

P5 Report

SPINOZA AND URBANISM

*Exploring Spinoza's Ethical and Political
Philosophy as Approach to Urban Planning*

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5092043

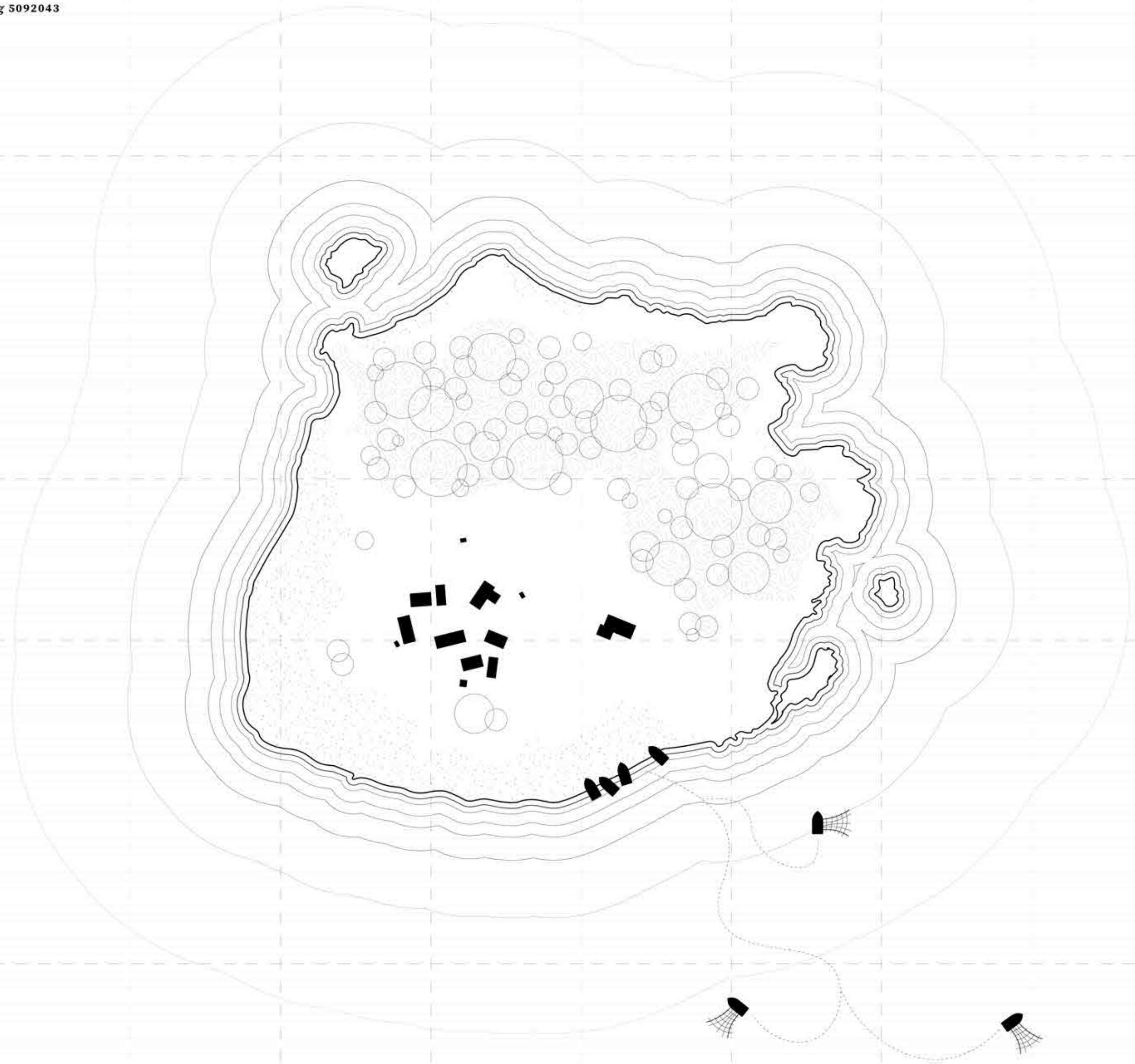
Mentor team

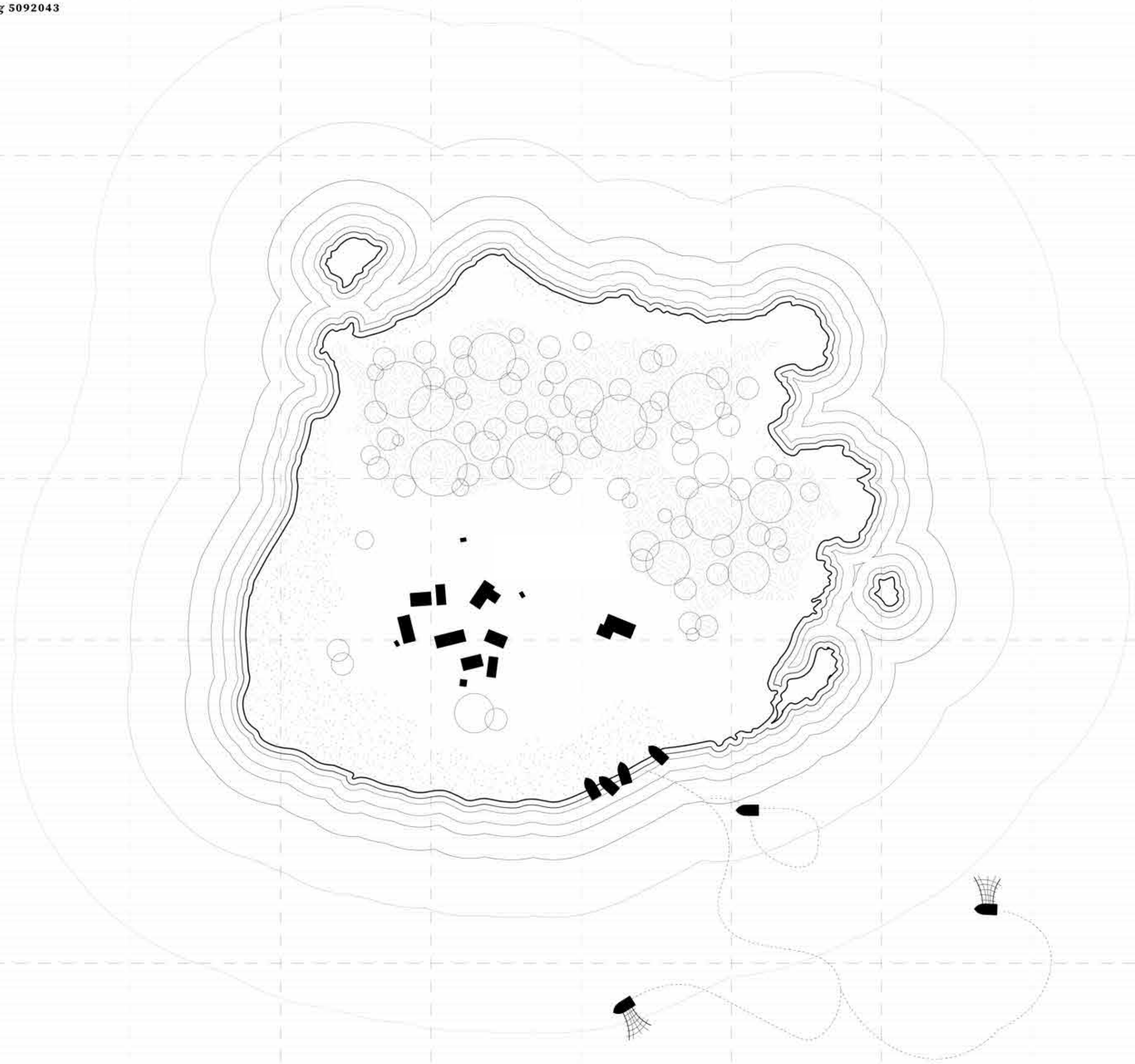
First mentor Dr. ir. Gregory Bracken
Second mentor Prof. Dr. Zef Hemel

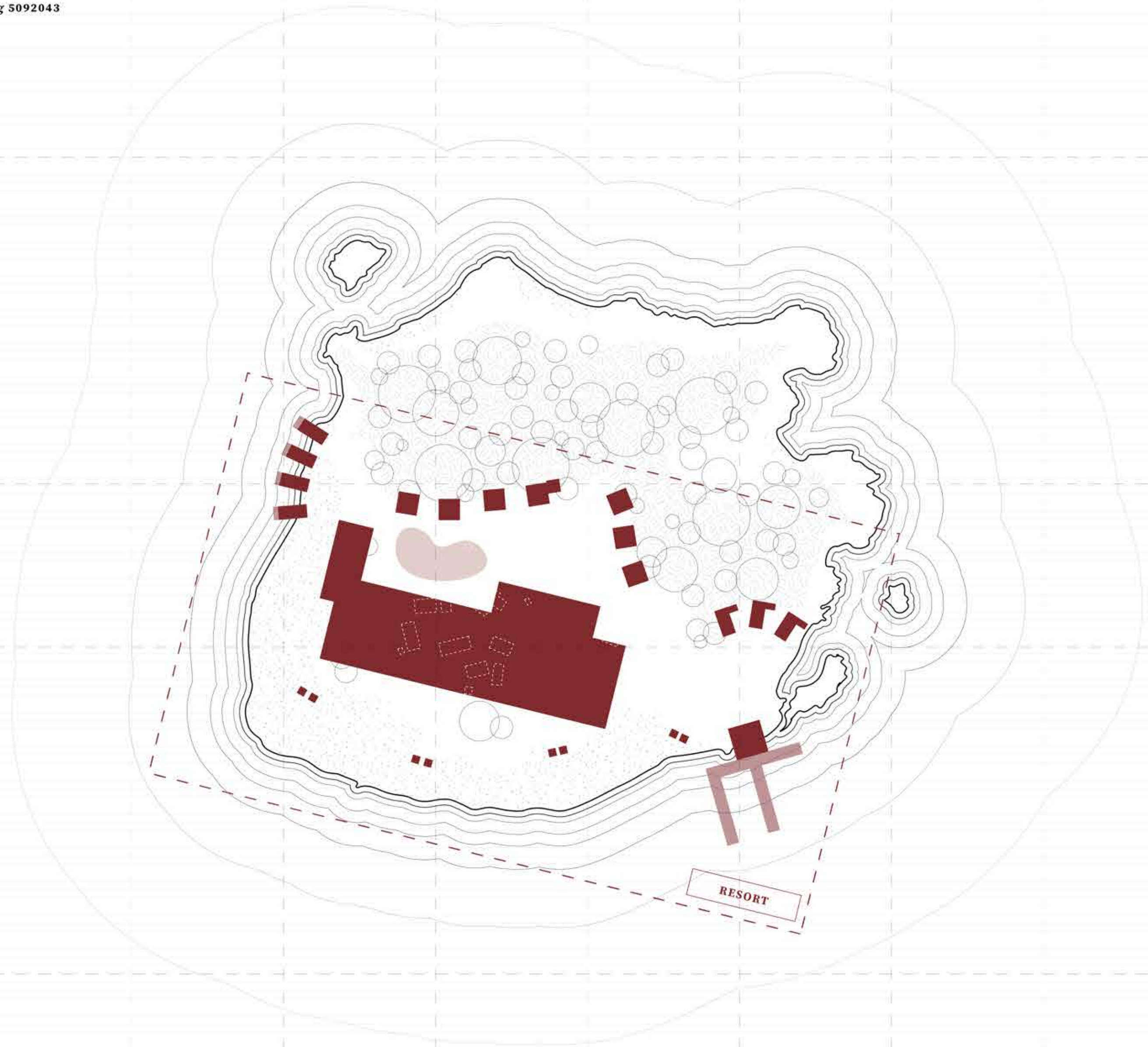
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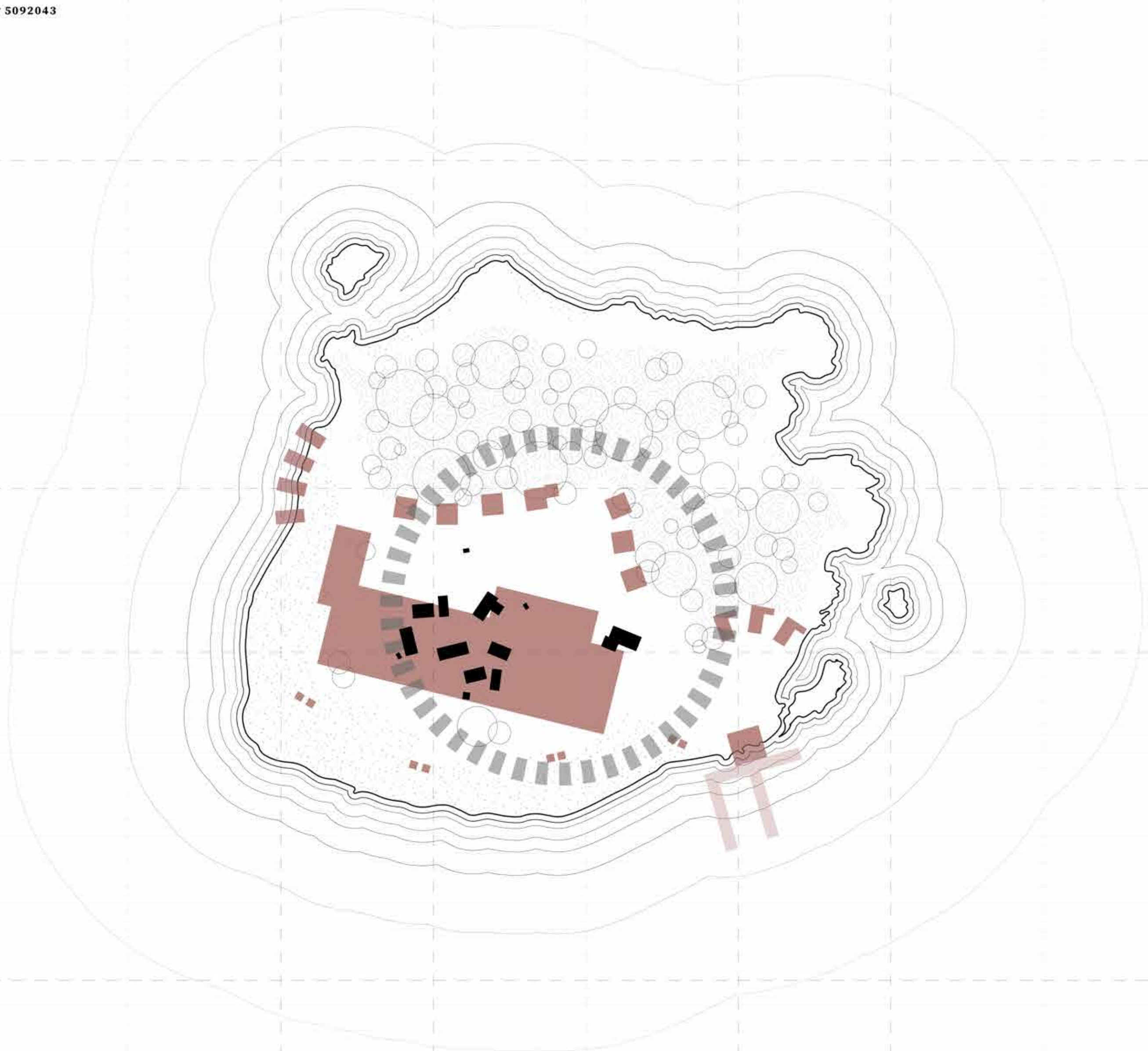


Imagine an Island...









Problem statement:

Ethical-political dilemma

in urban planning

Problem statement:

Ethical-political dilemma

in urban planning

(Moral) values
good / bad
justice / injustice

Problem statement:

Ethical-**political** dilemma

in urban planning

Power -
structure, use,
imbalance...

Problem statement:

Ethical-political dilemma

in urban planning

knowledge gap

What to do in the face of
ethical-political dilemmas?

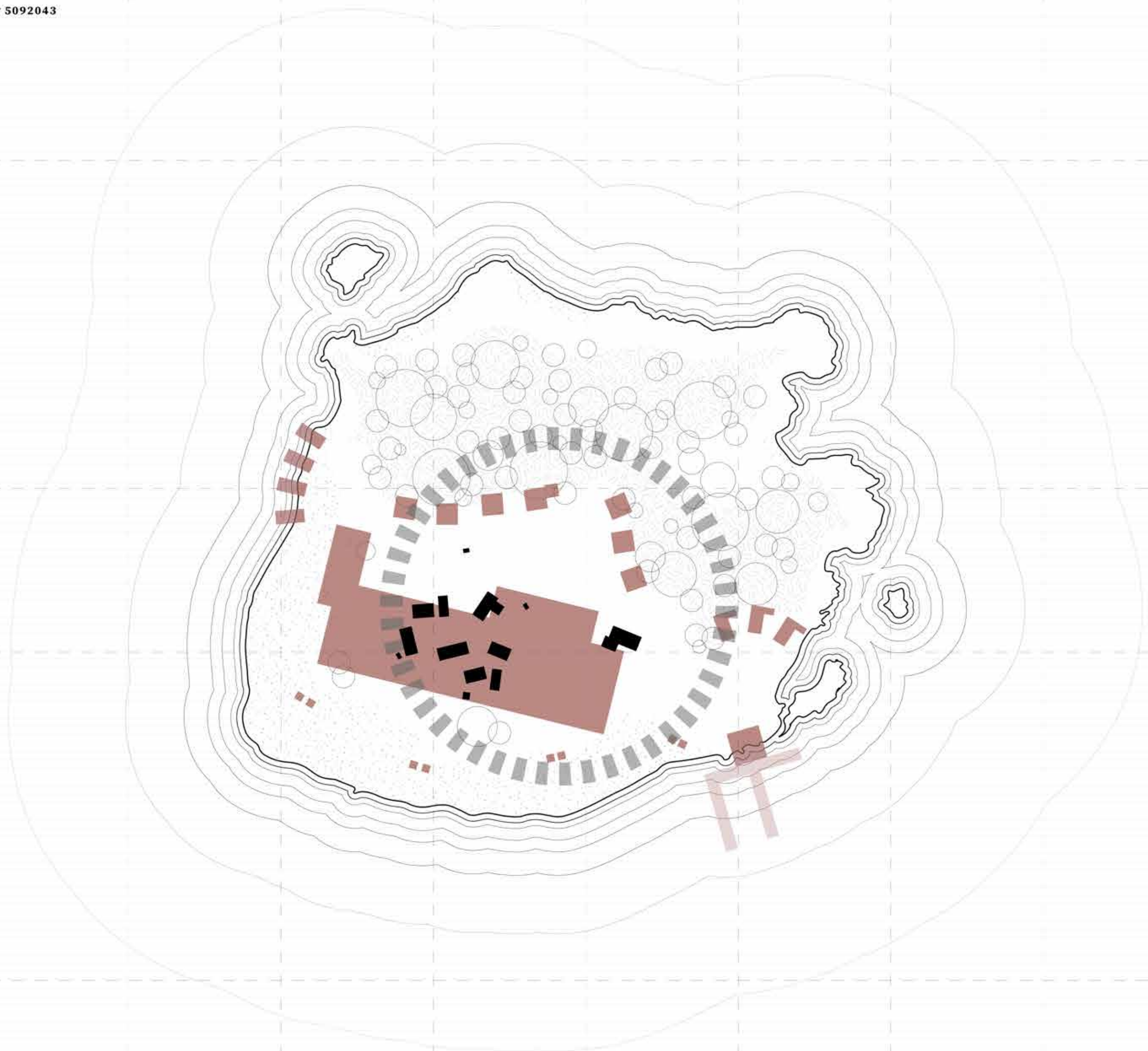
RESEARCHING

Ethical-political thinking

for urban planning

RESEARCHING
SPINOZA
for urban planning

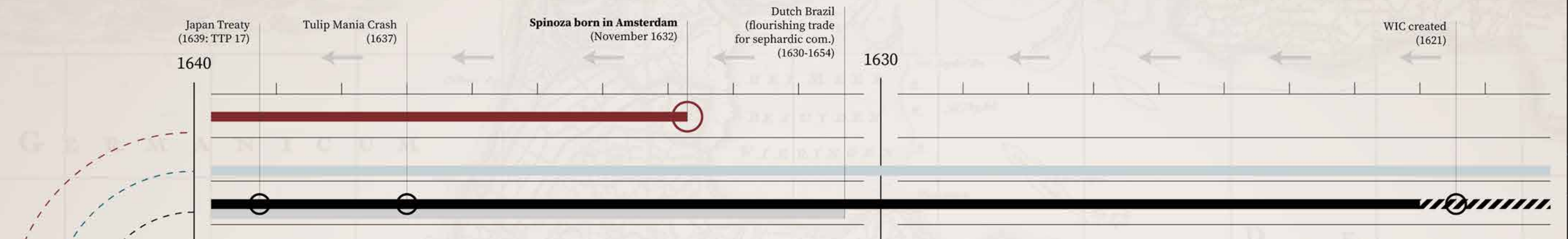
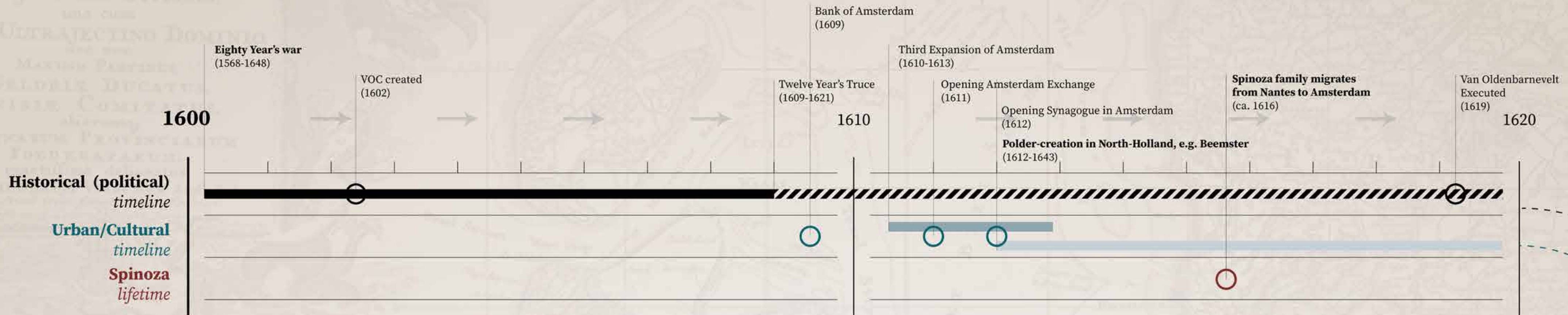




I.

Spinoza?

