entirely possible that people can create a version of themselves to present, when you talk to someone in private and in confidence, hopefully you're maximizing the chance that you do get a real picture. The sense I've had when I've met politicians and spoken to them is that they are being truthful. I have seen real emotions being expressed, from anger to sorrow and joy, but despair as well. To be honest, I think it's hard to mimic those things. The things they've said on the side of those conversations with me have appeared consistent. So I'm hopeful that what I'm getting is a real picture.

With a questionnaire and a survey, of course, there's always the potential for someone to create things. But we designed surveys in such a way where you can check the answers are consistent as well, which is another good way to pick up whether you're getting the truth or perhaps a slightly different version of things.

That said, it's the risk when we talk to anyone. I understand what you're saying about politicians. The job has a performance element, and that's why doing research on the psychology of politicians is important. They know it's confidential, it's anonymous, and their names are certainly never going to appear in any research publications I produce. That helps them feel confident speaking openly. That has been my experience, as far as I'm aware.

But it's a really good question. I would also add that, in my opinion, the more

racy, is a whole another story. How do you take the leap from the personal to the abstract?

It's a really interesting question. I think there's a lot more to be done and recognize that it's important we know what we don't know. We're a long way from bridging that gap between making assumptions about individuals and whole societies and communities. In fact, there's a real danger if we make assumptions about one or two people, and find it somehow representative of an entire community or group. That's a real problem we have in society generally.

But I think it's where we hopefully can make progress by increasing those conversations and their coverage, whereby we can try and make links between how individuals are feeling and their wider communities and political systems.

We can look at the issue from another perspective as well: One of the challenges with democracy is obviously how representative are the views we get to hear, whether it's said in parliament or spoken by the leader of a country, because in democracy – and in other systems of government – it is actually quite hard to represent everyone's view. Therefore, the challenge is how one brings consensus, especially because with individuals, we will always have a wide range of views expressed. Which is natural: That is the nature of our humanity. When it comes to representing all of those, we hope that our leaders make the best ef-

ate is that it humanizes the people – the politicians, the leaders – who are usually seen from a very long emotional distance, or, in other terms, objectified. And your work aims to subjectify them, to make them accessible, to turn them into real persons. Why does it matter?

It's again a really important question. When I was considering doing this research and the work I've been doing over the last number of years, I found it important that we have an understanding that the people who make the decisions that affect all our lives are human beings and, therefore, are subject to the same kinds of frailties and vulnerabilities and challenges that all of us face.

For me, there's a two-way thought process here. One is that, as citizens of a nation or community, we can understand that an individual can make a mistake and that they will have difficulties doing their particular job. But also, hopefully, politicians and leaders can think, "Well, actually I'm here, doing the best job I possibly can, on behalf of my nation or community, whatever it might be." So I think it's important that we don't see them as a different group of people, because we share those human qualities.

In terms of the practicalities of that, you're right, there is that distance. Sometimes as a leader, they might be making decisions that are very unpopular. It doesn't mean that we have to agree with them. In fact, disagreement is often a feature of political life as it should be. But we can understand that there is a human being there, because sometimes there might be occasions when politicians need support from people to do the best job possible and need that we don't disengage.

One of the major challenges for many political systems is where citizens feel there's just no point in talking to this leader or that political group. Then you start to see that views and voices are not expressed or they are done in a particular way, which is not actually productive. When people are not listened to and they feel they're not heard, there come the major political challenges. You've seen that in countries across the world: Protest is sometimes a very healthy way of expressing our views, but it's also an indication that dialogue with a leader is perhaps broken down. Politicians need to recognize that they should not be reaching that point. They should be reaching out to communities and have those conversations. At least that's my thought.

decisions. In some certain respects, I'm more free than a leader to choose what I want to do because I can go out right now and have a meal, or I can express my anger more easily, or I can be more vulnerable more easily. So, what was your understanding through all these interviews you had with politicians: Do they find themselves more powerful than the common people or more limited?

To be honest, I wish I had asked them the question you have now asked me! As for my estimation, based on the data I've gathered from people doing that job, it's surprising that in some of the surveys, up to 80% of the politicians who've taken part feel they have lower levels of control over their lives and events, compared to members of the general population who might fill in the same questionnaire.

