicago School of Law, and a lecture series for students that helped produce such books as Bruno Leoni’s *Freedom and the Law* and Milton Friedman’s *Capitalism and Freedom*.

Cornuelle’s own research focused on the role that voluntary associations play in society. He coined the term “the independent sector” to refer to activity that was neither in the market sector nor the public sector. Philanthropic enterprise became the subject to which he would devote his intellectual energies, and in so doing he would draw inspiration not just from Mises, but also de Tocqueville. Long before Robert Putnam discussed the importance of civil society and social capital for the functioning of a democratic society, Cornuelle understood the vital importance of a vibrant “independent sector” for the functioning of a free society. It is in the practice of the art and science of association and self-governance that a citizenry enables a free society to function and flourish. If the citizenry loses this ability, the free society will be threatened. This is the meaning behind the often made statement by

Cornuelle to the effect that while we know much about the free economy, we still know too little about the free society. It is in the quest to encourage free inquiry into the science and art of association and self-governance that the Fund for the Study of Spontaneous Order was established in 2002, with Dr. William Dennis as the Fund's director. The idea is to seek out and encourage scholarly work on spontaneous order in areas outside of the context of the market economy. In order to achieve this objective, a series of awards have been established to recognize senior and junior scholars in their work of developing the theory of spontaneous order and applying the theory to new areas of inquiry in the social sciences and humanities. In addition to these awards to scholars, a decision was made to make a periodic award to scholars who throughout their career have established a body of work that has advanced our understanding of spontaneous order and the science and art of association and self-governance.

The first recipients of this lifetime achievement award were Elinor and Vincent Ostrom and their Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis at Indiana University. The papers and comments in this special issue were presented at a 7 November 2003, conference at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University that was organized by William Dennis, with great assistance from the staff at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, in particular Brian Hooks. At a ceremony that evening, Vernon Smith and Gordon Tullock presented the awards to Elinor and Vincent, respectively, and both expressed their profound appreciation for the contributions that the Ostroms have made, individually and jointly, to our understanding of spontaneous order and the political economy of self-government. Mercatus produced for the occasion an interview with both Elinor and Vincent Ostrom detailing their contribution to the social sciences and the role played by the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis in the development and advancement of their research program. The papers and comments from the conference survey and carry forward the different aspects of the Ostroms' research program in the social sciences and reflect their work in methodology, broad political economy, and concrete field work on the problems of the commons. It is my sincere belief that the proceedings of this conference clearly demonstrate that the choice for the first recipients of the Fund for the Study of Spontaneous Order Lifetime Achievement Award could not have been any more appropriate. The scholarship, teaching, and mentorship of Elinor and Vincent Ostrom is a shining example to all of us as all that the republic of science is itself one of the most important examples of the art of association and of self-governance. It is with great pleasure that we offer this collection to readers of *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* and hope that the papers will both bring further attention to the brilliant contributions made by Elinor and Vincent Ostrom and stimulate future research along the lines laid out by them.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Richard Cornuelle for his vision and encouragement of the scholarship on spontaneous order and the free society, to William Dennis for his management of the conference and his leadership as the discussion leader during the conversation, to Brian Hooks and Mercatus for ensuring that the conference proceeded without any difficulties, to J. Barkley Rosser Jr., for the opportunity to present this work to the readers of the *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, and finally to Elinor and Vincent Ostrom for their cooperation and graciousness throughout the process from organizing the conference to the publication of this special issue of the journal.

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