Spinoza *urban-historical context*



Rembrandt: *Nachtwacht* (ca. 1642)

Peace of Münster: End of 80-years war (1648)

Spinoza starts working as merchant (1649 (roughly))

Failed Coup of William III (1650)

First Anglo-Dutch War (1652-54)

Spinoza orphaned, "bento y gabriel" firm (1654)

Inauguration Amsterdam City Hall (1655)

Fourth Expansion of Amsterdam

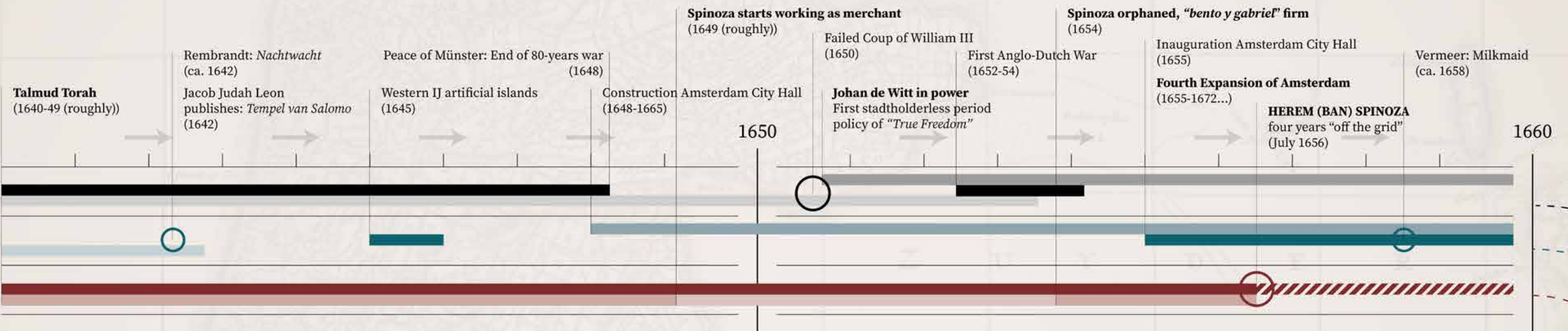
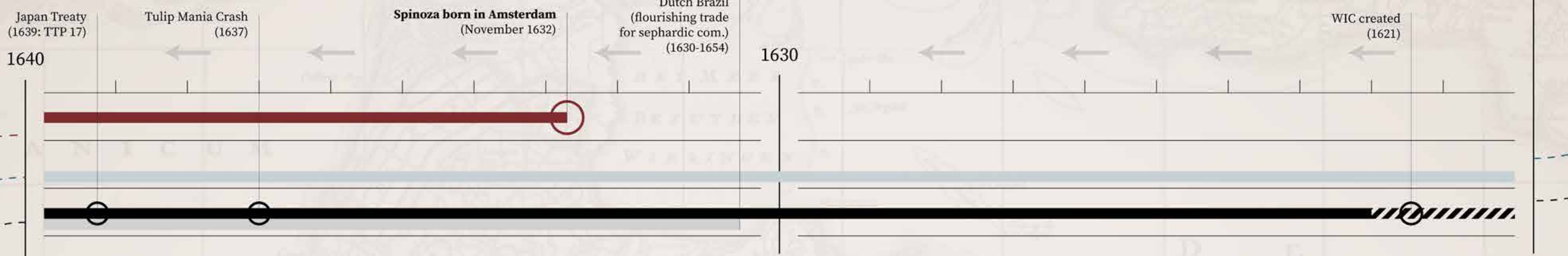
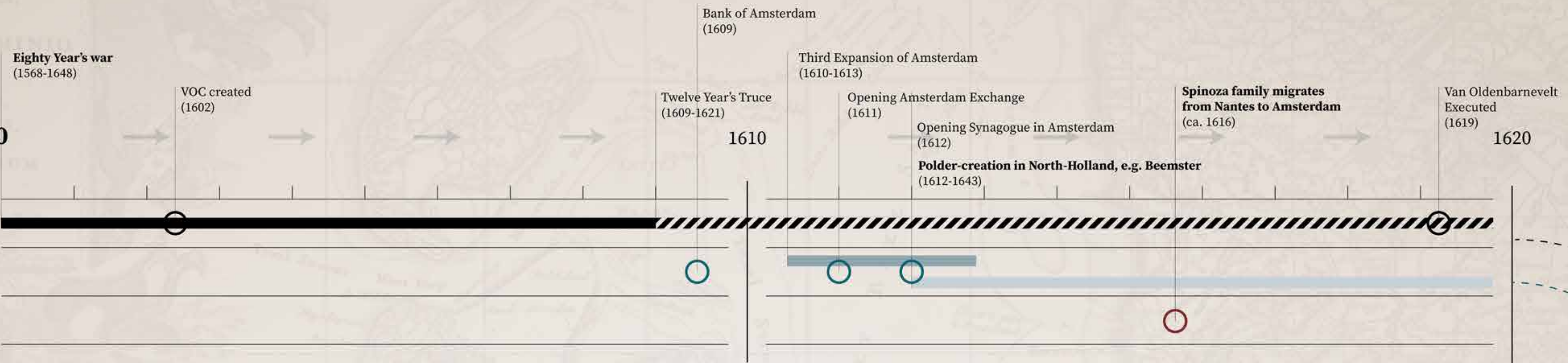
Vermeer: *Milkmaid* (ca. 1658)

1600

Historical (political) timeline

Urban/Cultural timeline

Spinoza lifetime



Publication Opera Posthuma (1677)
Placed on Catholic Church's Index of Banned Books
Works banned

Spinoza dies peacefully in The Hague (February 1677)
Opening New Synagogue in Amsterdam

DISASTER YEAR Johan de Witt lynched (1672)
Third Anglo-Dutch war (1672-74)

Spinoza moves to The Hague (1670)

Adriaan Koerbagh dies in prison

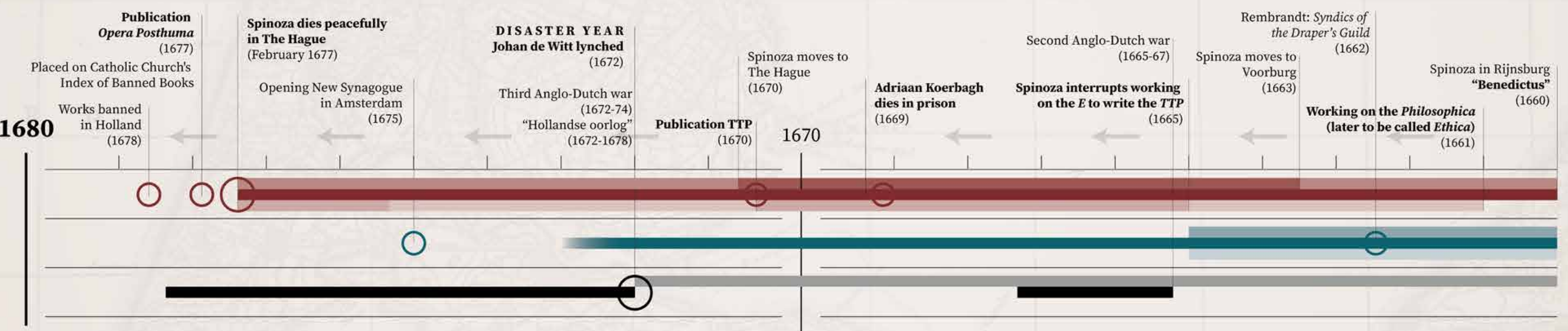
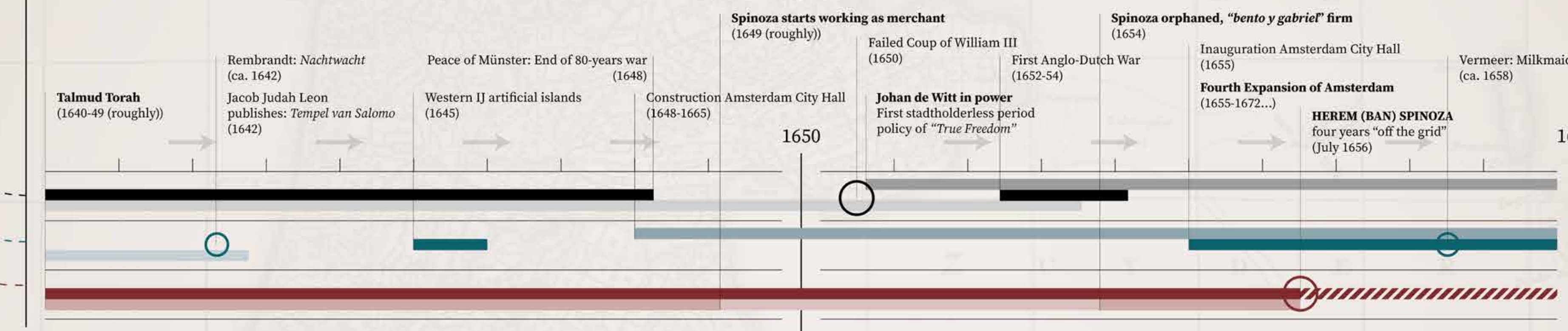
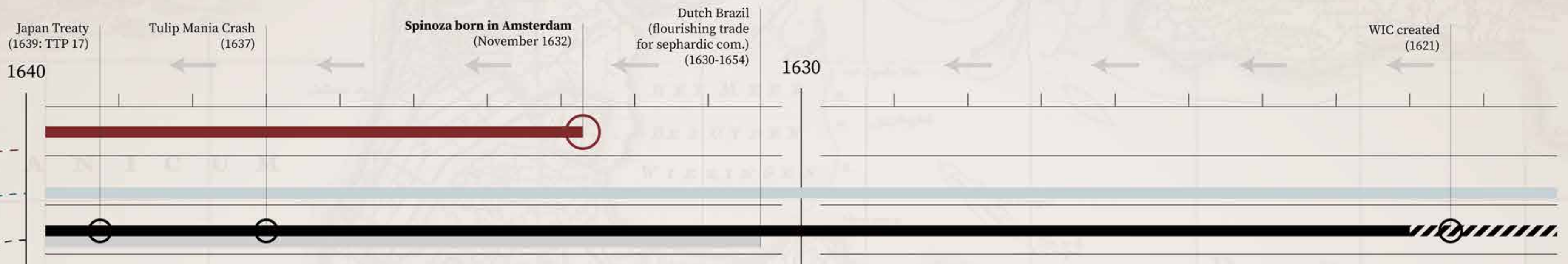
Second Anglo-Dutch war (1665-67)

Spinoza interrupts working on the E to write the TTP

Rembrandt: *Syndics of the Draper's Guild* (1662)

Spinoza moves to Voorburg (1663)

Spinoza in Rijnsburg "Benedictus" (1660)





ABOUT SPINOZA

Incidence

8,0 E⁻⁵

7,5 E⁻⁵

7,0 E⁻⁵

6,5 E⁻⁵

6,0 E⁻⁵

5,5 E⁻⁵

5,0 E⁻⁵

4,5 E⁻⁵

4,0 E⁻⁵

3,5 E⁻⁵



Key takeaways:

■ 1 Honourable person

Despite hardship, misfortune, injustice...
Spinoza lived an exemplary life.

■ 2 Intellectual Rebel

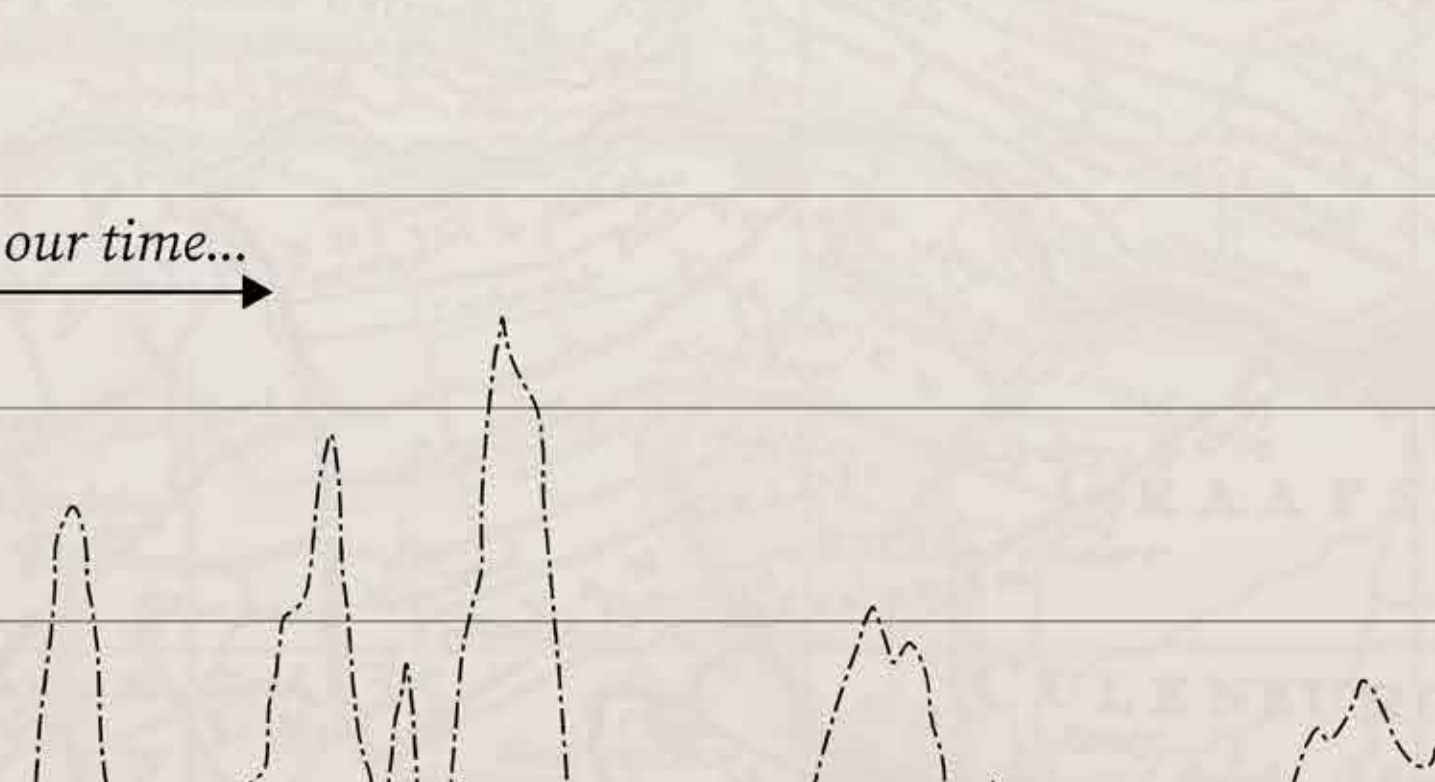
Extremely progressive views, responding to

- changing landscape, emerging urban world
- rise of autocracy, demise of democratic institutions

Arguing for

- relational ontology; humans interrelated with environment
- defence of democracy (*unique*)

resonance with our time...



ABOUT SPINOZA

This graph shows all mentions of Spinoza in all English, French, and German language literature in Google's databases (source: Google Ngram, 2024).

Incidence

8,0 E⁻⁵
7,5 E⁻⁵
7,0 E⁻⁵
6,5 E⁻⁵
6,0 E⁻⁵
5,5 E⁻⁵
5,0 E⁻⁵
4,5 E⁻⁵
4,0 E⁻⁵
3,5 E⁻⁵
3,0 E⁻⁵
2,5 E⁻⁵
2,0 E⁻⁵
1,5 E⁻⁵
1,0 E⁻⁵
0,5 E⁻⁵



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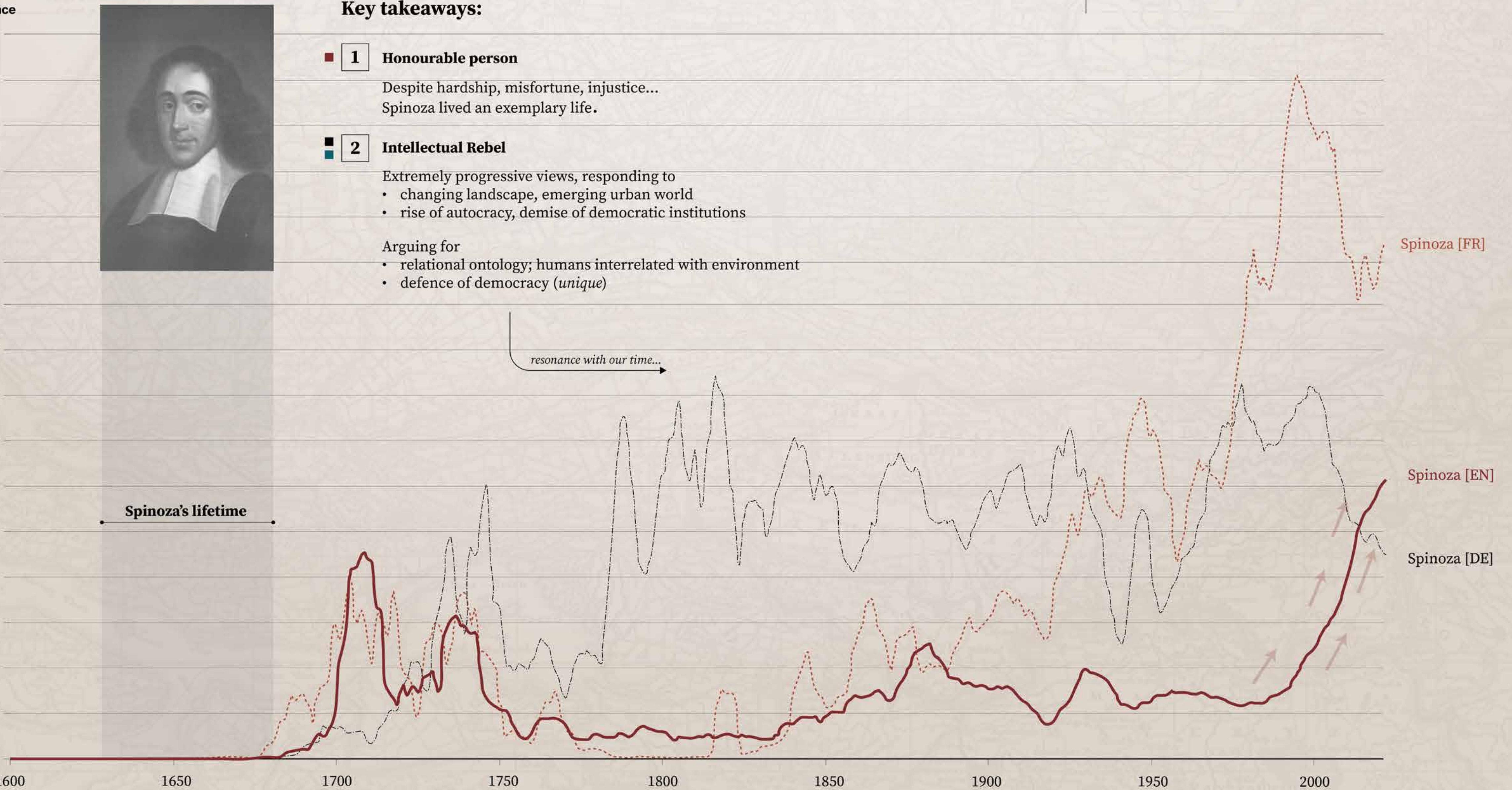
1600 1650 1700 1750 1800 1850 1900 1950 2000

Spinoza's lifetime

Spinoza [FR]

Spinoza [EN]

Spinoza [DE]



II.

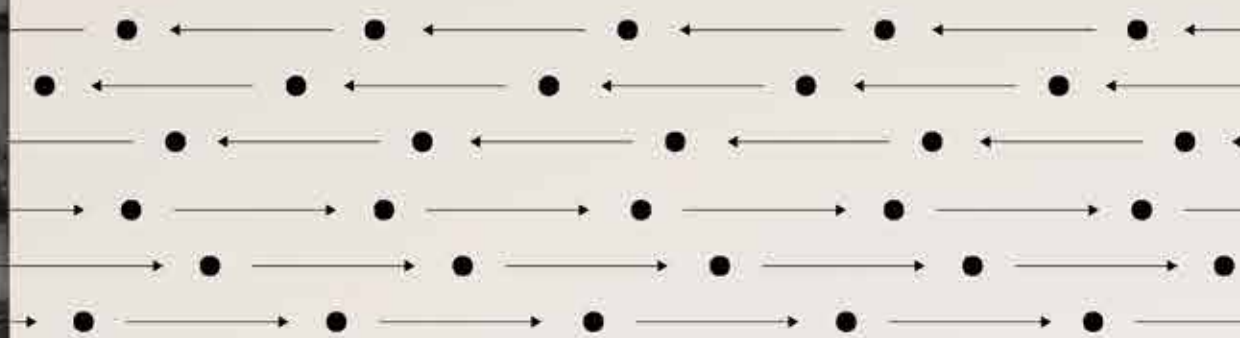
Findings

Heuristics

Thinking alongside Spinoza for building better cities



◀ The Urban Planner in Spinoza's day:
The Geographer by Vermeer (ca. 1668-69).



Thinking alongside Spinoza. ▶
Excommunicated Spinoza by S. Hirszenberg(1907).



What are heuristics?

The word heuristic comes from the Greek εὐρίσκω, which means “to find”. It is also related to the word *Eureka!* A heuristic is like a rule of thumb, a “quick and dirty” or “fast-and-frugal” method of decision making, of finding out. “Follow the brook, and you’ll get to the river” is an example. Einstein used the term to describe and entitle (!) his Noble-prize winning academic article in 1905.

Heuristics are well-known in urban and spatial planning, often as “design principle”. The heuristics in this list are meant to guide urban planners through ethical-political dilemmas, by offering means to approach the problem.

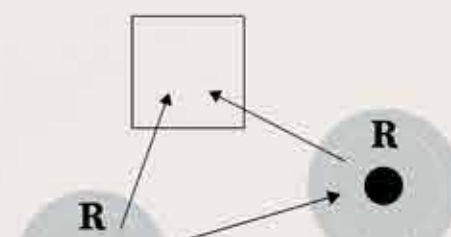
Heuristics are not dogmatic rules. You can pick and choose, and add to your own set of heuristics. Most professionals have a personal set of heuristics (explicitly or implicitly). Spinoza’s entire ethical project can be seen as ‘heuristic’: it is not a set of rules to be imposed, rather a set of guidelines to be used, or not.

(on Heuristics: see Flyvbjerg, B. (2024). Heuristics for Better Project Leadership: Teasing Out Tacit Knowledge. *Project Management Journal*, 55(6), 615-625. <https://doi.org/10.1177/87569728241300307>)

1

Aim to discover the composition that works for everyone

Spinoza's ethics contains a hopeful promise. Since rational people agree in nature (harmony), and aim to share their rational needs

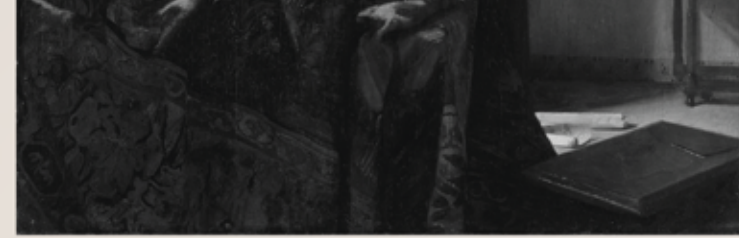


7

Beware of the affective image of money.

“As money has presented us with an abstract of everything,” explains Spinoza, “it has come to pass that its image above every other usually occupies the mind...” (E4 App.28). Money is





Thinking alongside Spinoza. ▶
Excommunicated Spinoza by S. Hirszenberg(1907).

◀ The Urban Planner in Spinoza's day:
The Geographer by Vermeer (ca. 1668-69).

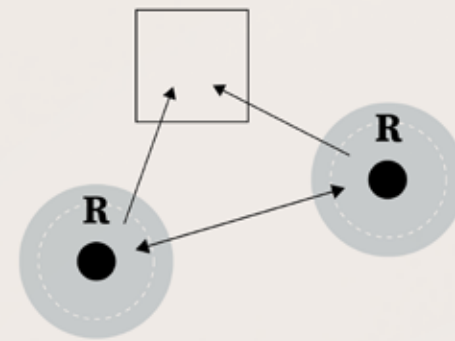


(on Heuristics: see Flyvbjerg, B. (2024). Heuristics for Better Project Leadership: Teasing Out Tacit Knowledge. *Project Management Journal*, 55(6), 615-625. <https://doi.org/10.1177/87569728241300307>)

1

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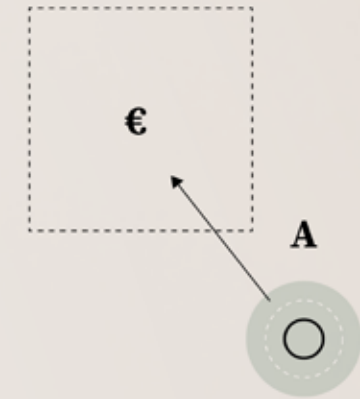
Spinoza's ethics contains a hopeful promise. Since rational people agree in nature (harmony), and aim to share their rational needs, (which are by definition self-interested but non-exclusive), there is always a composition to discover which works for all actors involved (and, technically, for the entire world population). Discovering this composition is the **ethical aim** of an urban planning question. Nonetheless, this composition is extremely hard to realize or even conceive.



7

Beware of the affective image of money.