That was a very surprising finding when I first started doing this research. And perhaps it's counter-intuitive because people would, as you say, assume that politicians have a much greater level of control since their status may give them the opportunity for it.

There's a quote from a British politician many years ago. He wanted to get involved in politics because he wanted to know where was the power. So he got elected to the local council and he realized the power wasn't there. So he ran as a politician for the national parliament and he realized it wasn't there. He became a government minister and he finally had even less power than when he started off as a local councilor. So I think it's an
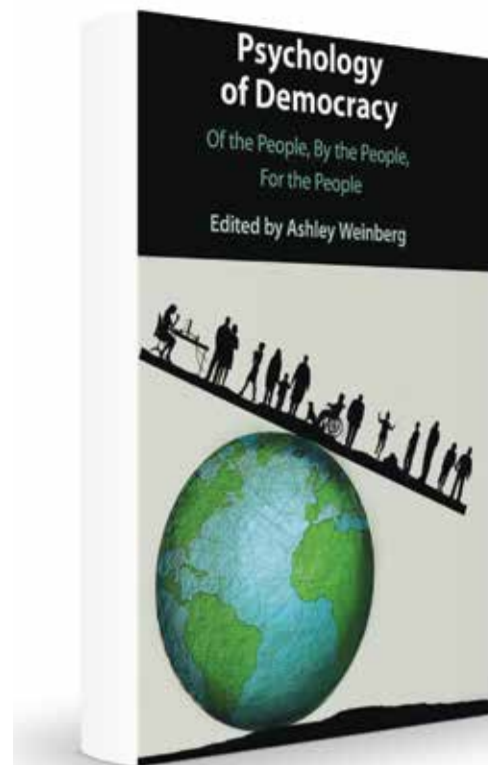
elusive concept.

It's noteworthy that in terms of how people see themselves, positive mental health can be gained from a sense of control and a sense of good self-esteem. If you're doing a job that reflects back to you that people understand and respect what you have to say, that naturally can boost an individual.

We have challenges when that tips over into an individual who is feeling that they're not accountable anymore, that they don't owe anything to the rest of humanity. Rather than well-being, it's sometimes about the kind of personality type that they exhibit. Power will naturally attract people who will feed off that, sometimes in a positive way, but also sometimes in a negative way.

So, in terms of self-concept, it's a fascinating area for analysis. Sadly, we found too few politicians who will put themselves forward for an interview asking the question, "How do you see yourself compared to everybody else?" And I think then we'll probably not quite get the honest answers. But it would be fascinating to ask it!

Your quote reminded me of a joke: "You don't know what happiness is until you get married and then it's too late!" So we can recreate the joke for the politicians, and say: "You don't know what freedom is until you become a politician, and then it's too late!"

[Laughs] I like that parallel! I should say I'm very happily married, of course!

TO BE CONTINUED

Psychology of Democracy
Of the People, By the People, For the People
Edited by Ashley Weinberg

> We need to understand that the people who make the decisions that affect all our lives are human beings and, therefore, are subject to the same kinds of frailties and vulnerabilities and challenges that all of us face.

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that mental health is talked about publicly, then perhaps it will become more acceptable for politicians to be open, honest, and sincere about it. I realize we're all in a position of cultural change around discussing our psychological health and well-being. Over the last 30 years, I'm seeing things moving in the right direction and people are being more open because we're all human. We all share that human experience: Whatever status we have in society, we all have a job we serve,

I have one more methodological question as well. I can understand talking about the psychology of a person: There is this person, some emotions are involved, as well as some facts of life. But to talk about the psychology of a community, it's a little bit different. And to talk about the psychology of an abstract system, whatever concrete manifestation it might have, like democ-

forts possible. And sometimes we can see when that just isn't happening – and we can appreciate when it is, as well.

Those said, I think you're right that there is always some dissonance, and some distance as well, between what individuals may feel and what the communities may feel. But it's important that we make the effort to find out what those views are in order that they can be considered so that we can try and make some positive progress – and this is perhaps one advantage of a democratic approach.

In an era where climate change and the difficulties we all face together, regardless of systems, it's so important that we get those views and we hear what's happening to people and their experiences because we will have to make real decisions about how we can help as many people as possible.

One implication of your work that I really appreci-

That makes sense. So, sometimes we tend to think that politicians, especially at the leadership level, are very powerful. But in practice there is what is called checks and balances, that limits their