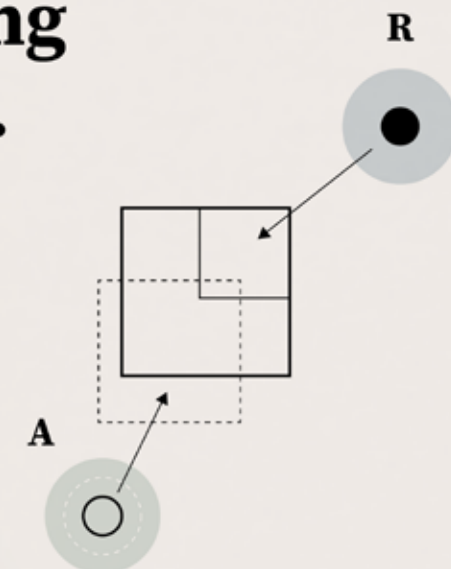
"As money has presented us with an abstract of everything," explains Spinoza, "it has come to pass that its image above every other usually occupies the mind..." (E4 App.28). Money is the go-to affective image because it can represent almost all (material) desires. In Spinoza's time, the famous *Tulip Mania* occurred, in which people linked the affective image of money to tulip bulbs with great vehemence, and in a great self-reinforcing bubble of desires.



2

Act by making a plan (image, model) using the empowering effect of rational* plans.

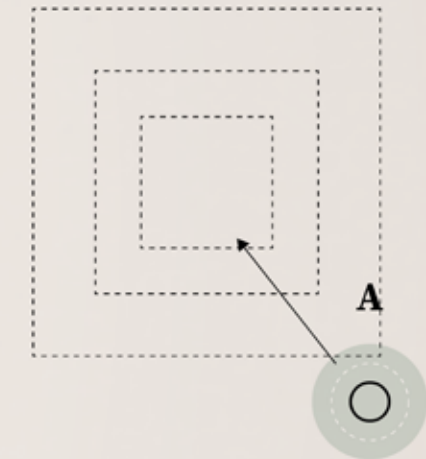
A plan is nothing but a possible, highly exact i.e. rational image. This is the **action** that urban planners can undertake by virtue of their profession: placing a rational image in a situation. Via the rules of interpersonal affects, we can predict how this image will work in such a situation: empowering actors, reducing affective images in size or linking with them, etc.



8

Beware that positive affects are fast excessive.

Spinoza holds that things (around us) that bring us joy are good; they empower and "help the parts of the body to perform their functions". However, he states, these objects (1) do not work to this end ("that they may affect us with joy"), (2) their power of action is not guided in accordance to our needs, and (3) joy generally applies only to a part of us, so it follows that these joys are fast excessive (E4 App.30). People overestimate, and quite often "blow up" positive affective images (for instance: expected financial gain).



3

Plan without reservation to mould the non-human world to the rational* advantage.

"Excepting man [humans], we know no individual thing in nature in whose mind we can take pleasure, nor anything which we can unite with ourselves by friendship or any kind of intercourse, and therefore regard to our own profit does not demand that we should preserve anything which exists in nature excepting men [humans], but teaches us to preserve it or destroy it in accordance with its varied uses, or to adapt it to our own service in any way whatever" (E4 App.26).

9

Beware of your limitations as planner.

"All things noble are as difficult as they are rare..." (E5 P42S). Rational planning (exact knowledge) is difficult! "Human power is very limited, and is infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes" (E4 App.32), humans are but a "speck" (TTP 16.7) in nature. Individually, you are very limited in reasoning. Enlist others! "Above all things it is profitable to form communities (...) [and] do whatever may tend to strengthen their friendships" (E4 App.12).

4

Beware of human psychology (desires, power)

10

Use democratic deliberation as source of

like with ourselves by friendship or any kind of intercourse, and therefore regard to our own profit does not demand that we should preserve anything which exists in nature excepting men [humans], but teaches us to preserve it or destroy it in accordance with its varied uses, or to adapt it to our own service in any way whatever" (E4 App.26).

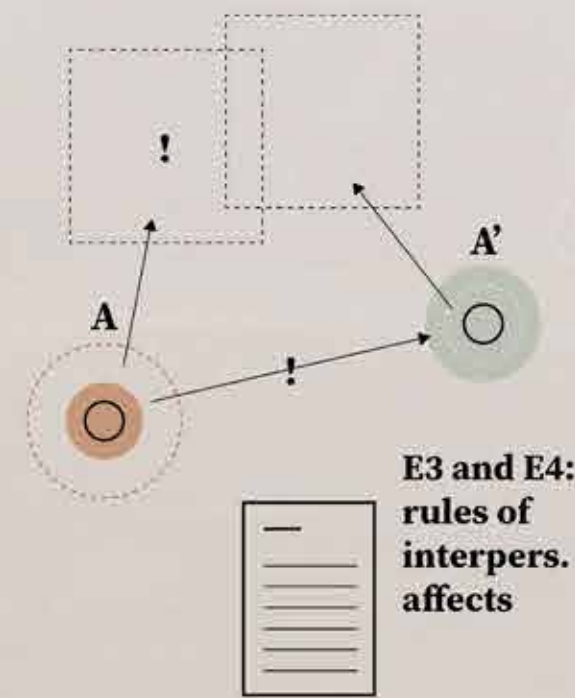
4 Beware of human psychology (desires, power) as the driving force behind ethics and politics

The ethical method Spinoza sets out is a private affair - and a difficult one, "the road, that reason herself points out, is very steep" (TP 1.4). Most of the time, "the individual man is thus determined, not by sound reason, but by *desire and power*" (TTP 16.4). Human psychology and its mechanics form the building blocks of Spinoza's Ethics, but even more so of his political theory.

5 Use the rules of interpersonal affects to the rational* advantage

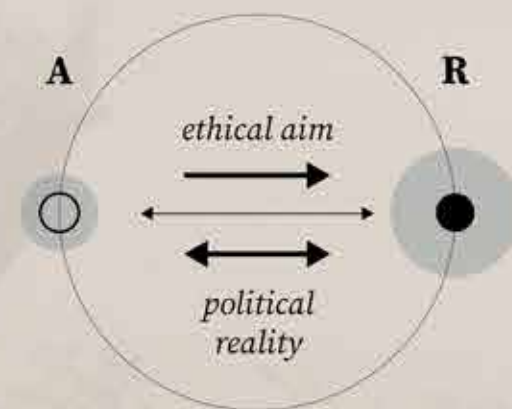
Spinoza takes his *theory of affects* as natural law. The affective dispositions and images of (large) groups of people are reasonably predictable, and follow clear behavioral rules. Use this! says Spinoza. In his political works, he urges states to do so; using behavioral patterns to further civic harmony and peace of mind.

See overviews E3 (*dictionary of affects*) and E4 (*rules of interpersonal affects*). See Steinberg, 2009 for political implications.



6 Be tolerant of the passions of others.

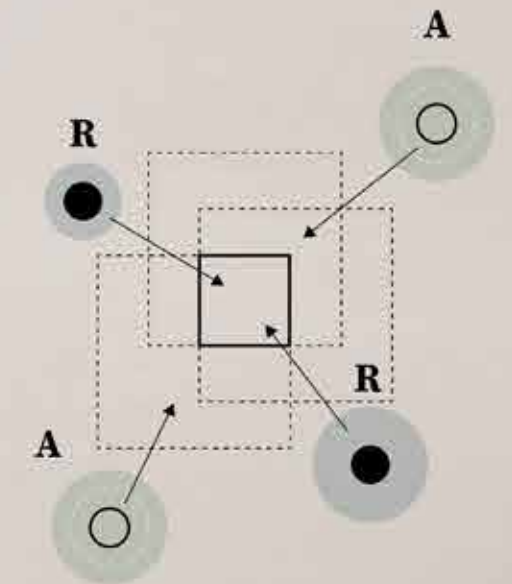
It is only hurtful and (self-)destructive to treat people with affective images less than others - it is without virtue. Moreover, there is no right for intolerance, for "they are no more bound to live by the dictates of an enlightened mind, than a cat is bound to live by the laws of the nature of a lion" (TTP 16.2). Like Spinoza, labour carefully "not to mock, lament, or execrate, but to understand human actions" (TP. 1.3). It might be of great use (see 5, or 11).



each" (E4 App.12), humans are factually "open" (E4 P16.1) in nature. Individually, you are very limited in reasoning. Enlist others! "Above all things it is profitable to form communities (...) [and] do whatever may tend to strengthen their friendships" (E4 App.12).

10 Use democratic deliberation as source of information and accountability.

Spinoza can be seen as epistemic, or instrumental democrat: he argues time and time again for democratic bodies, not from some ideal, but because he theorizes they make better decisions. They sharpen the mind (see 9), "For men's natural abilities are too dull to see through everything at once; but by consulting, listening, and debating, they grow more acute, and while they are trying all means, they at last discover those which they want, which all approve, but no one would have thought of in the first instance" (TP 9.14).

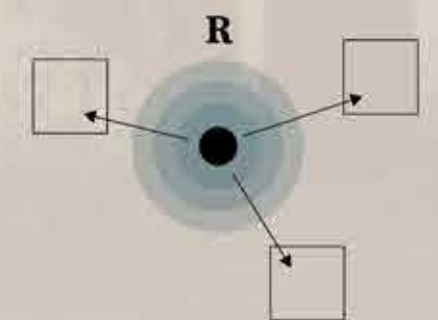


11 Beware of your vulnerabilities as planner.

Spinoza stresses time and time again that it is "impossible not [to] be a part of nature and follow her common order..." (E4 App.7). As planner, you are vulnerable to the mechanics of affects and passions too - you are not a stoic, neutral onlooker. Beware of this vulnerability. "Skill and watchfulness are required..." (E4 App.13). Before you know it, *power* and *desire* force the planner, "to follow the worse, although [s]he sees the better before him[her]" (E4 pref).

12 Keep working on yourself as ethical project - a more virtuous person is a more virtuous planner.

Building a "rational worldview," in other words, training your brain in exact knowledge of cause and effect (in urban planning), is one of the five tactics Spinoza lists for peace of mind in E5 P20S. This also means taking care of the body (E4 App. 27), and a healthy social environment (E4 App. 12). On top of this, the more exact knowledge you possess, the more useful you are for others, which is a virtue in itself (E3 P35-37).

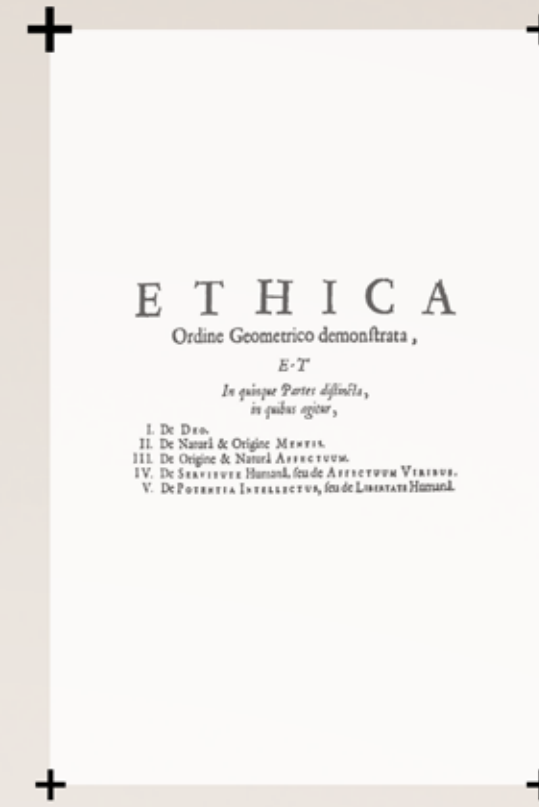
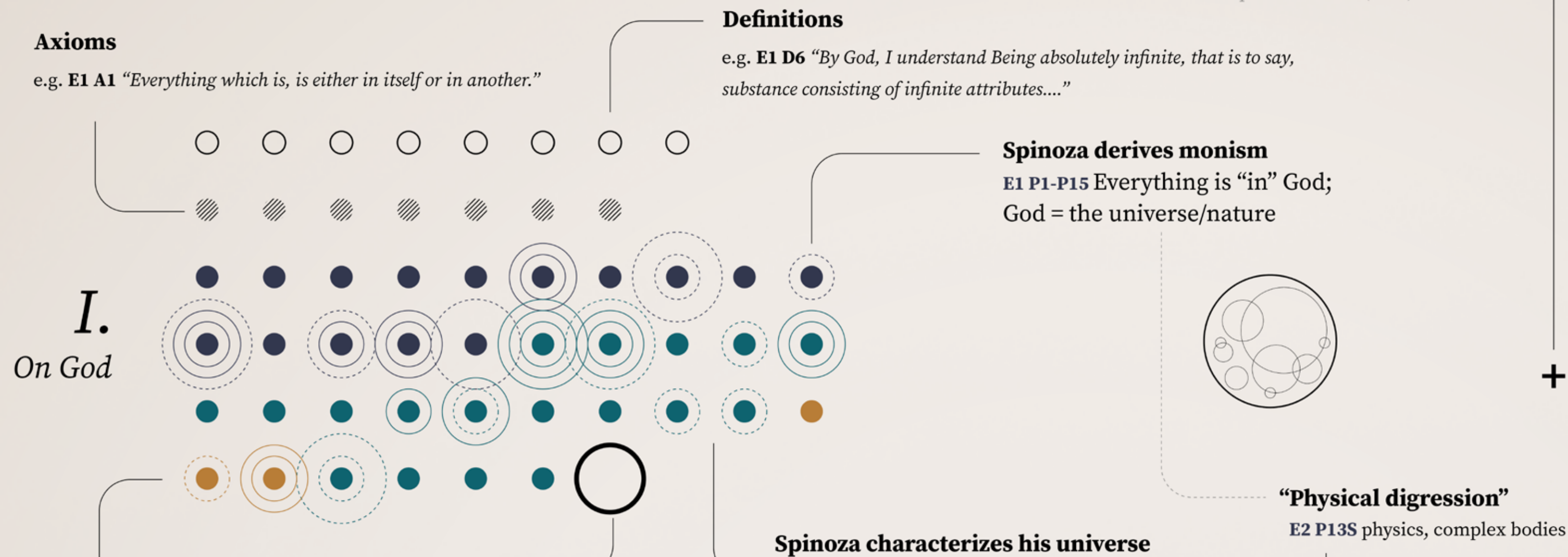


The Ethics mapped

The Ethics is generally regarded as Spinoza's *magnum opus*. It is a densely packed exposition of Spinoza's philosophy, touching on everything from ontology (the nature of 'being' and the universe), epistemology (knowledge), to psychological models and ethical doctrines.

The structure of the Ethics is famously (or notoriously) difficult. It is a book in **five parts** written in a difficult or even intimidating **'Euclidian' structure**: definitions and axioms, from which many propositions are logically derived, and to which Spinoza adds a wide array of corollaries and comments (*scholia*).

Below, the Ethics is mapped using the Euclidian structure as backbone. The five parts are shown separately, with the main topics discussed grouped in propositions of a similar colour.



The Ethics as it originally appeared in the *Opera Posthuma* (1677).

How to read this visual?

Elements of the *Ethics* are shown per **proposition**, layered like an onion:

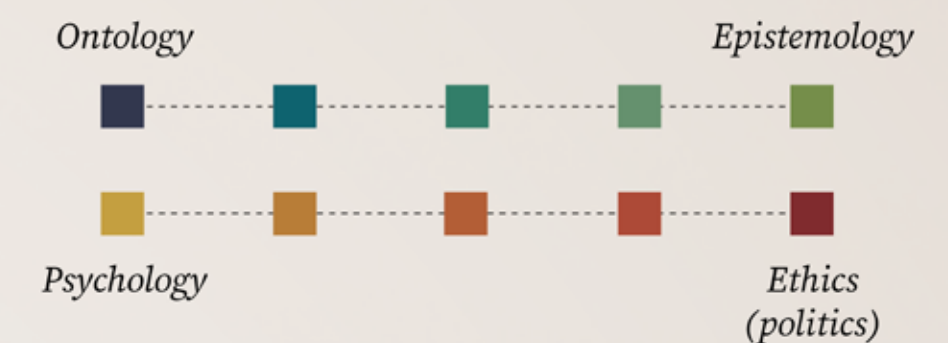
- proposition *and* demonstration (*proof*)
- extra demonstration *or* corollary
- scholium (*comment by Spinoza*)



Other elements of the *Ethics* (that do not depend on a proposition) are shown separately:

- definition (only found at the beginning of the parts)
- ▨ axiom *or* postulate (*ibid.*)
- other textual element: preface, appendix, etc. (labelled in diagram)

Propositions are colour-coded by domain of philosophy:



I. On God



Appendix
E1 App Spinoza denies *teleology* and rejects transcendental concepts (good/evil, justice/injustice, etc.)

Spinoza characterizes his universe

- E1 P16-P36
- causality (cause and effect)
 - determinism (necessity)
 - power, existence

Necessary will/intellect

E1 P30-32 the will/intellect is not free but determined necessarily

Mind: acting or suffering

E3 P1-P3 adequate ideas: acting inadequate: passions (suffering) "the body cannot determine the mind to thought... [vice versa]"

Preface

E2 Pref Spinoza states his strong naturalism

The Conatus

E3 P4-P9 Spinoza's ethical foundation: the striving [conatus] for perseverance

Adequate and inadequate ideas

E2 P31-P47

General mechanics of the Affects

E3 P10-P21 Spinoza combines the conatus with theories on the mind to build a theory of affects.

Mechanics of interpersonal Affects

E3 P22-P57 Spinoza details the mechanics of interpersonal affects such as ambition, envy, approval...

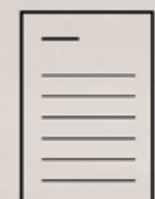
E4 P41-P66 relates these to good and evil (thus: ethics)

IV. Human

III. The Affects

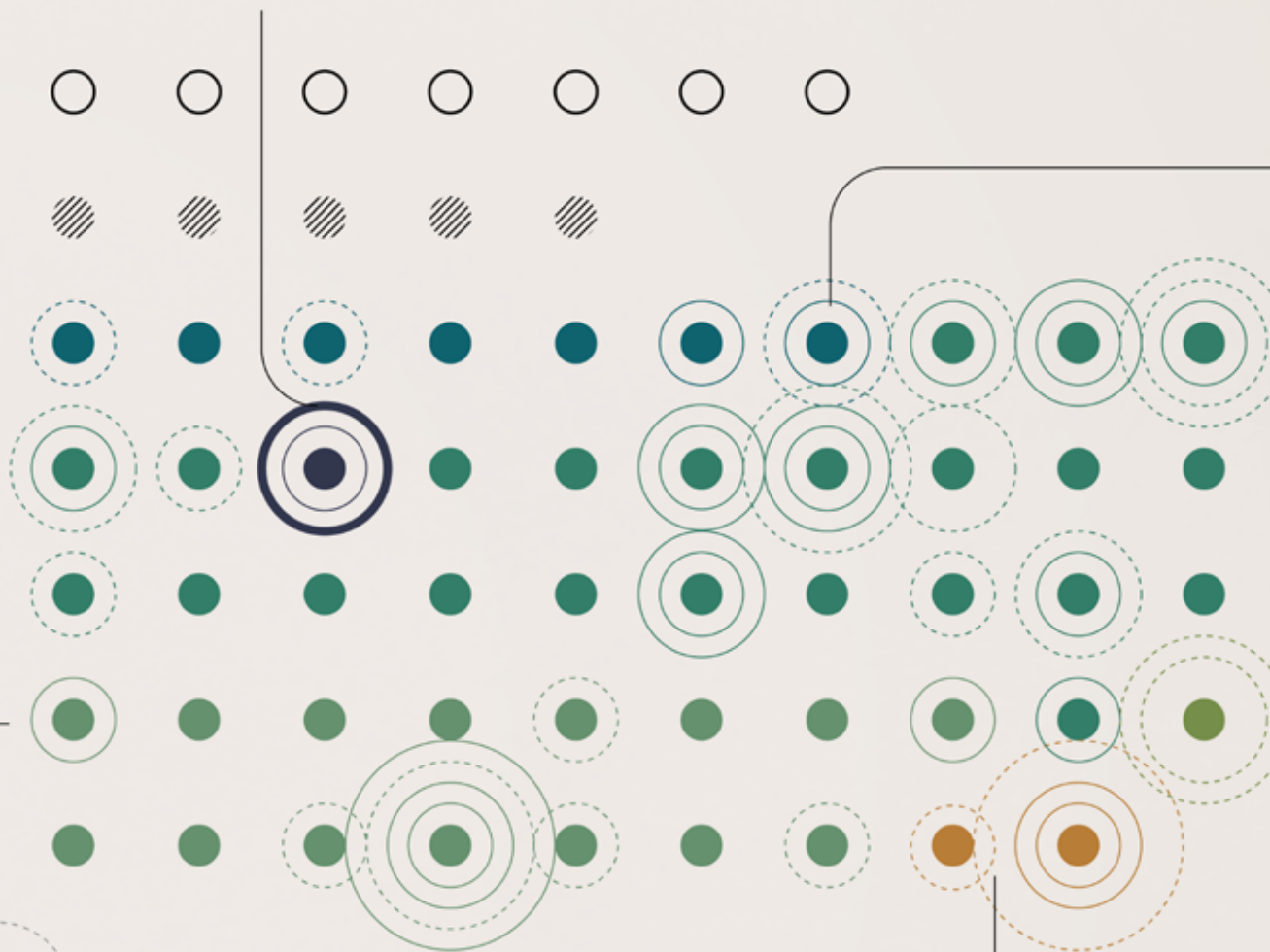
Appendix

- E3 App Overview of the affects in **dictionary** form
1. *desire* is the essence itself of man in so far ...
 2. *joy* is man's passage from a less to a greater perfection ...
 47. *Avarice* is the immoderate desire and love of riches
 48. *Lust* is the immoderate desire and love of sexual intercourse



"Physical digression"

E2 P13S physics, complex bodies



Parallellism

E2 P1-P7 thoughts and ideas parallel (two lenses, same thing).

Human mind and body

E2 P8-P30, P39

Three kinds of knowledge

E2 P40S2: (1) imagination, (2) reason, (3) intuition (discussed in E5).

Images & Desires

E4 P9-18: strength of images, how images confuse cause and effect, cause of desires.

An image is stronger when:

- 1 depicting something present (E4 P9)
- 2 depicting something to be present soon, or close in memory (E4 P10)
- 3 depicting something we imagine necessary, vis-à-vis something contingent (E4 P11)
- 4 depicting something non-existent but possible, vis-à-vis something contingent (E4 P12)
- 5 depicting something in the past, vis-à-vis something contingent and non-existent (E4 P13)

Virtue

E4 P19-28: virtue = power = self-preservation

Main ethical-political doctrines

E4 P30-40: notably

Psychology

Ethics
(politics)



No free will

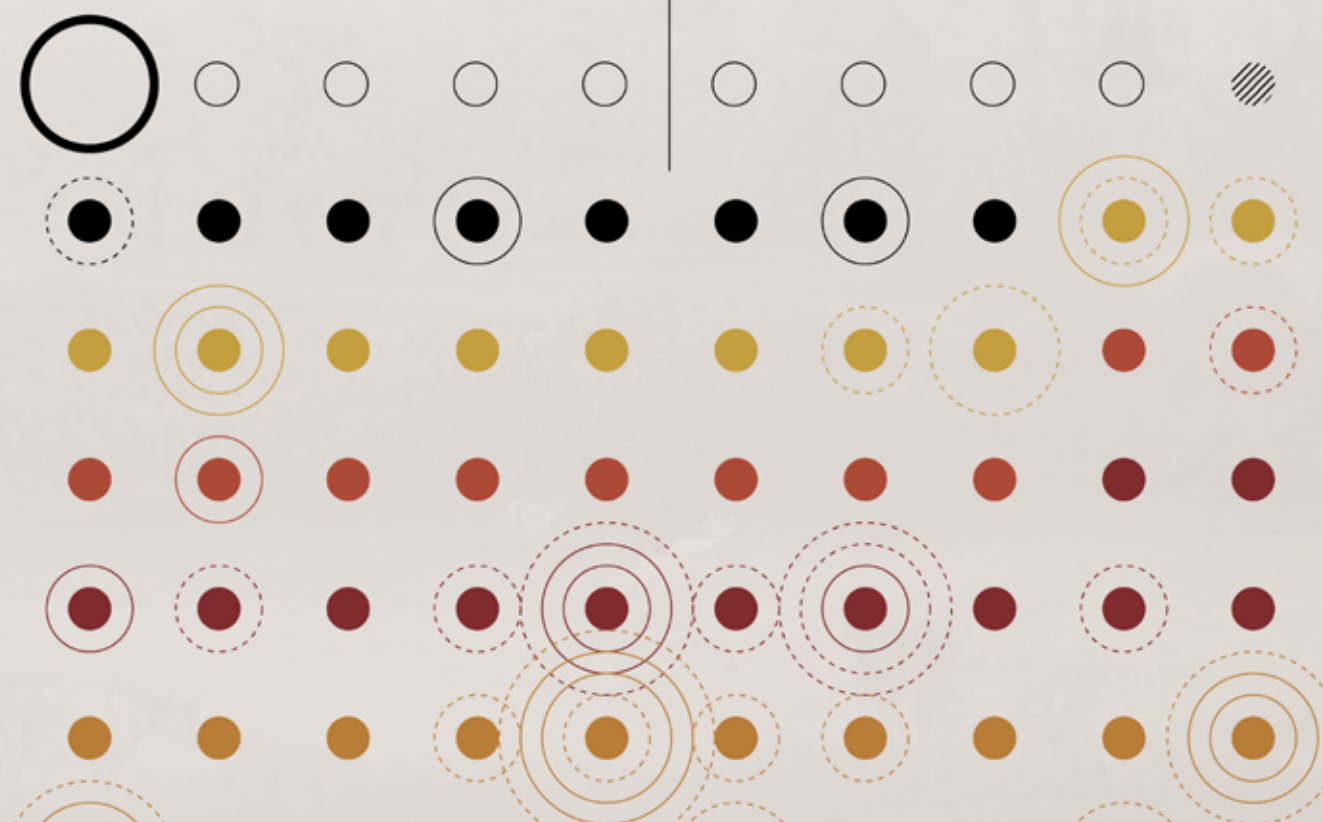
E2 P48-49 Spinoza equates the will with the intellect, states it is not free but necessarily determined (see E1).

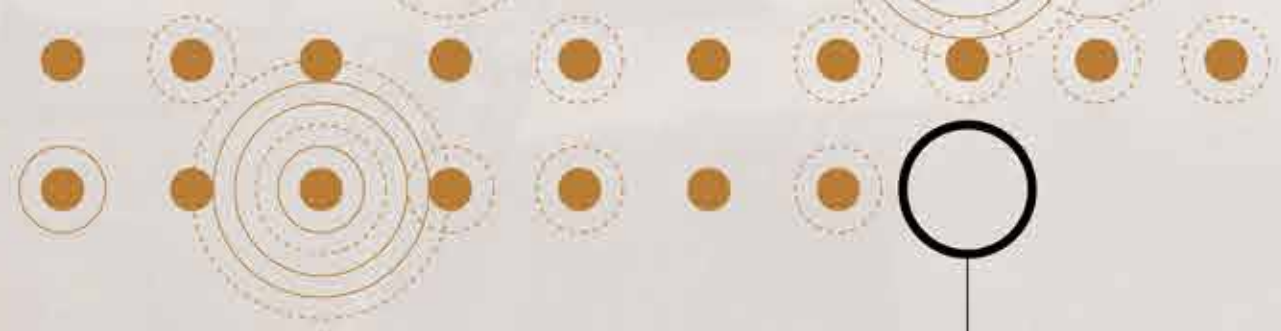
Preface

E4 Pref Spinoza reintroduces the concepts rejected in E1 App.

Recaps of E1 - E3

E4 P1-8: notably, naturalism place in nature, good-evil and affects (active vs suffering).





Appendix



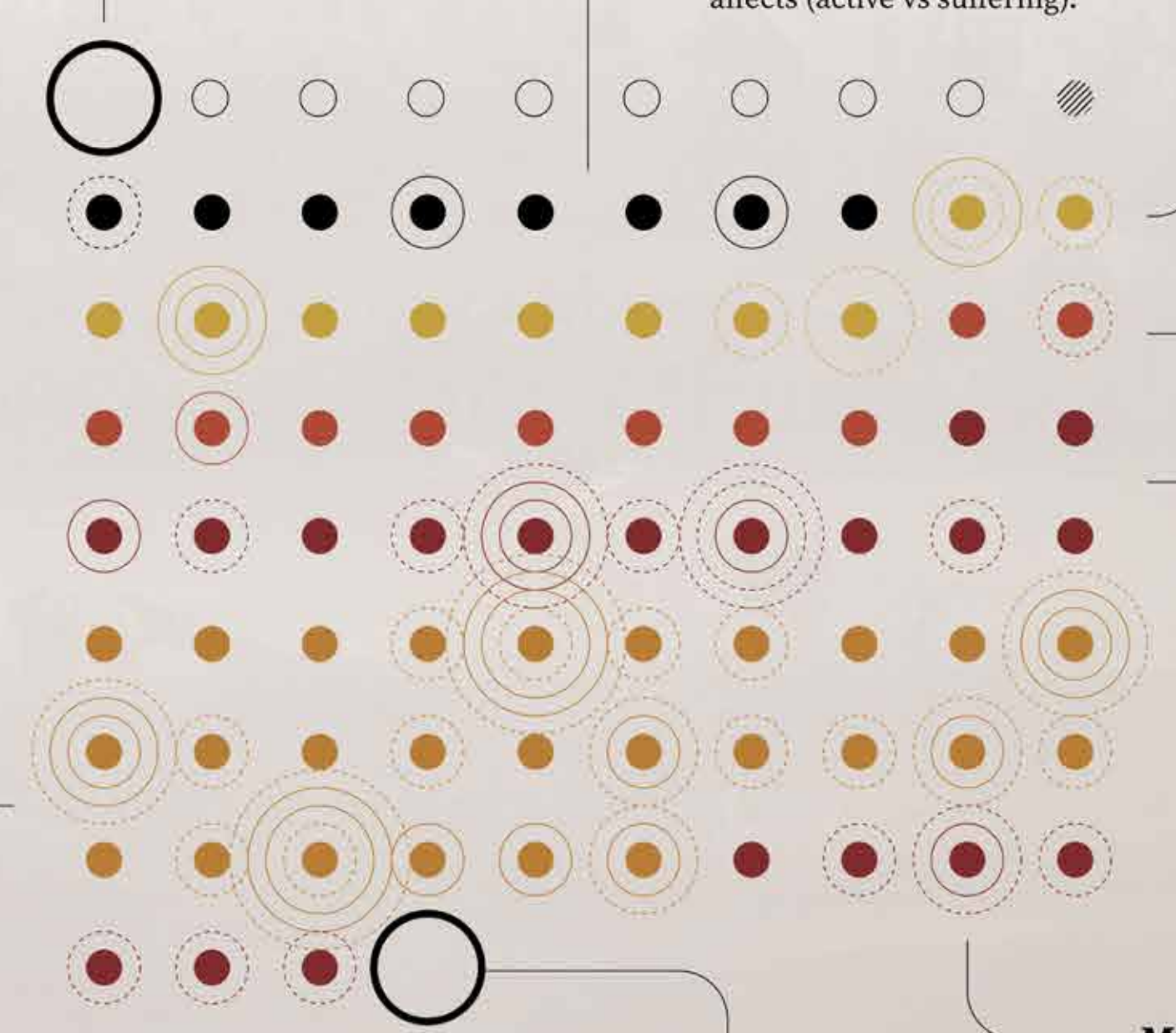
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Mechanics of interpersonal Affects

E3 P22-P57 Spinoza details the mechanics of interpersonal affects such as ambition, envy, approval...
E4 P41-P66 relates these to good and evil (thus: ethics)

IV. Human Bondage



- 4 depicting something non-existent but possible, vis-à-vis something contingent (E4 P12)
- 5 depicting something in the past, vis-à-vis something contingent and non-existent (E4 P13)

Virtue

E4 P19-28: virtue = power = self-preservation

Main ethical-political doctrines

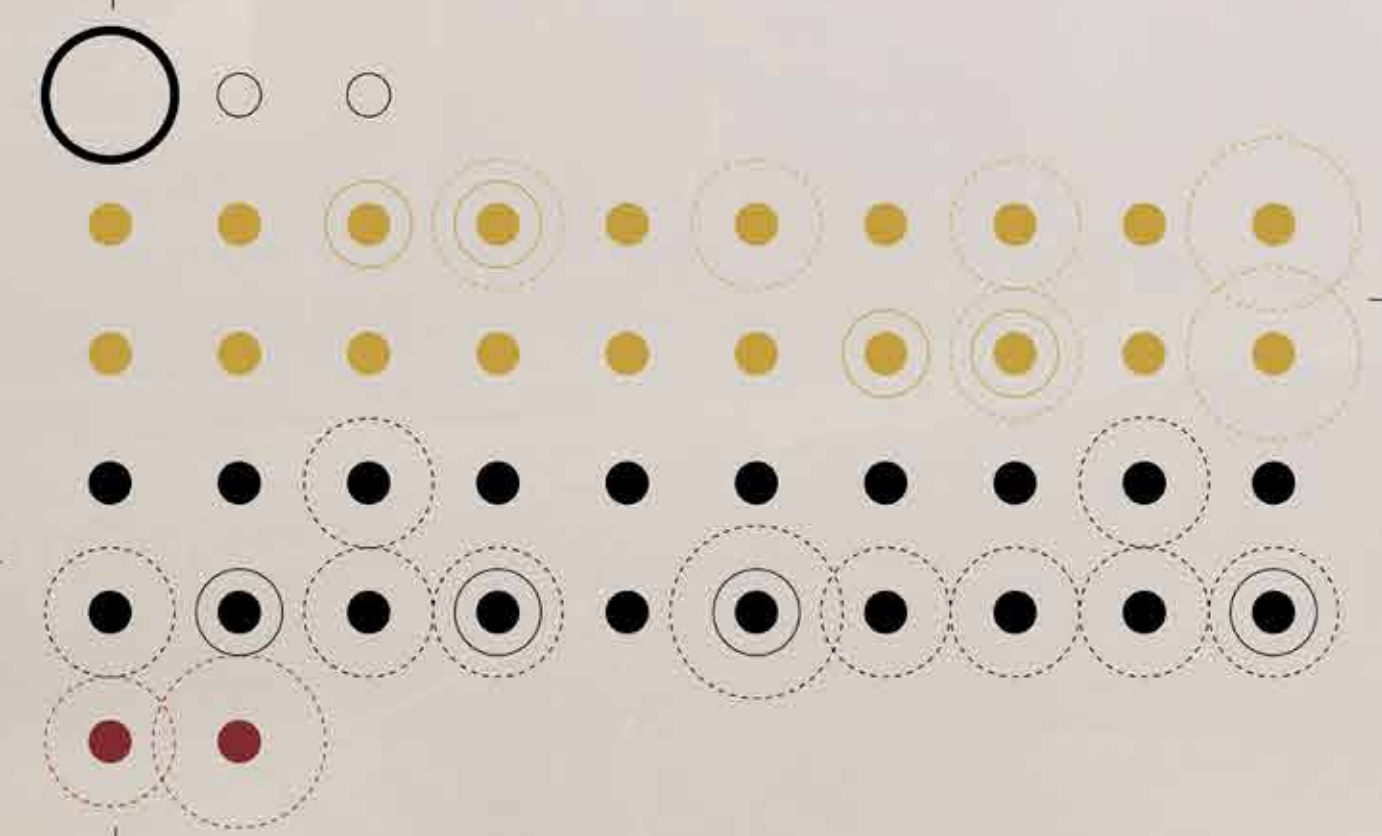
- E4 P29-40:** notably
- (Dis)agreeing bodies; passions
 - Rational self-interest / harmony
 - Taking care of the (human) body

Model of the "Free Man"

E4 P67-73 Spinoza provides some codes of conduct for the "free man"

Preface

E5 Pref the power of reason over the affects (contra Descartes, contra Stoicism)



V. Liberty

Spinoza on the after-life

Bennett (1983: 347): "an unmitigated and seemingly unmotivated disaster", "rubbish that causes others to write rubbish."

Lord (2010: 137): "an experiment in which Spinoza tests the capabilities of his own thinking."

Spinoza's final message

E5 P41 Living virtuously is also important for those who do not know the "rules of ethics" (*true religion*).

scholium: *true religion* is not hoping for rewards after death

E5 P42 "blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but is virtue itself; nor do we delight in blessedness because we restrain our lusts; but, on the contrary, because we delight in it, therefore are we able to restrain them."

scholium: "all things noble are as difficult as they are rare"

Spinoza's psychological guide (self-help)

E5 P20S "[T]he power of the mind over the affects consists..."

- 1 in knowledge of the affects - naming them, knowing how they work, etc.
- 2 in separating the affect from the (confusedly perceived) thought of an external cause
- 3 in duration, *time heals all wounds*: affects related to understanding triumph passive ones in time
- 4 in building ("nourishing") a worldview relating affects to "common properties of things [reason] or to God [universe]"
- 5 in connecting affects in your brain to other affects in your brain - using images! (see E5 P10-14).

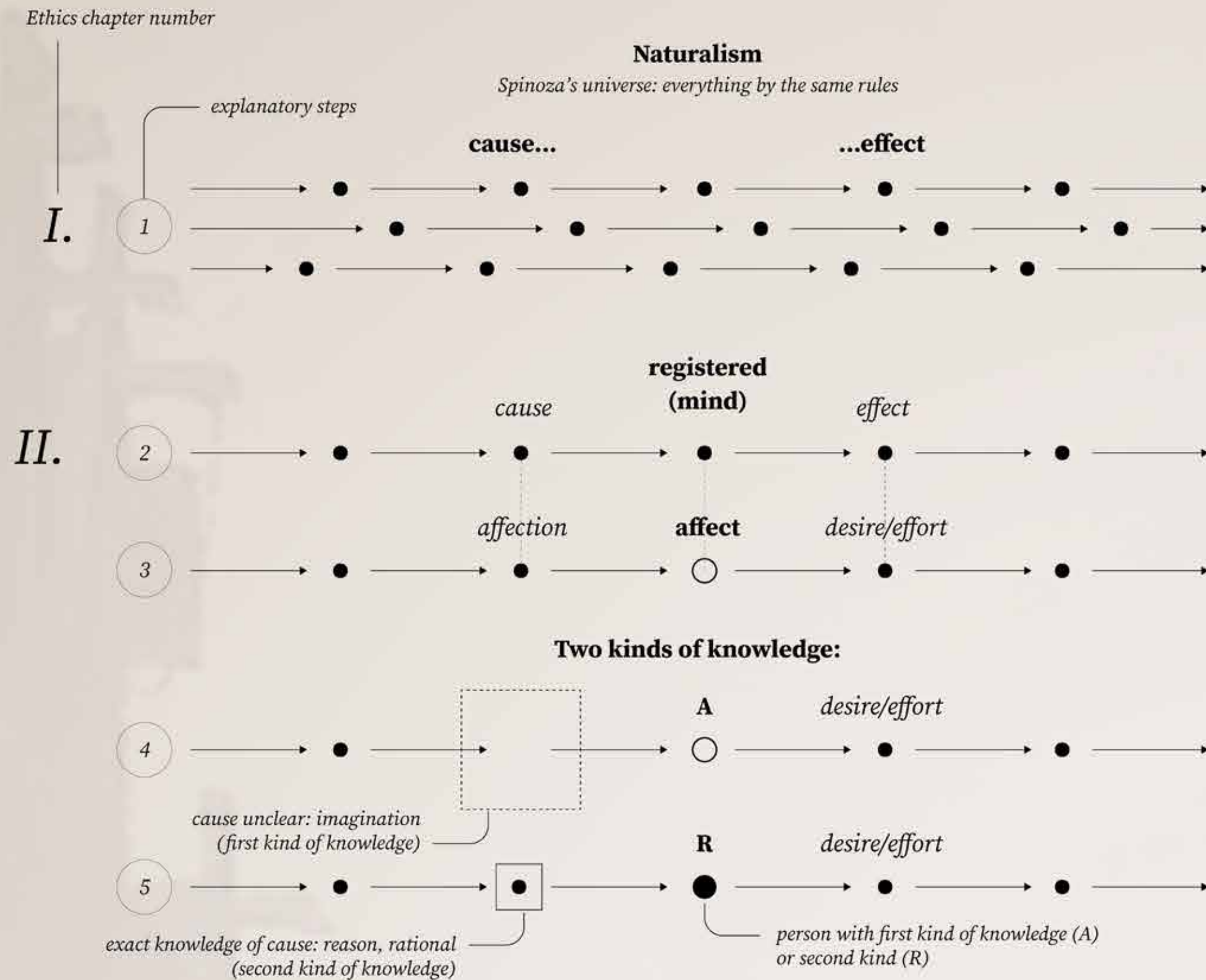
Appendix

E4 App Spinoza's ethical-political framework "true method to life" In **32** heuristics!

- 1 All our efforts or desires follow from the necessity of our nature...
- 3 Our actions, that is to say, those desires which are determined by man's power or reason are always good; the others may be good as well as evil.
- 7 ...if [a person] be placed amongst individuals who agree with [their] nature, [their] power of action will by that very fact be assisted and supported.
- 9 Nothing, therefore, (...) is more profitable to man for the preservation of his being and the enjoyment of a rational life than a man who is guided by reason.
- 12 Above all things is it profitable to men to form communities and to unite themselves (...) do whatever may tend to strengthen their friendships.
- 13 to accomplish this, skill and watchfulness are required; for men are changeable...
- 26 excepting men, we know no individual things in nature in whose mind we can take pleasure (...) preserve it or destroy it in accordance with its various uses...
- 32 But human power is very limited, and is infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes (...) Therefore in so far as we understand these things properly will the efforts of the better part of us agree with the order of the whole of nature.

Ethical-Political Framework

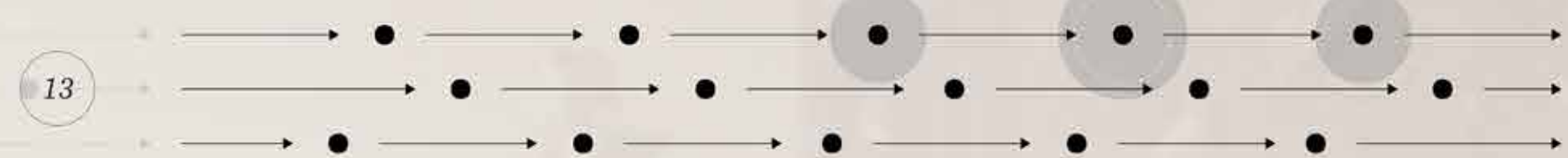
THEORY OF ETHICS



“Bridge”: from Ethics to Politics

H. 3

everything in nature: helping or hindering (power fluctuations)



“So far as men live in conformity with the guidance of **reason**, in so far only do they always necessarily **agree in nature**” (E3 P36)

Homo homini Deus

“In so far as men are **subject to passions**, they cannot be said to agree in nature” (E4 P32).

“In so far as men are agitated by affects which are passions **can they be contrary to one another**” (E4 P34).



H. 1



E3 and E4: rules of interspers. affects

Ethical-Political Fram

THEORY OF ETHICS

Ethics chapter number

I.

1

explanatory steps

Naturalism

Spinoza's universe: everything by the same rules

cause...

...effect

II.

2

registered (mind)

cause

effect

affection

affect

desire/effort

3

+

“Bridge”:

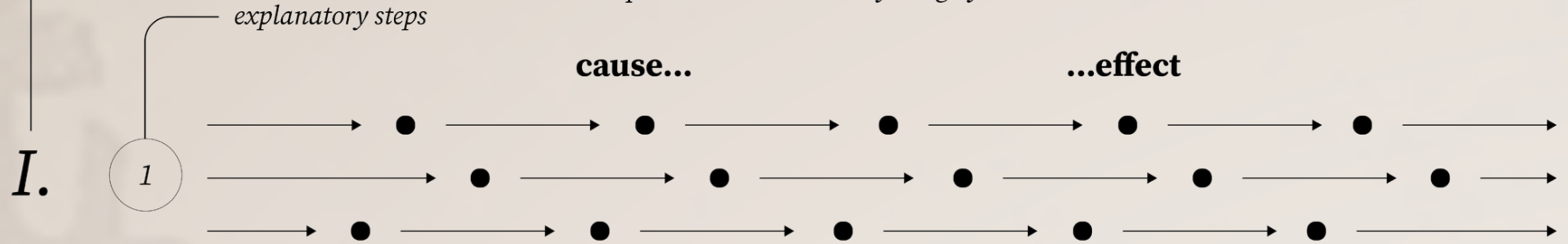
13

“So far as me
guidance of r
always neces

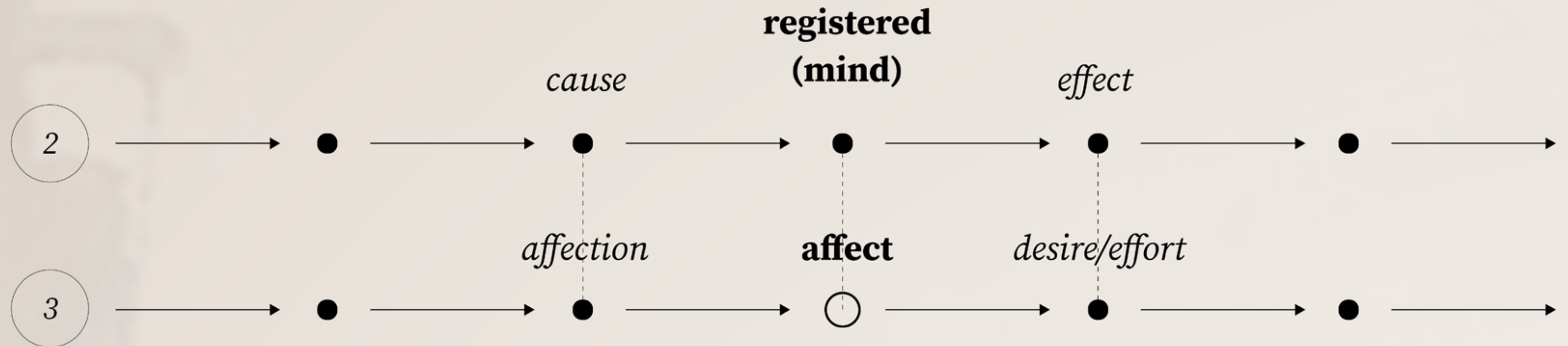
Homo homini

Naturalism

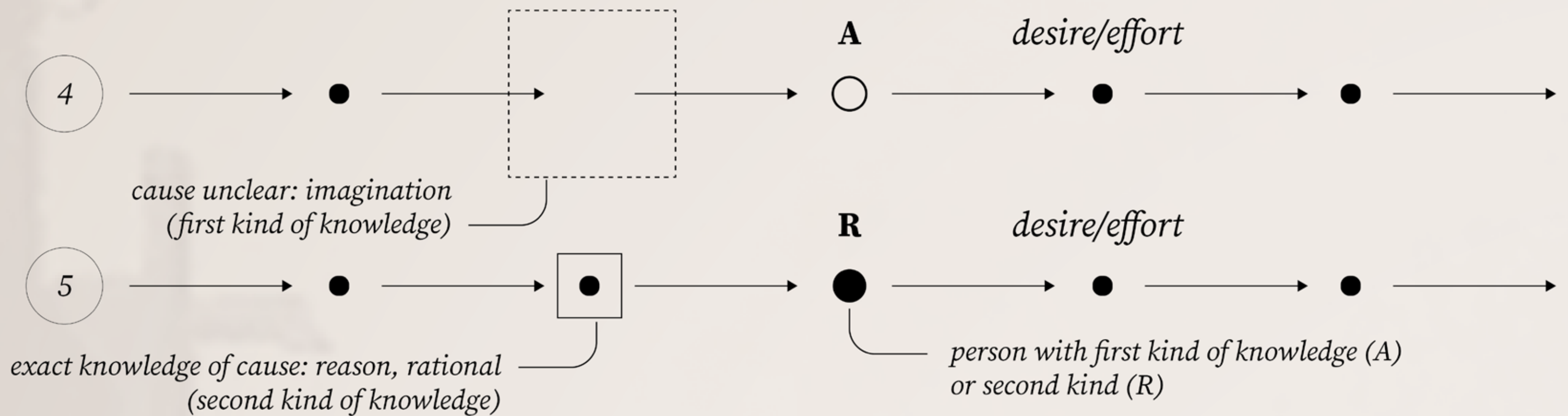
Spinoza's universe: everything by the same rules



II.



Two kinds of knowledge:



13

“So far as me
guidance of r
always neces

Homo homini

14

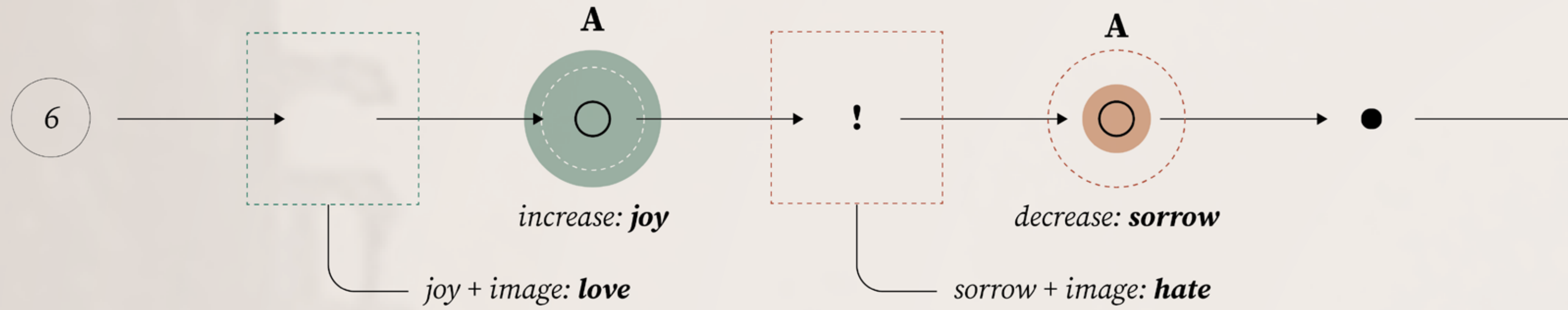
H. 1

15

III.

Registering Affects

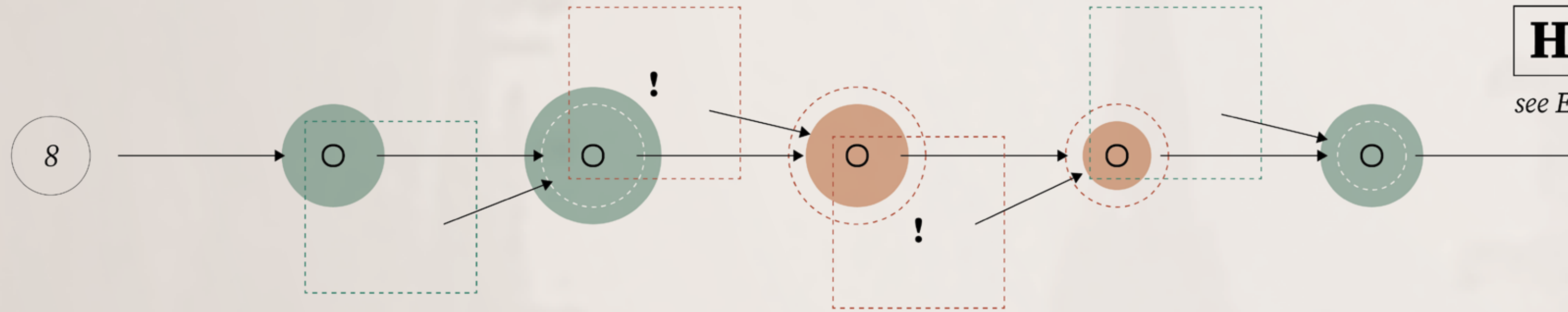
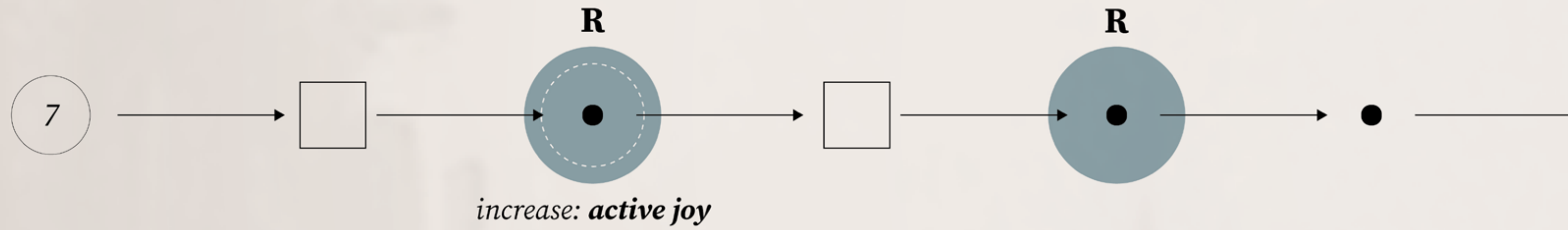
Affects are registered as increase or decrease in power (conatus)



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Reason is empowering

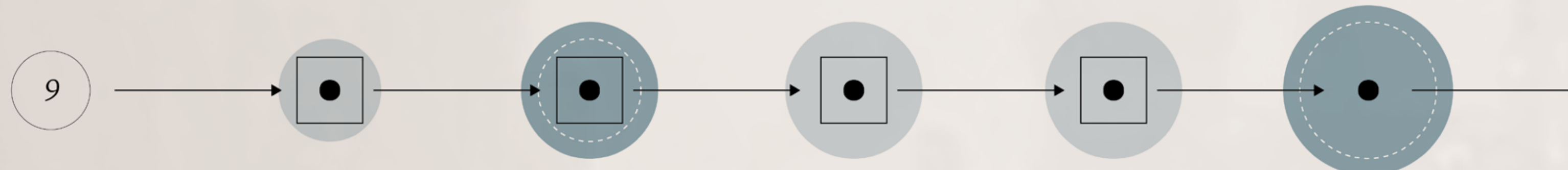
exact knowledge; knowing exactly what to do



H. 8

see E4 App.30

16



*"All noble things
[a]s the wise
foolish man h*

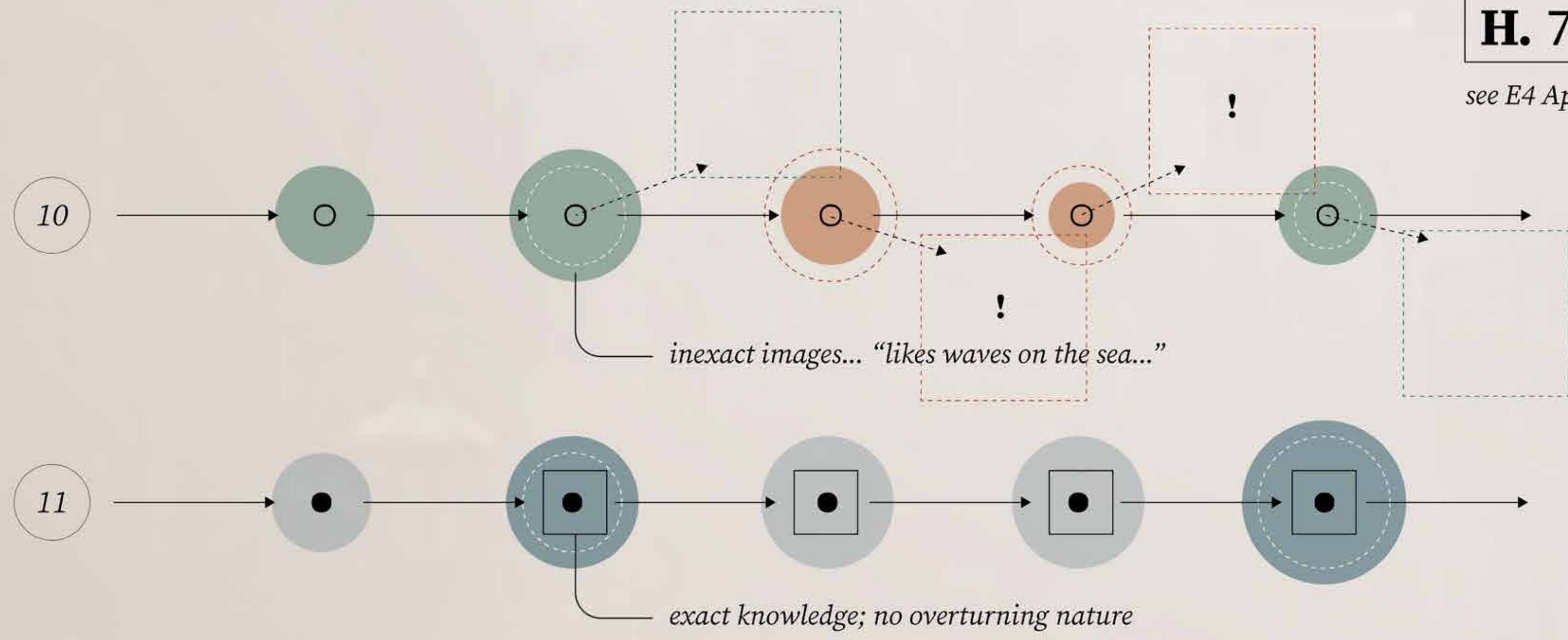
IV.

Images

"overturning nature" i.e. confusing cause and effect for aims (see also E1 app.)

17

H. 7
see E4 App.28



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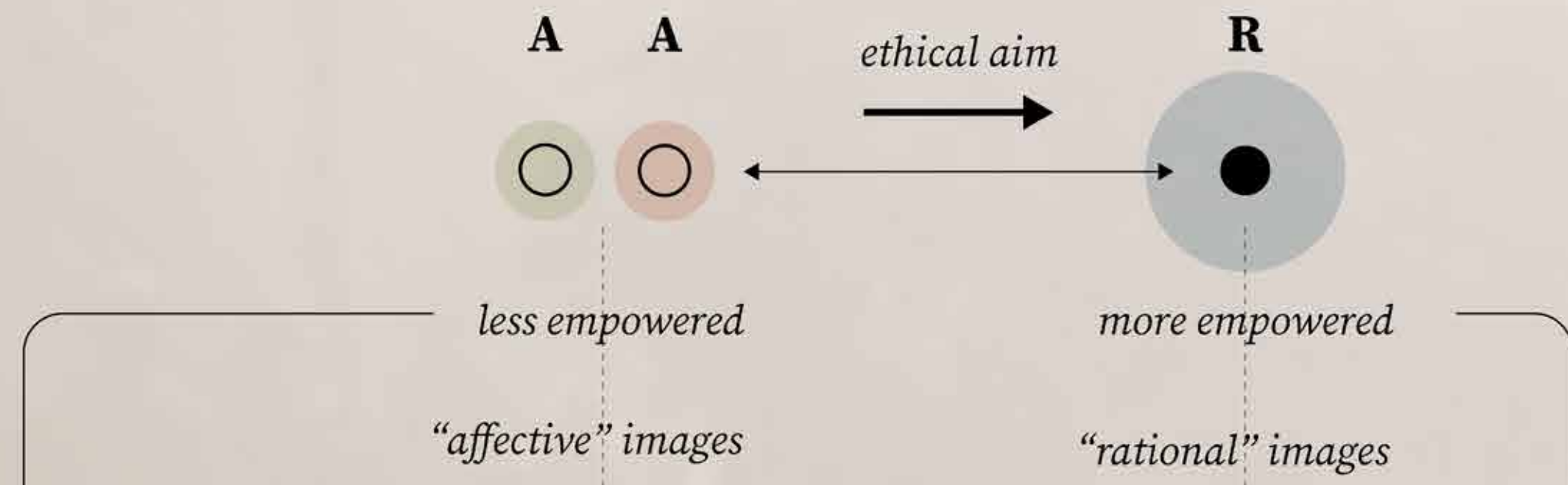
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Blessedness

rational life: peace of mind (E4 App.4)

V.

12



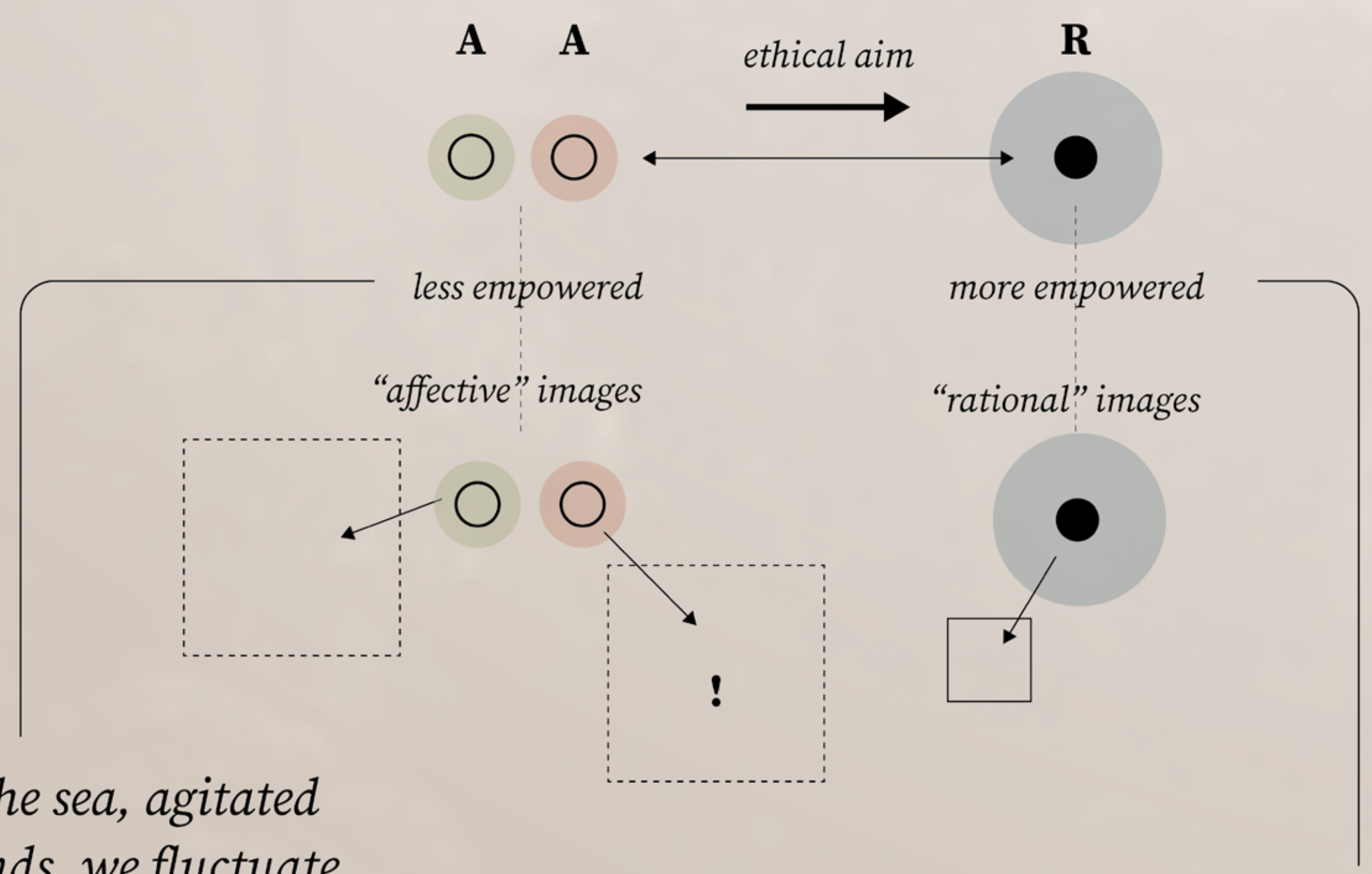
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V. 12

Blessedness

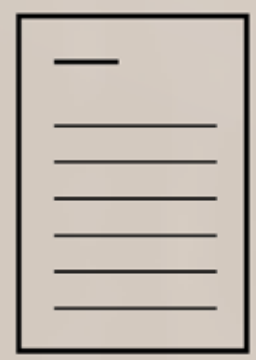
rational life: peace of mind (E4 App.4)



“like waves of the sea, agitated by contrary winds, we fluctuate in our ignorance of our future and destiny” (E3 P59S).

“...mastered by fortune, in whose power he is, so that he is often forced to follow the worse, although he sees the better before him.” (E4 pref).

H.11



Spinoza's psychological guide (self-help)

E5 P20S “[T]he power of the mind over the affects consists in...” five tactics!

H. 9

H.12

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al Framework

“Bridge”: from Ethics to Politics

H. 3

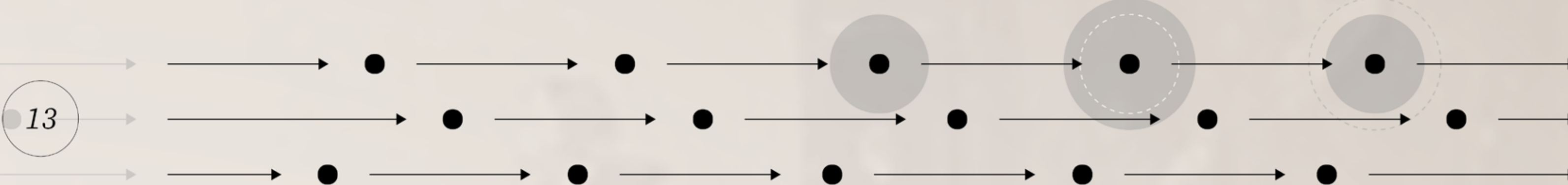
everything in nature: helping
or hindering (power fluctuations)

“So far as men live in conformity with the guidance of **reason**, in so far only do they always necessarily **agree in nature**” (E3 P36)

Homo homini Deus

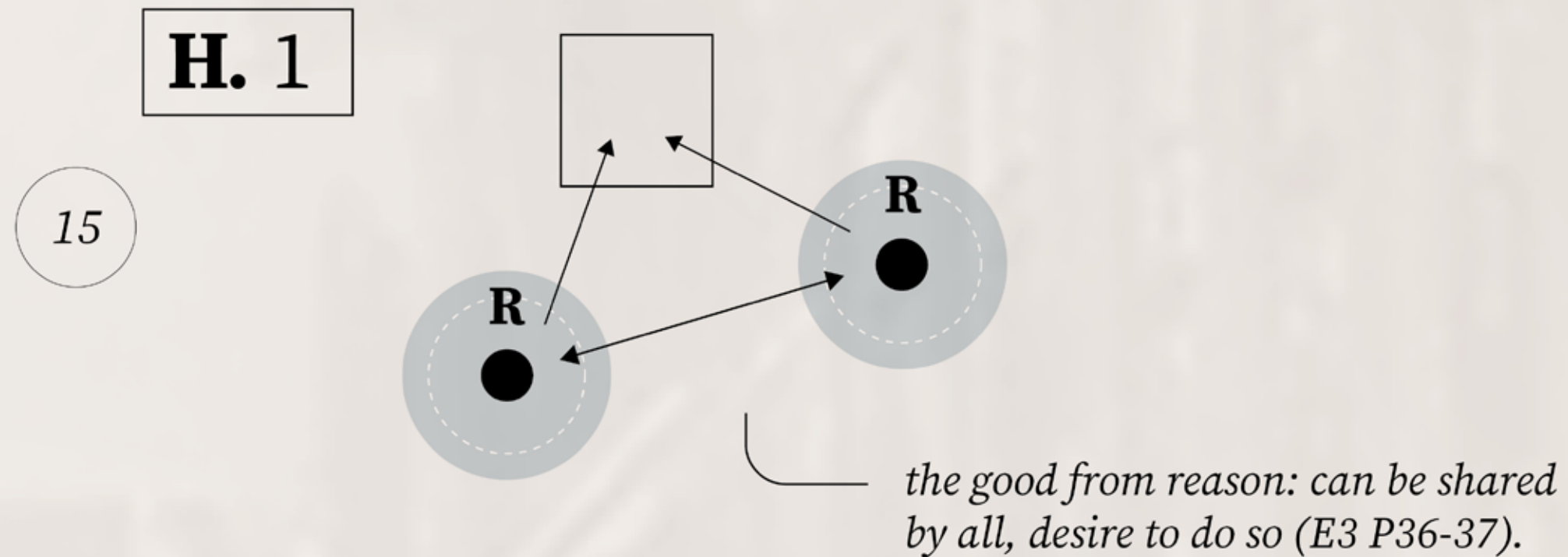
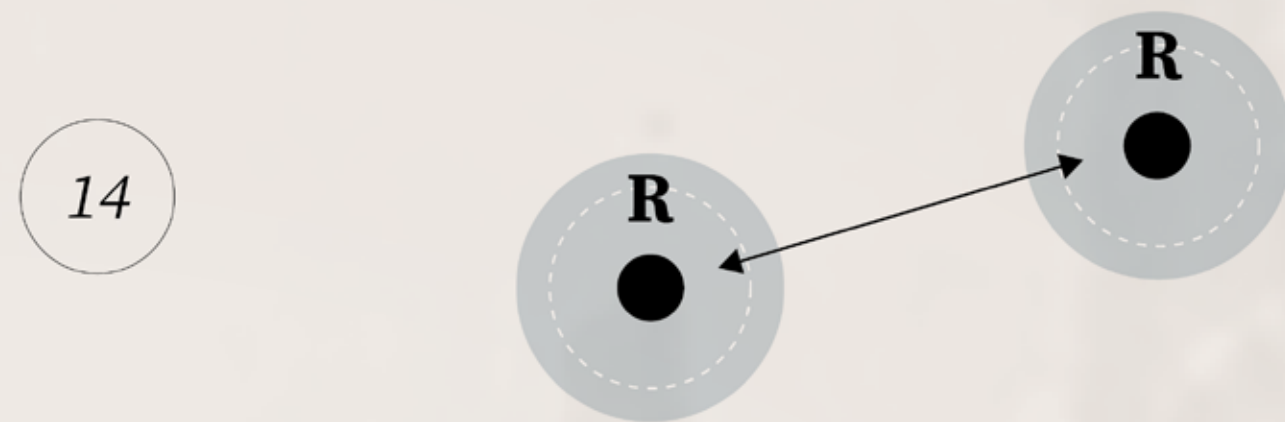
“In so far as men are **subject to passions**, they cannot be said to agree in nature” (E4 P32).

“In so far as men are agitated by affects which are passions **can they be contrary to one another**” (E4 P34).



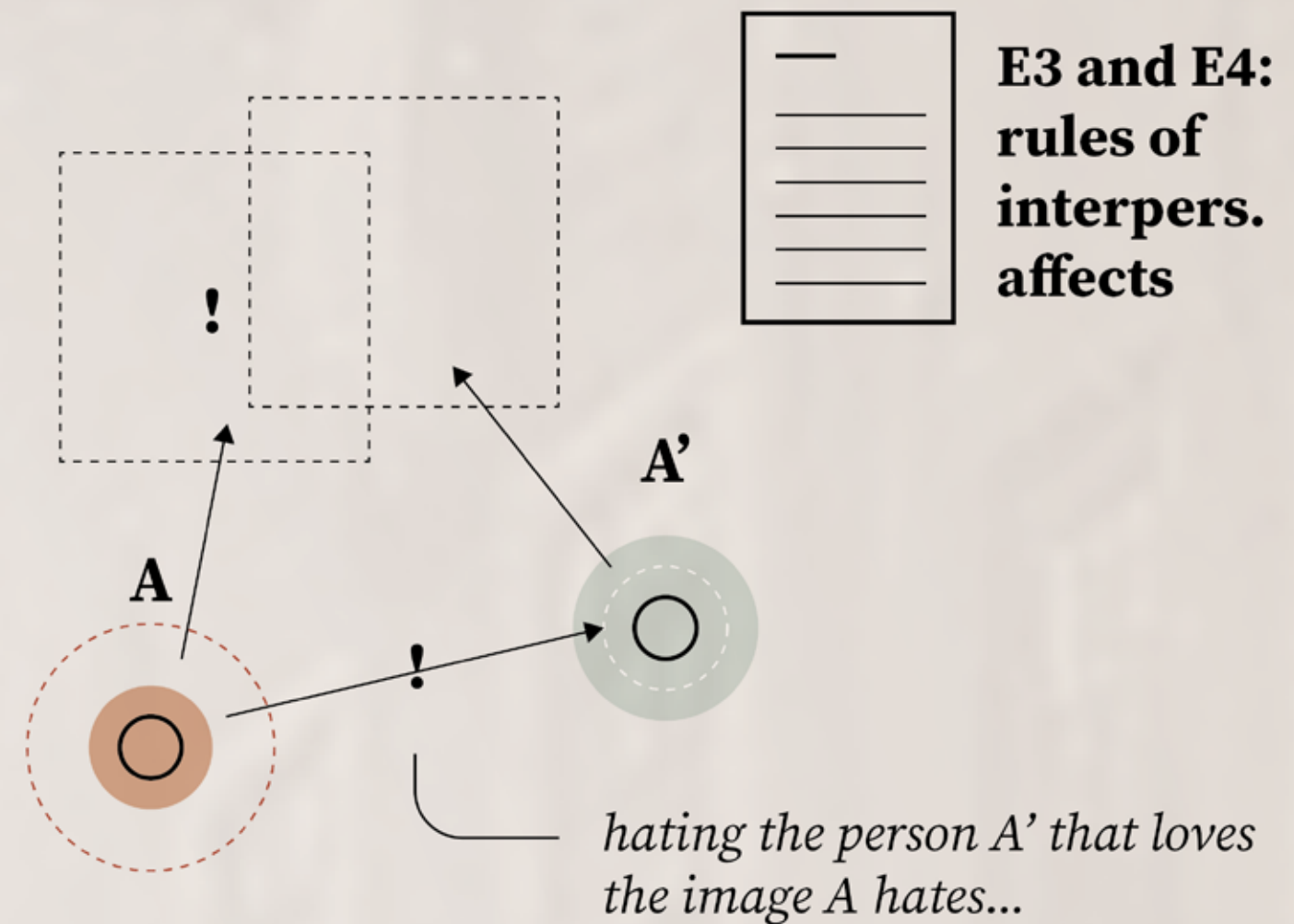
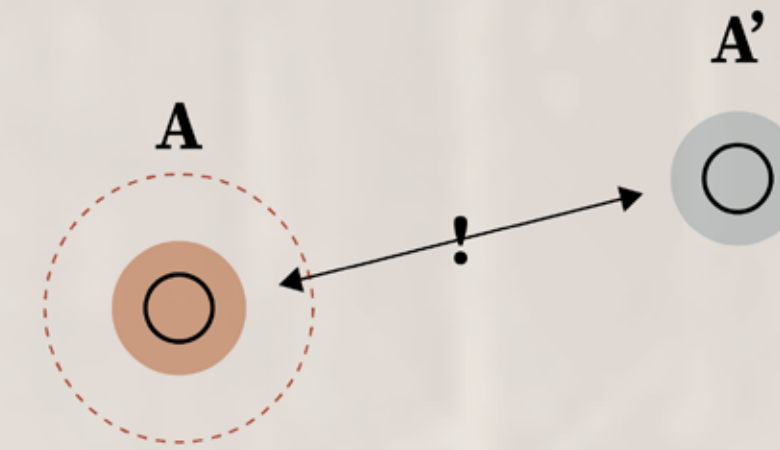
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Homo homini Deus



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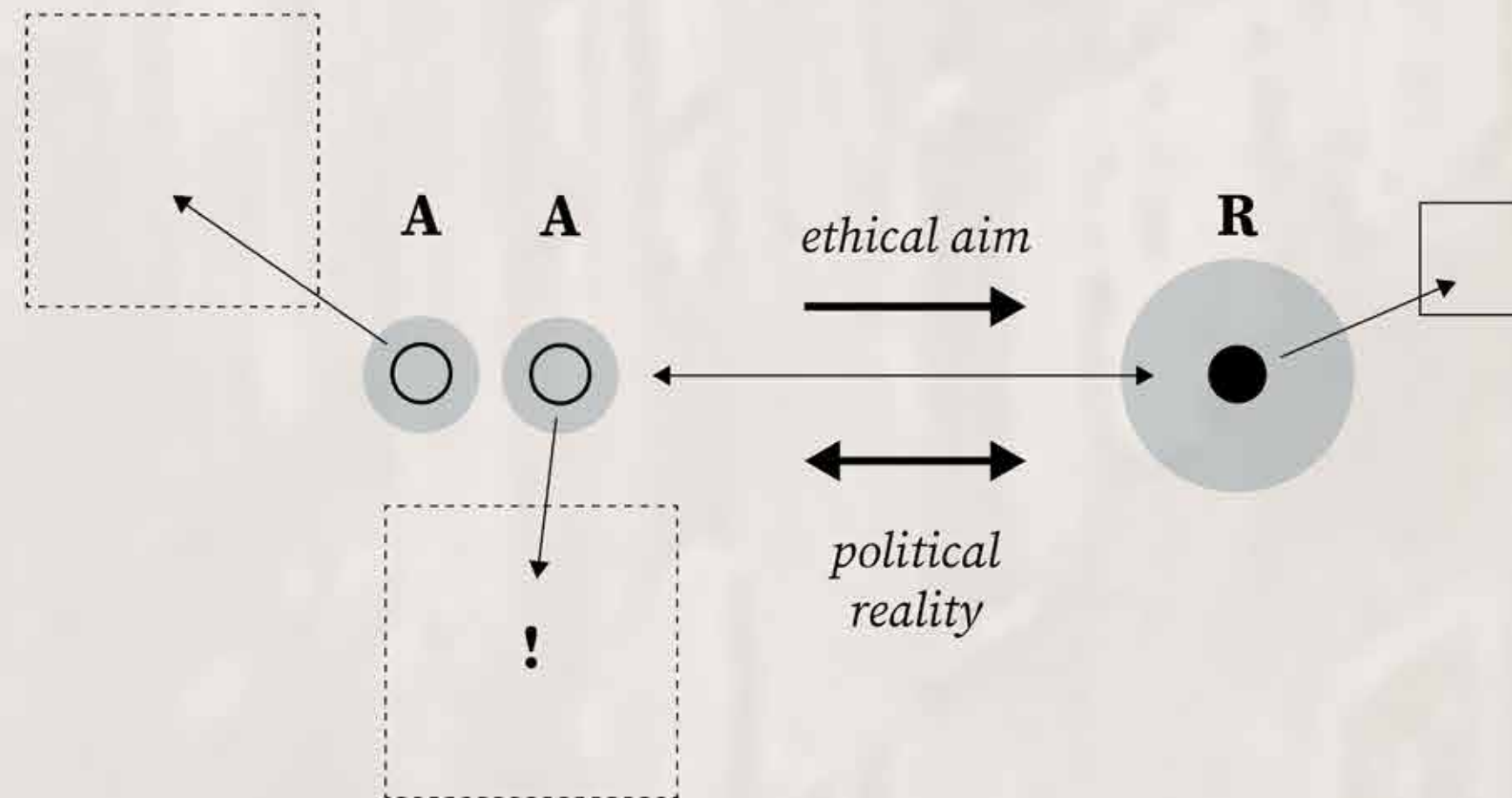


the good from reason: can be shared by all, desire to do so (E3 P36-37). hating the person A' that loves the image A hates...

POLITICAL THEORY

No utopias

Passions are a (major) fact of life. No point in lamenting it (E3 Pref).



16

H. 8

see E4 App.30

H. 4

H. 6

“All noble things are as difficult as they are rare” (E5 P42S) / “the road, which reason herself points out, is very steep” (TP 1.4)

“[a]s the wise man has sovereign right to do all that reason dictates, or to live according to the laws of reason, so also the ignorant and foolish man has sovereign right to do all that desire dictates, or to live according to the laws of desire” (TTP 16.3)

Strategies

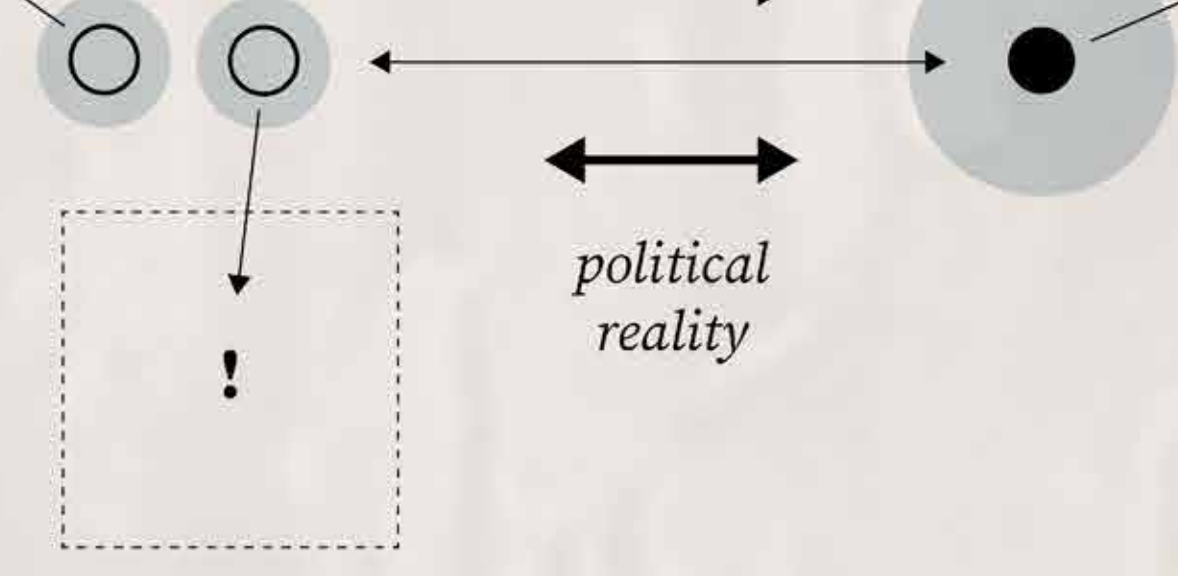
17

H. 8

see E4 App.30

H. 4

H. 6



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17

Strategies

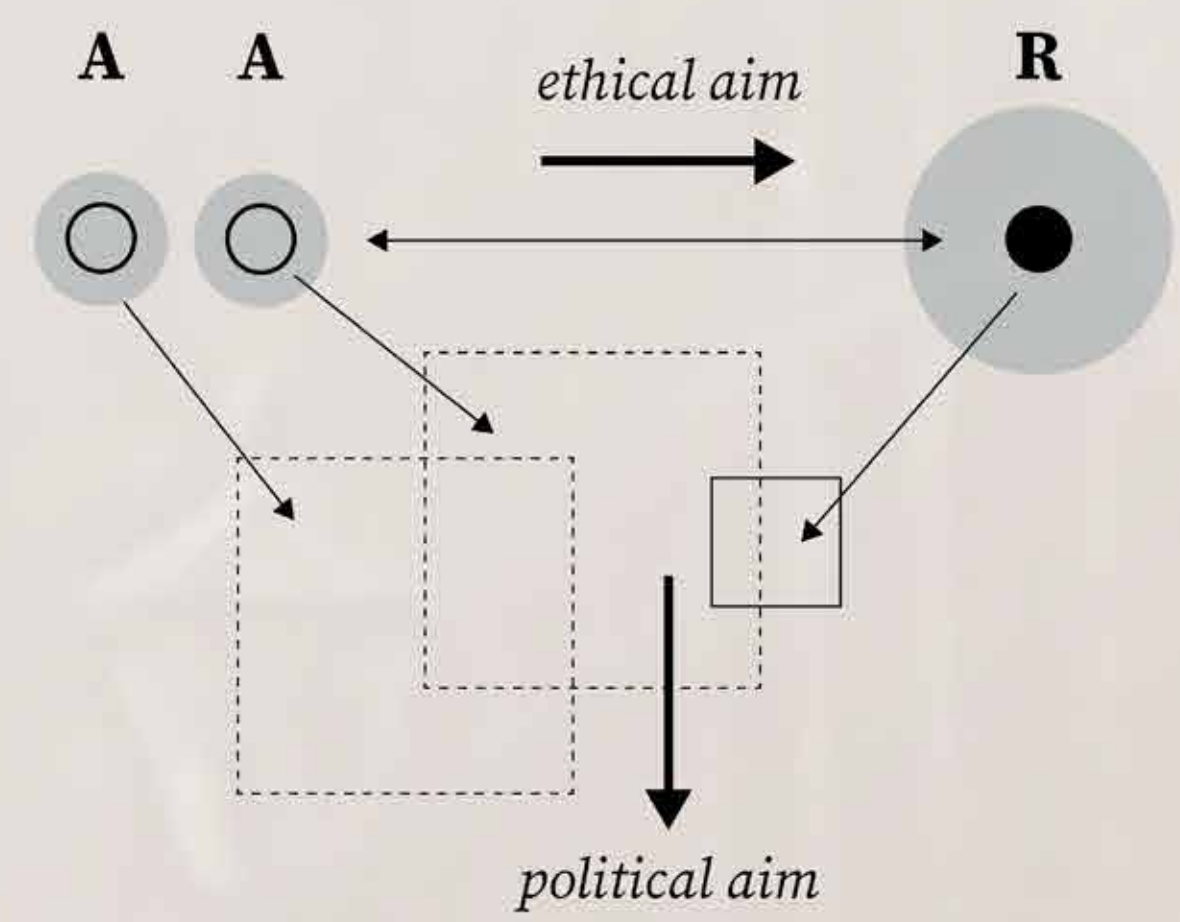
strong, harmonious states, without relying on personal virtue

H. 7

see E4 App.28

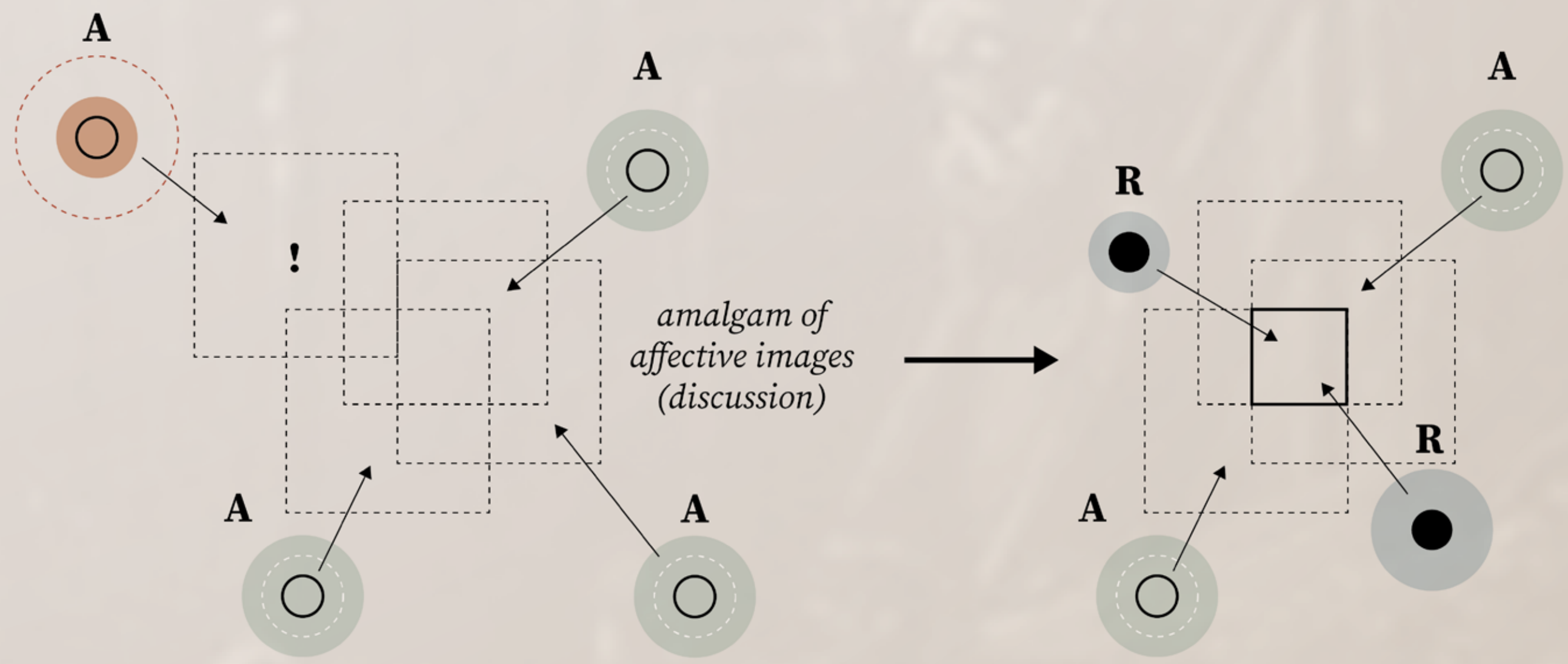
A Strategy: align passions with reason (TP 10.6)

H. 5



B Strategy: democratic deliberation (9.14).

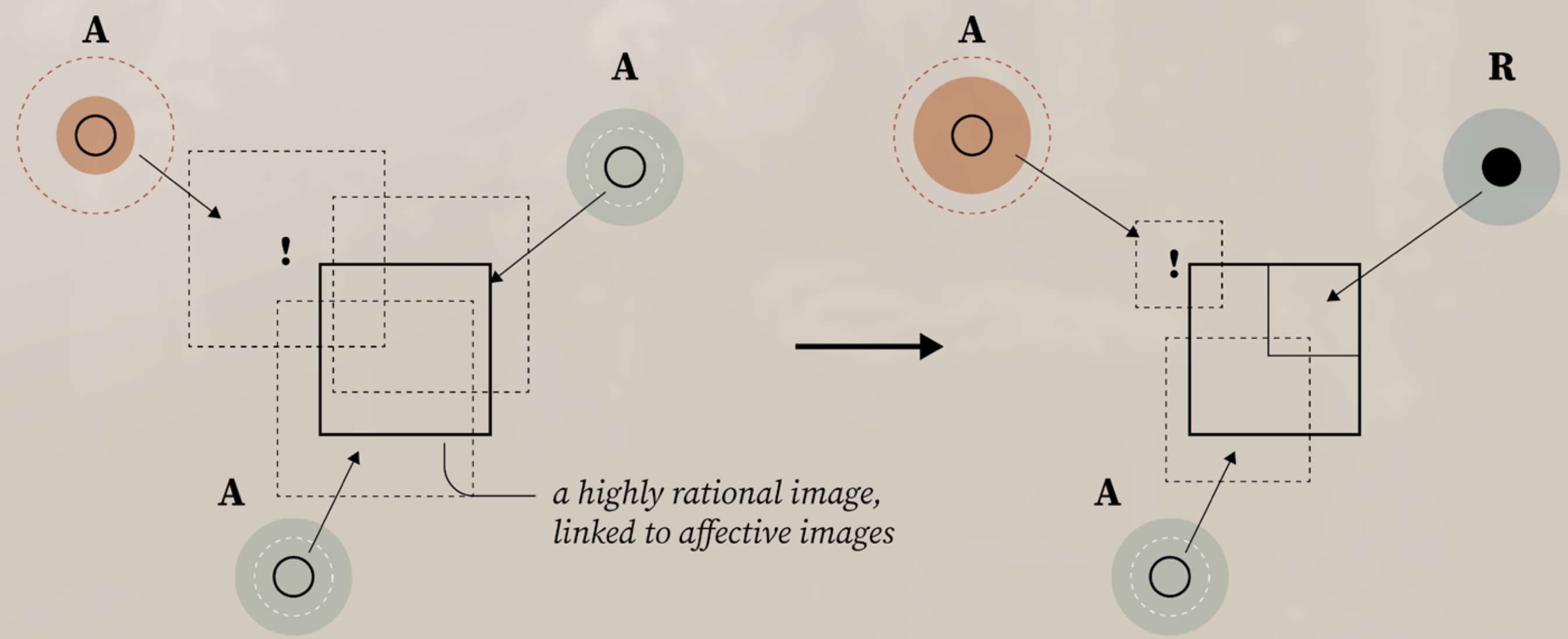
H.10



"...they at last discover [that] which they want, which all approve, but no one would have thought of in the first instance."

C Strategy: institutions, cultural, images, etc. that mitigate the passions (virtuous political leadership).

H. 2



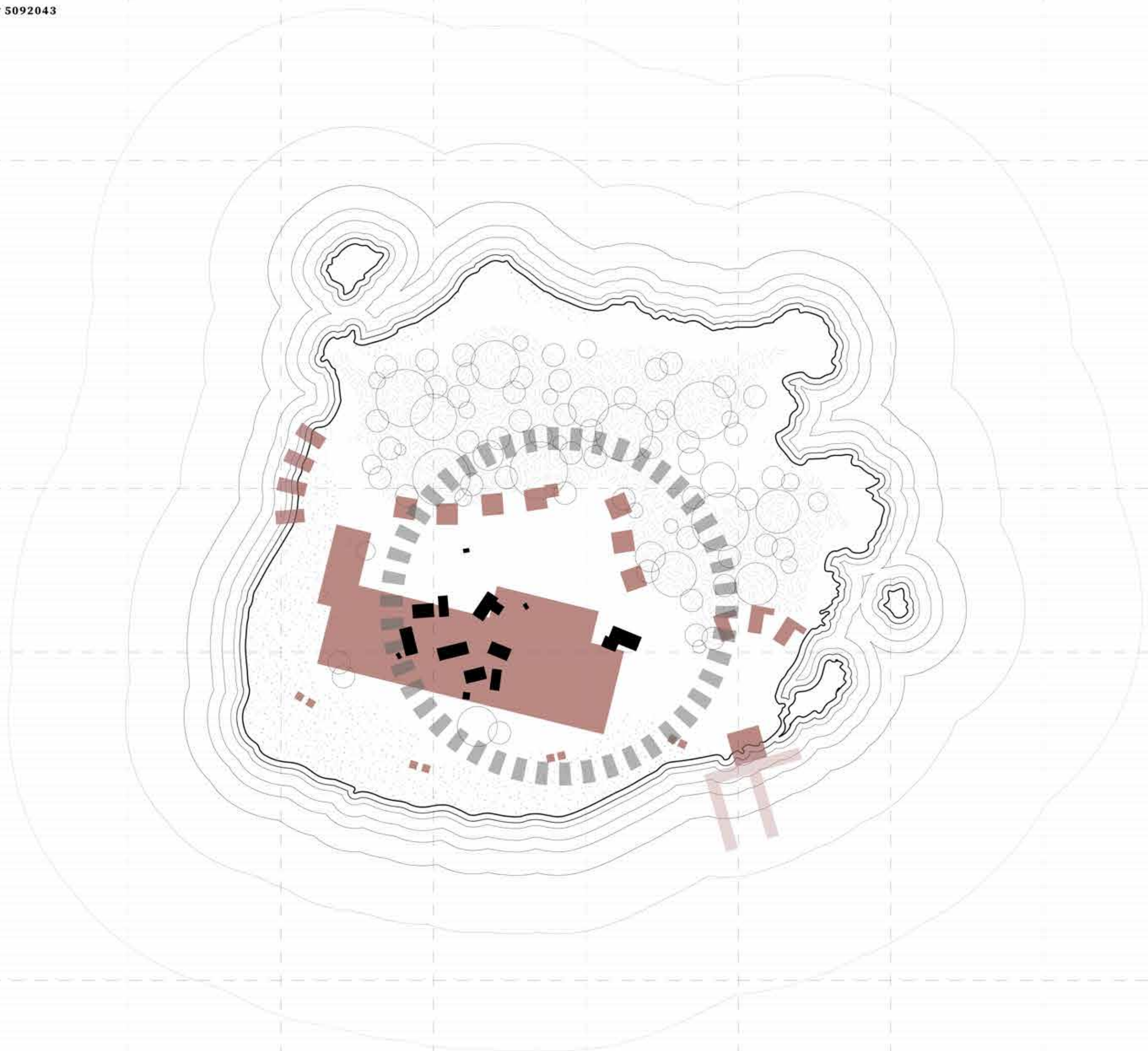
le (self-help)

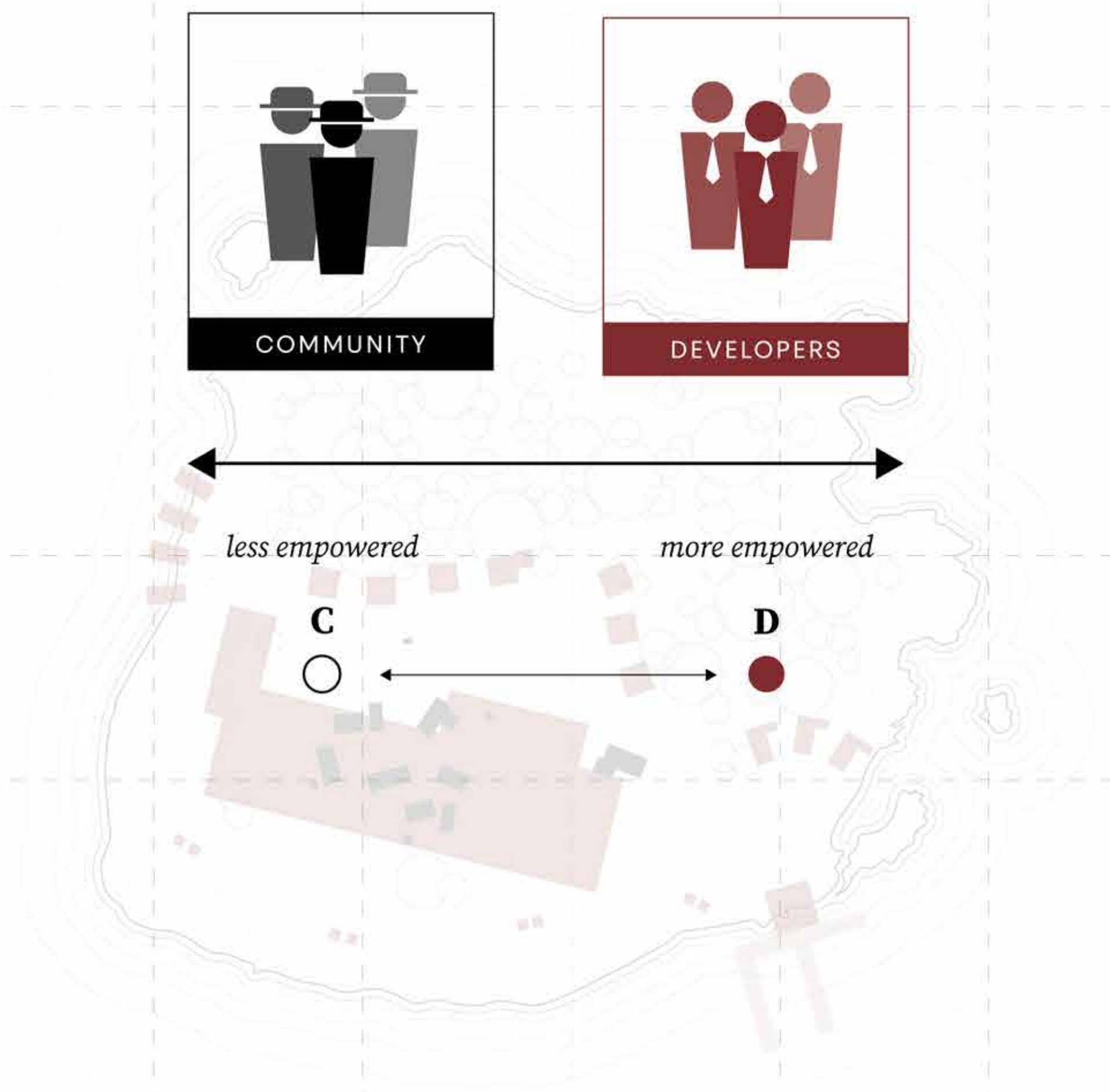
H. 9

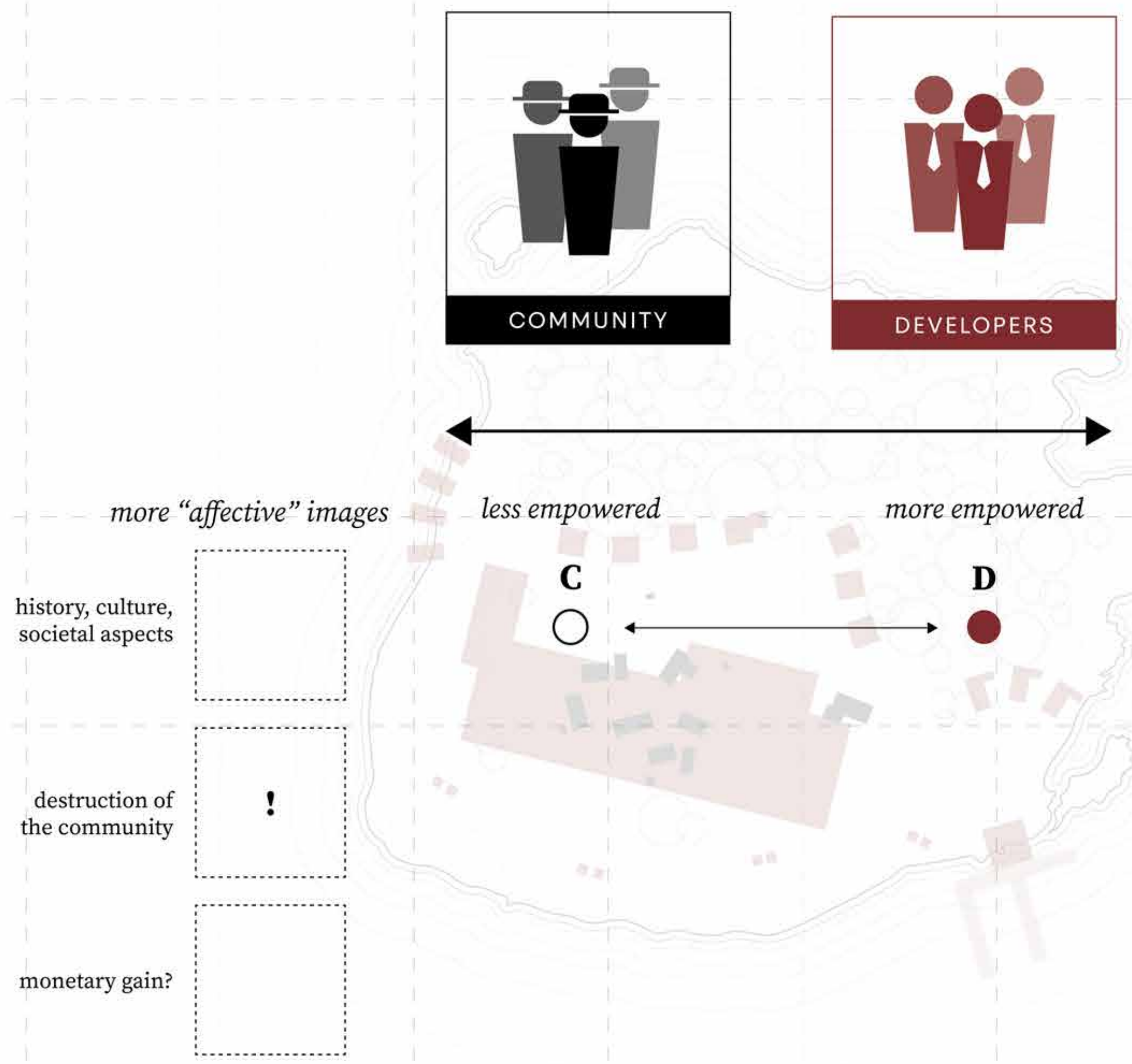
H.12

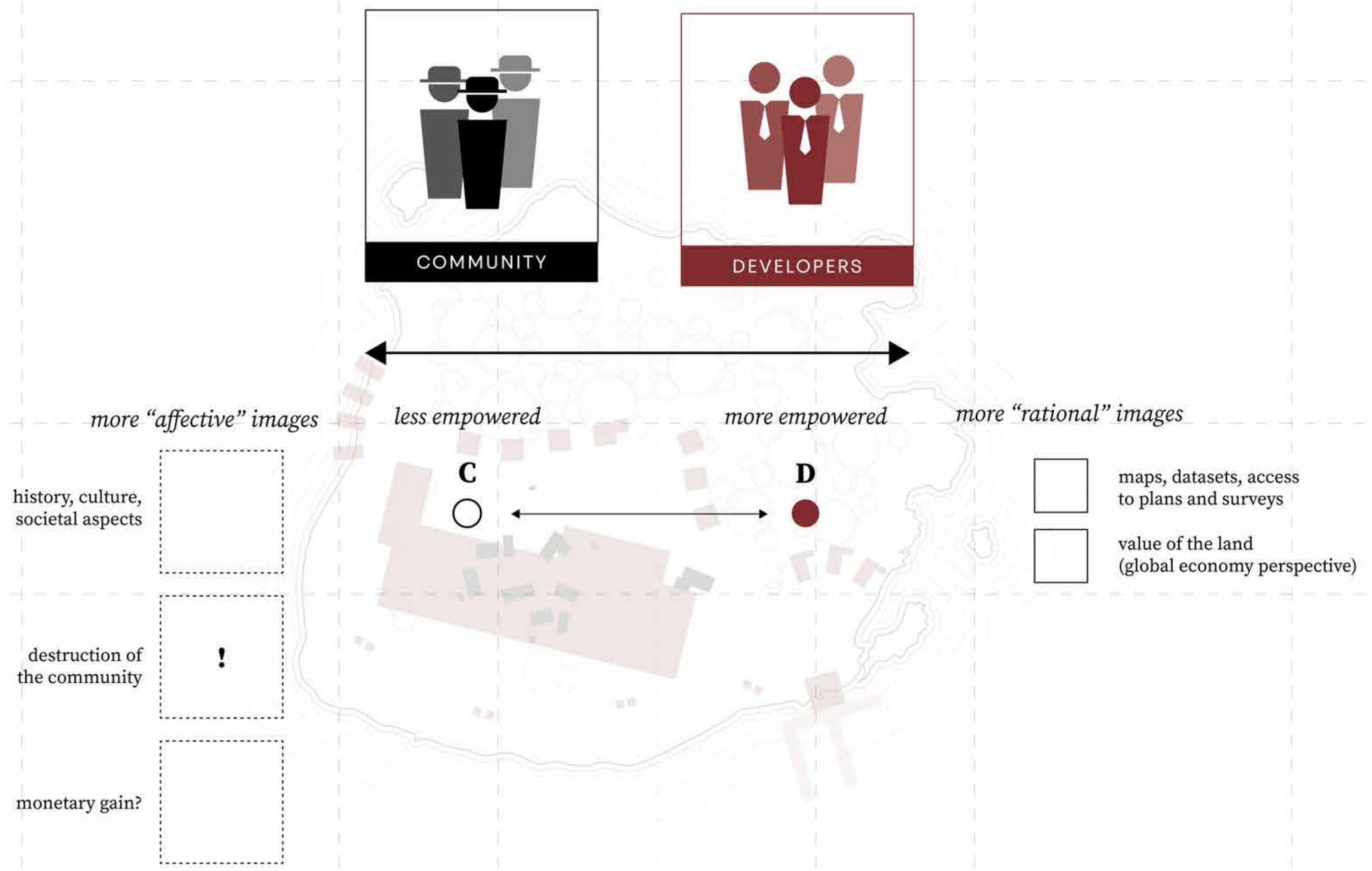


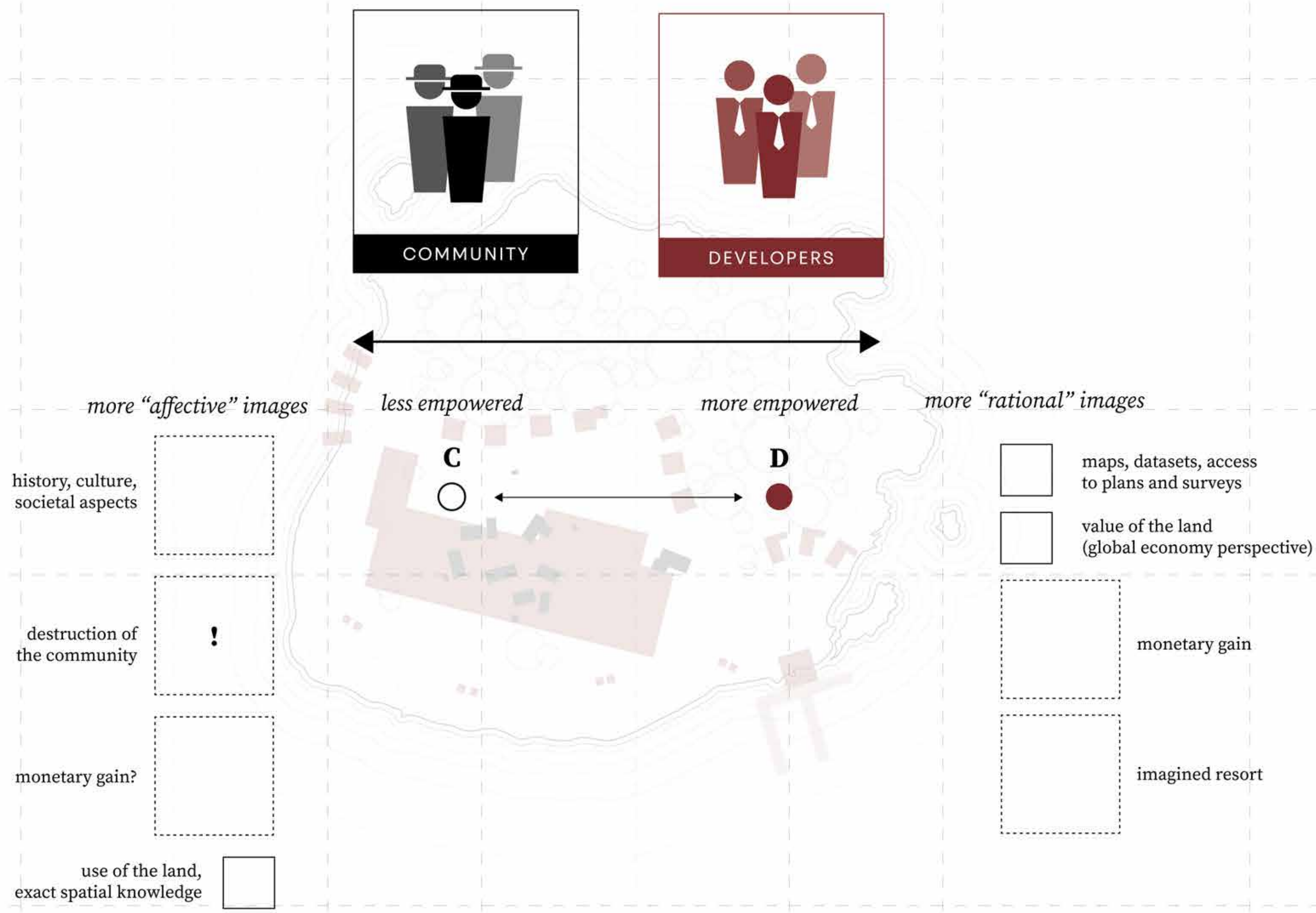
Back to the Island...



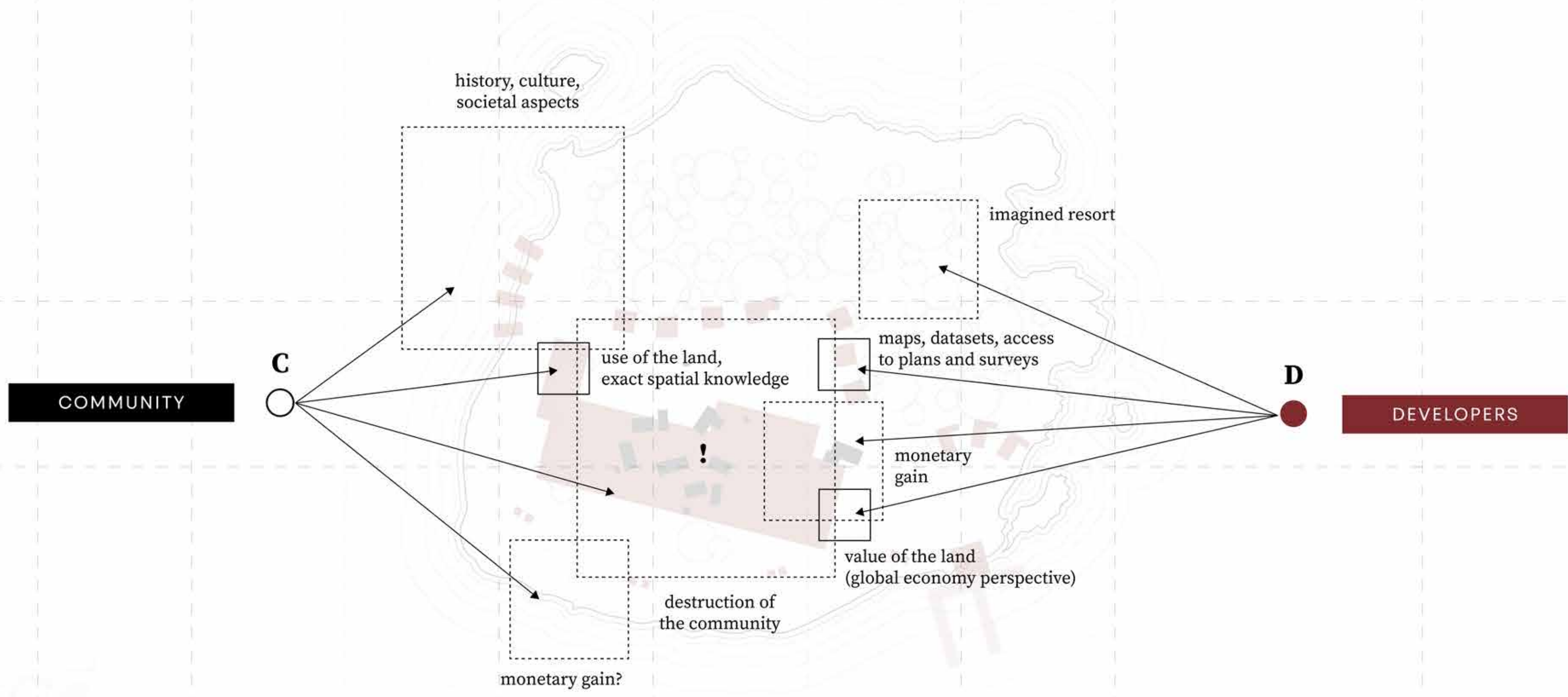




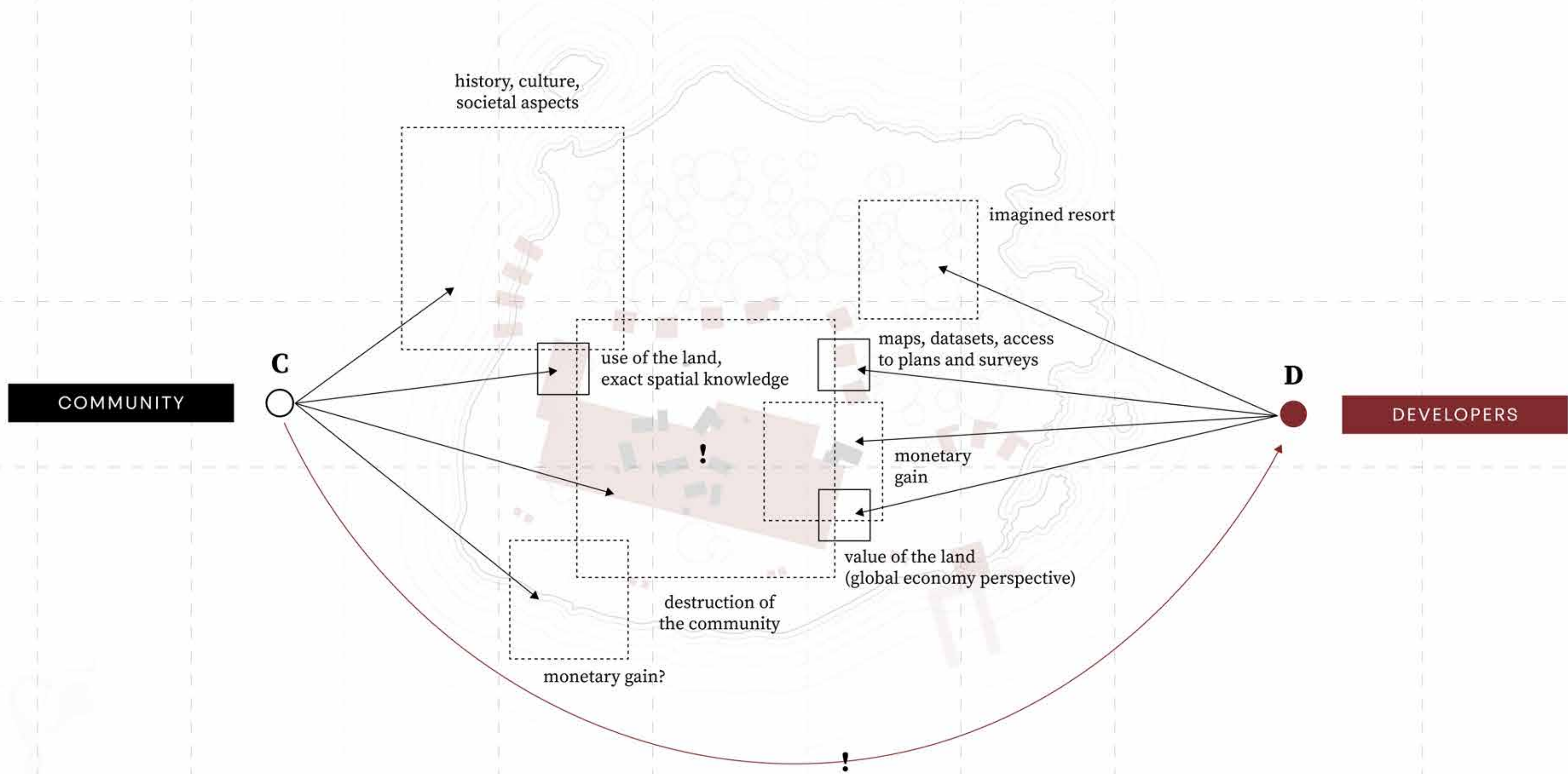




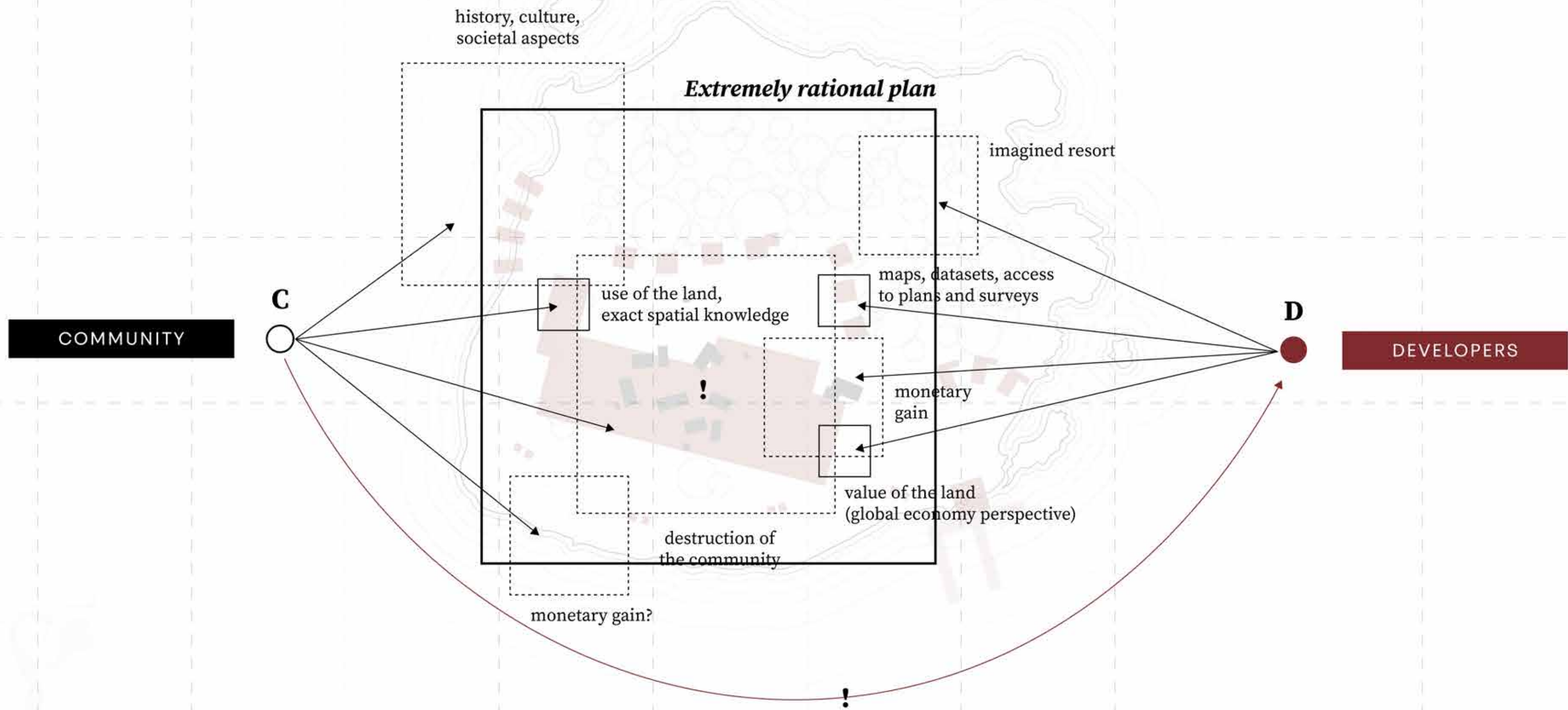
Mapping the situation: ethical-political dilemma

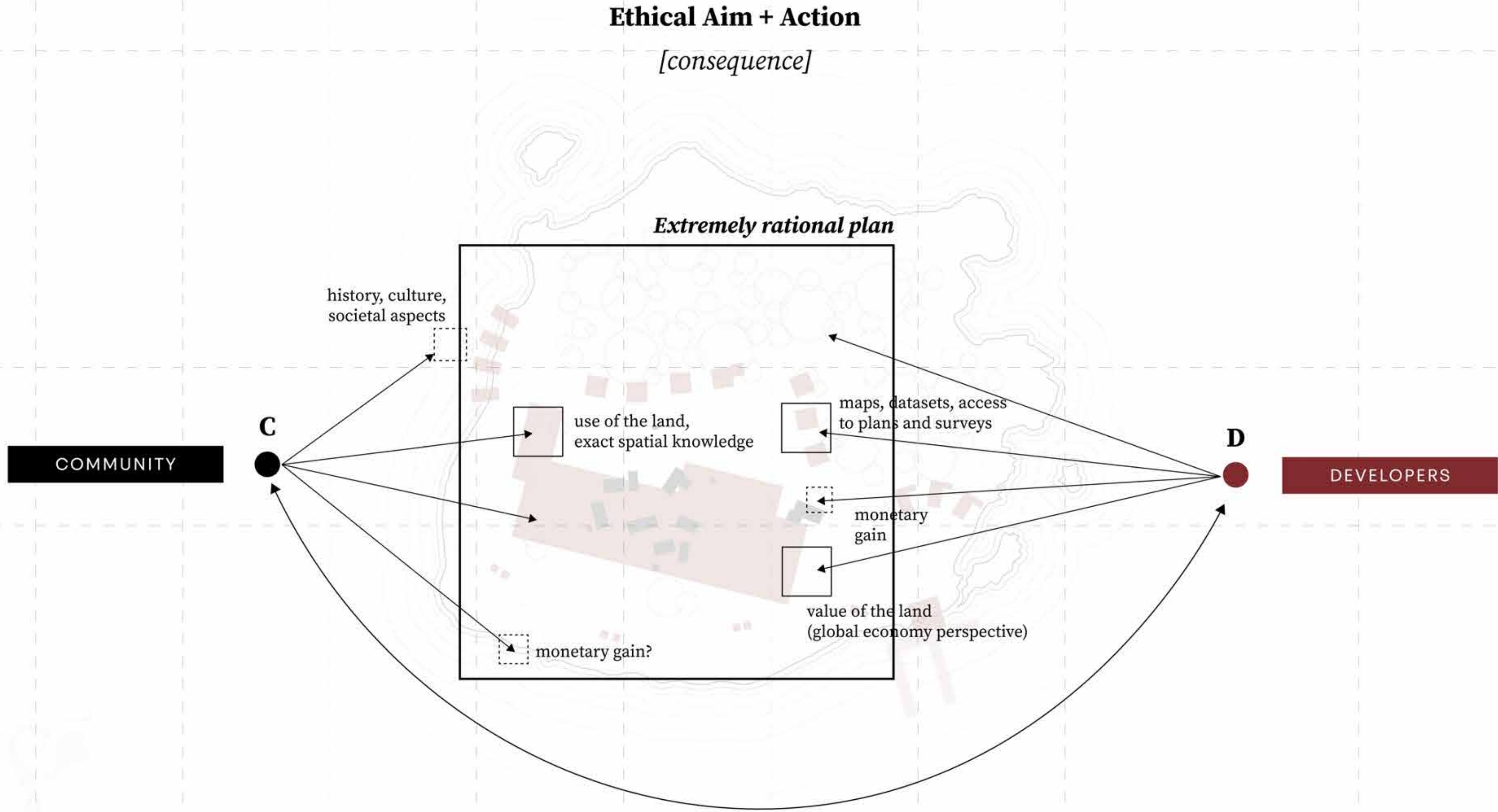


Mapping the situation: ethical-political dilemma

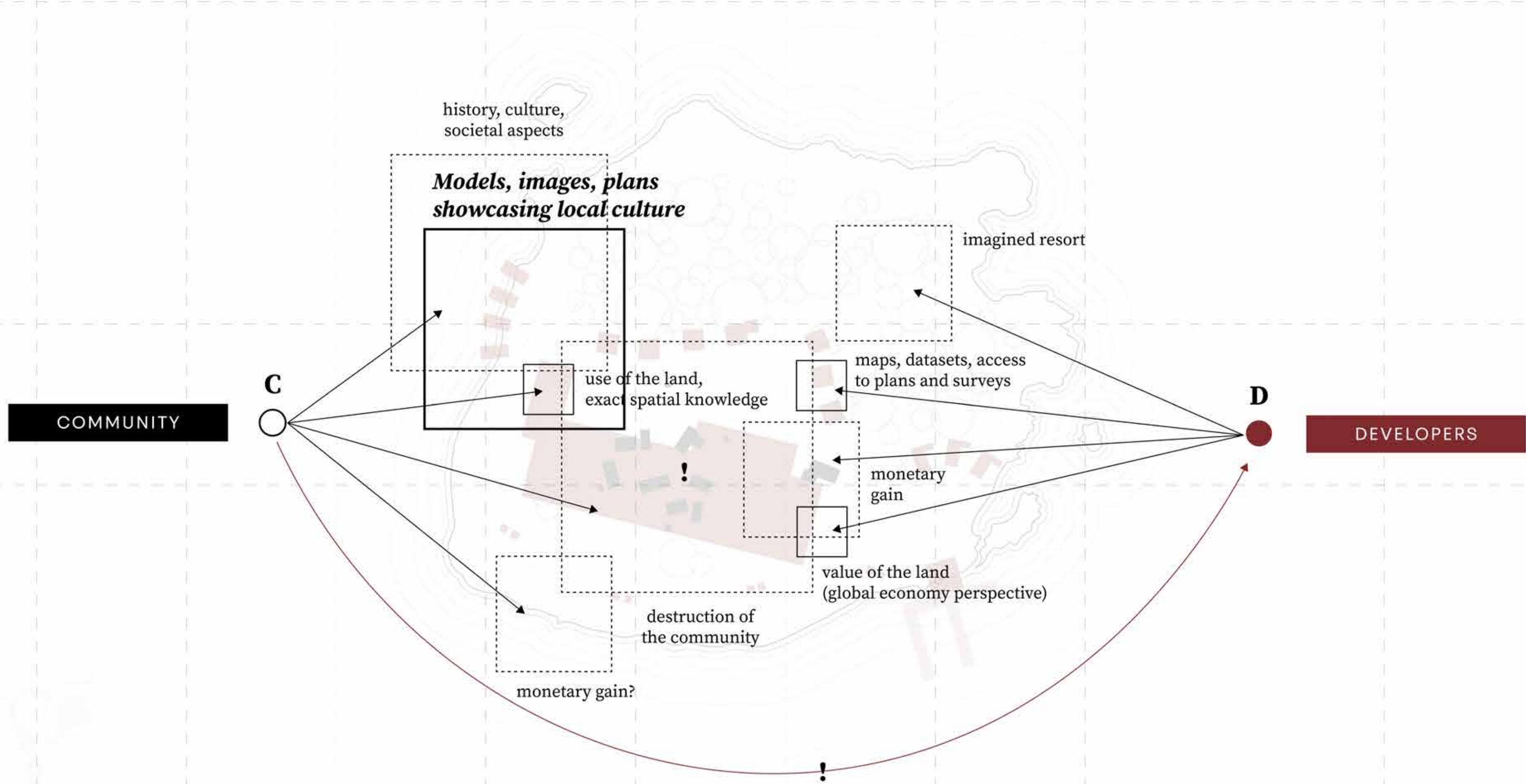


Ethical Aim + Action



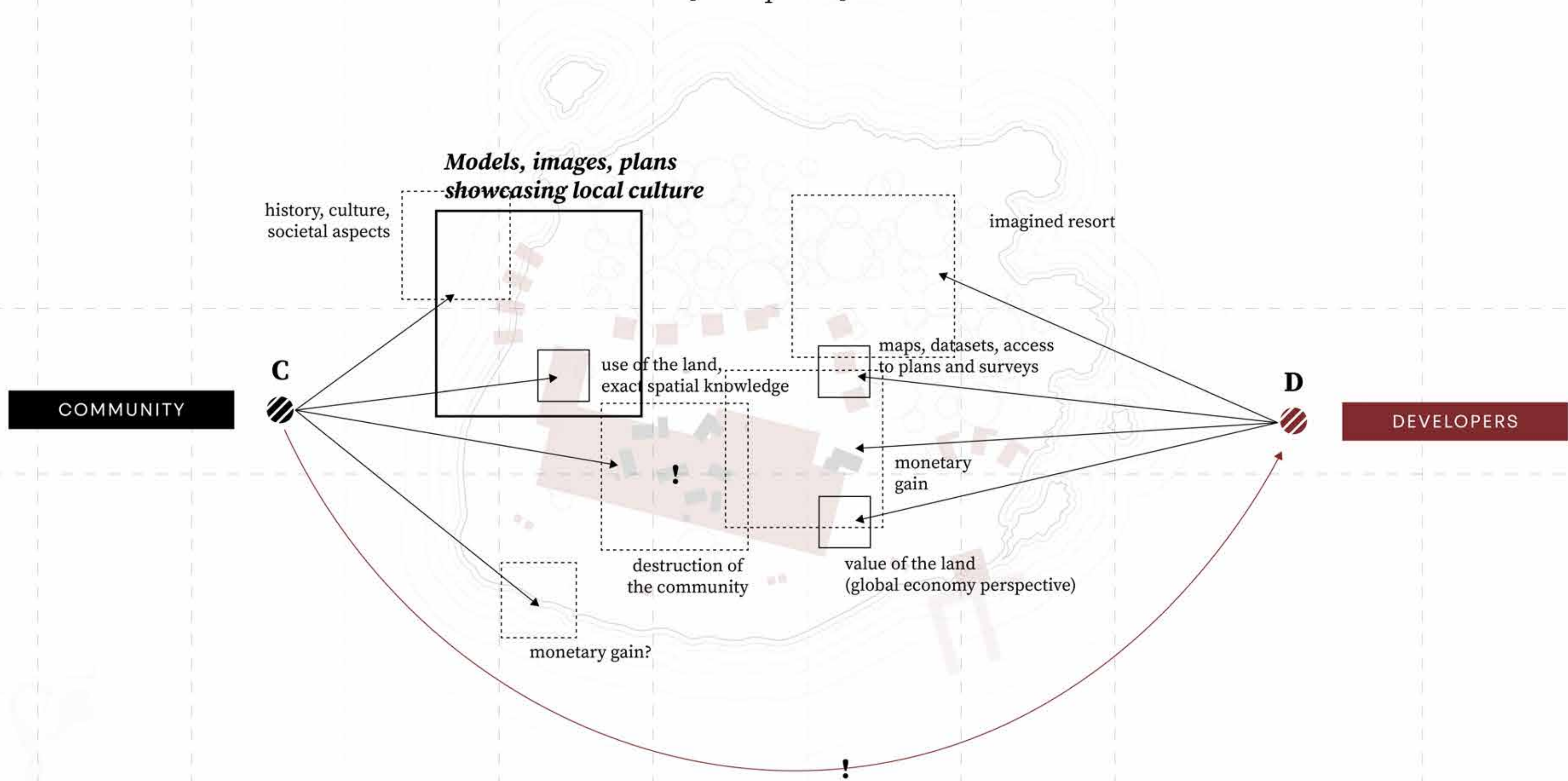


Approach: advocacy (ethnographic) planning



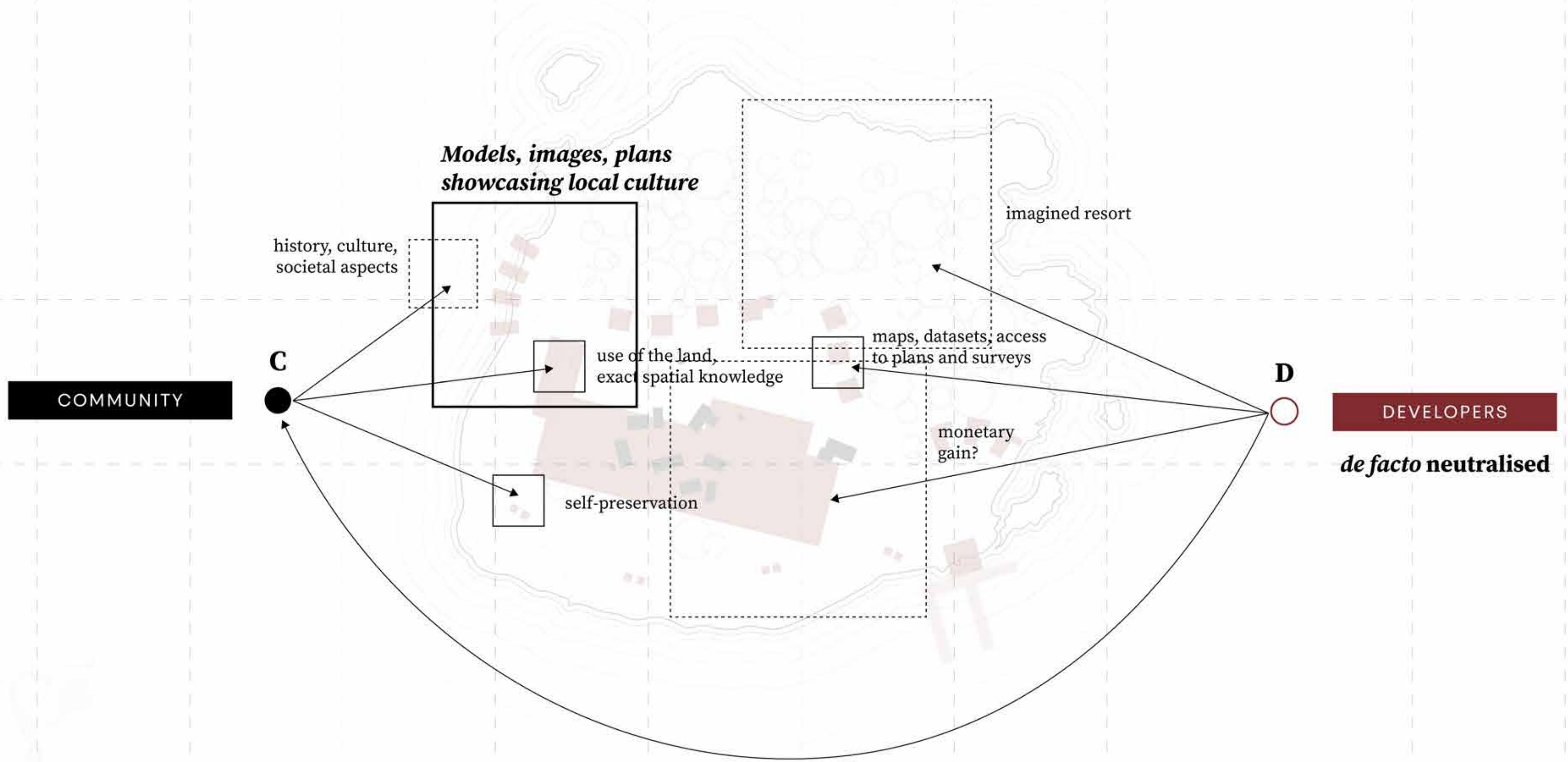
Approach: advocacy (ethnographic) planning

[consequence]

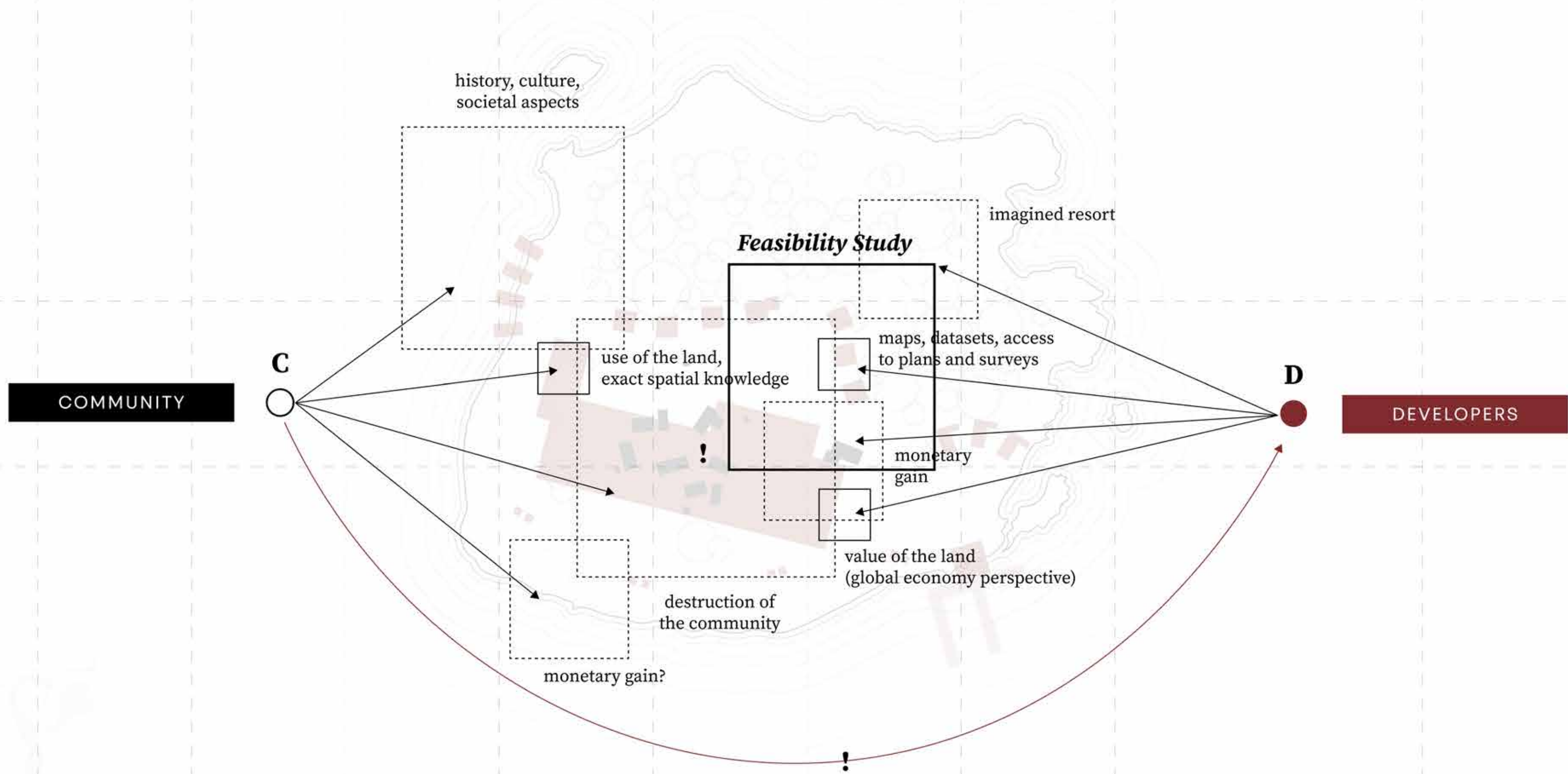


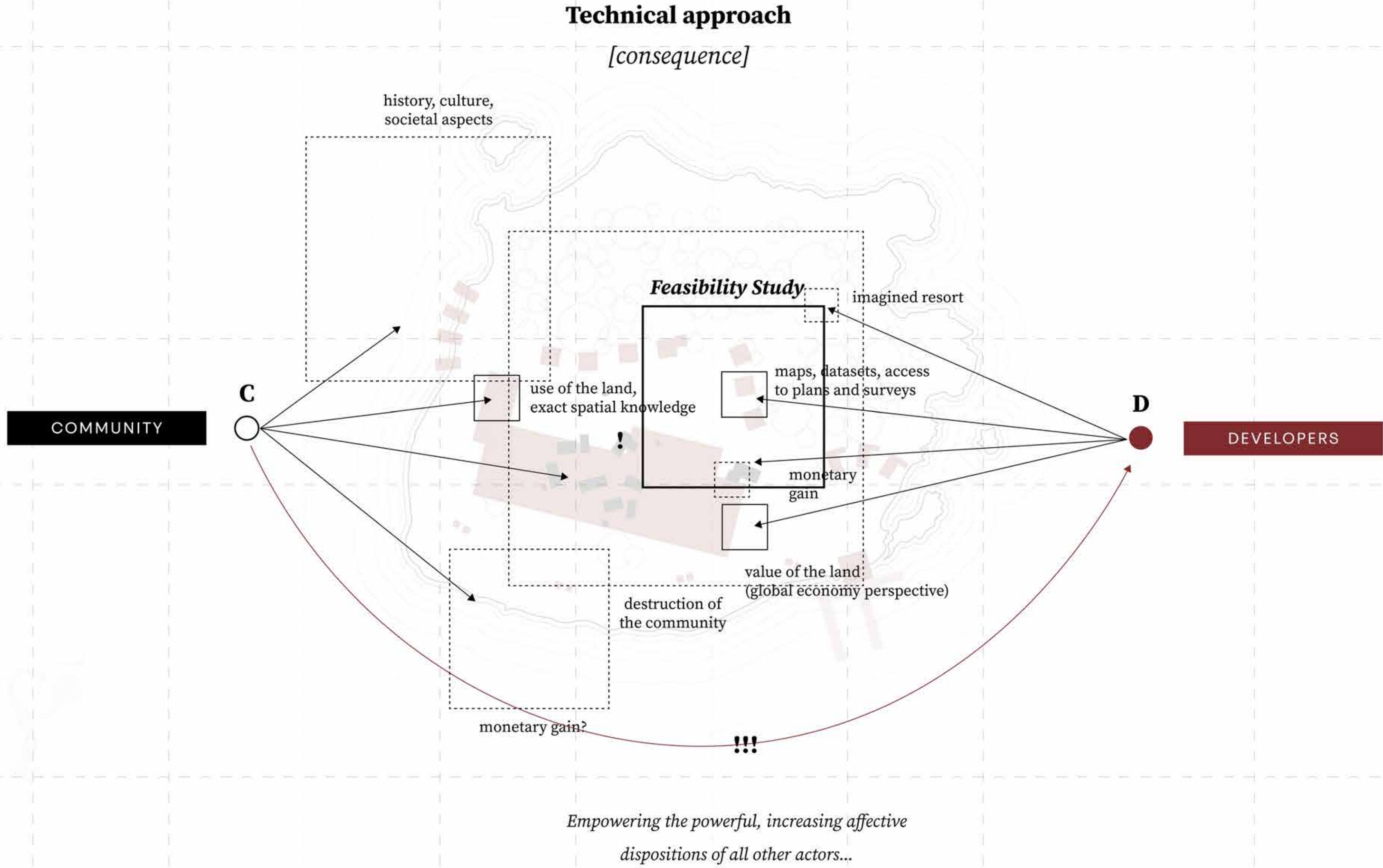
Approach: advocacy (ethnographic) planning

[consequence if done really well]



Technical approach





Conclusion

THANK YOU

Time for Q&A

