

Introduction

If law-making is a game, then it is a game in which changing the rules is a move. Law-making is more than changing the rules of law-making, of course, and more than a game. But a real game may model the self-amending character of the legal system and leave the rest out. While self-amendment appears to be an esoteric feature of law, capturing it in a game creates a remarkably complete microcosm of a functional legal system.

--Peter Suber, [How to Play Nomic](#)

Confused yet? Well in reality, the basic concept is not that complex...

Nomic is a game, invented by Peter Suber, where the rules are always changing. It's a voting game. In fact it resembles parliament and congressional procedures in lots of ways. "A game of Nomic usually (not always!) starts out as a democracy--one person will propose a change to the Rules, everyone votes on it, and if there are enough votes in favor of the change, the change takes place. Play then continues by the new Rules."¹ This game requires you to answer emails and vote on proposals brought up by the other players. You also have the opportunity to write proposals and judge disputes on rule interpretations. The end goal, of course, is to win by gaining the most number of points. The email traffic is not very heavy. You might get 3 or 4 messages a week from players in the game.

This game requires a certain combination of egotistical fortitude, writing skills, and finesse in communicating with other players. In order to get your proposals passed (to get points) you will have to lobby for support from the other players in Our Nomic. You will need to form multiple alliances and gain the trust of others. For some proposals you submit, you may find yourself looking to your worst enemy for help. (Figuratively speaking of course, remember it's only a game.) At the same time, you need to be wary of the consequences of others' proposals. A proposal submitted by someone else may, in fact completely reverse one of yours that you worked very hard to pass. In that case, it is time to go on the defensive to protect yours at all costs. You must rally support from the other players. Even those who don't support your original proposal can be swayed with the right propaganda. Remember, no alliance is absolute, in fact many are made just to endow your opponent(s) with an overwhelming sense of self-confidence before you and your allies massacre *eir* proposal at voting time.

SHEESH! Can't you folks even spell??

Sure we can... the use of *eir* was not a mistake. *Eir* is a **gender-neutral pronoun**, or GNP. These are pronouns that do not differentiate between gender, and therefore lend themselves very well to the language used in writing rules, proposals, and the like, that will include a variety of people and genders. They are also much easier to use than having a whole slew of him/her, his/hers, and other cumbersome expressions littered throughout your proposals. In Our Nomic we typically use "e or ey, em, eir, eirs, or eirself". Currently we have adopted this convention as a voluntary measure, but at some point with the right proposal, it may become a rule. The next bit should help make things a bit clearer for you.

What is a "gender-neutral pronoun"? What are some examples?

Loosely speaking, a **pronoun** is a part of speech that takes the place of other nouns. Although they are usage-dependent, some pronouns are: I, we, he, she, all, it, they, their, who, what, this, one, nothing, everybody, every, both, etc.

Gendered pronouns are those that indicate gender: he, she, him, her, hers, his, himself or herself, herself, and derivative forms like she'd or he'd. All others, like "it", "one", and the rest listed above, are **gender-neutral**. You probably already use some GNPs: they, their, and them. Suppose you are expecting a call from someone of unknown gender; traditionally, you might say something like: "If the person from the insurance company calls, tell **him** I'll call **him** back tomorrow."

This is inappropriate, because the person calling might be female. It's been argued and taught that the male forms can also be inclusive and gender-neutral, but many people disagree. Some alternative forms that you may have used:

"If the person from the insurance company calls, tell **them** I'll call **them** back tomorrow."

But it can't be used in specific cases, like "If you see Chris, tell them to come back at five." Instead, the gendered pronouns "her" or "his" would be correct here.

"If the person from the insurance company calls, tell **em** I'll call **em** back tomorrow."

This is an example of a neologism, where the word "em" is created to be used as the singular form of "them". This can be used for all forms of the third-person singular: "If you see Chris, tell em to come back at five." Gender is no longer required.

Depending on how one counts, there are between three and five active groups. The most popular seem to be "sie, hir, hir, hirs, hirsself", (especially "hir"). Second, derivative forms of the above have found wide use: "zie, zir, zir, zirs, zirsself". These apparently came into being after a German-speaking netizen objected to "sie" (a German word for "she" or "they"). Third and fourth, differing only in the first and maybe last word, are "e or ey, em, eir, eirs, or eirself". Fifth, some people use "per", from "person", which is assumed to have the set "per, per, pers, pers, persself"

***OK, that's fine, I know more than I ever wanted to know about GNP's but how do I use them?
It seems a lot like conjugating Spanish verbs!***

How to Read the Entries:

Format: First comes a word from a set, then the date that set was proposed, then set itself. The members of the set are categorized by initials as in the following example:

theirs

(1978) -- **S:** they, **O:** them, **PA:** their, **PP:** theirs, **R:** themselves.

S: Subject

They looked at the frogger.

O: Object

The frogger looked at them.

PA: Possessive Adjective

It was their frogger.

PP: Possessive Pronoun

The frogger was theirs.

R: Reflexive

They kept the frogger for themselves.

eir

(1975) -- **S:**ey, **O:**em, **PA:**eir, **PP:**eirs, **R:**eirself. --

Good: Complete set of distinct forms, acting as the singular form of the already-existing pronoun set of "they, them, their, theirs, theirself."

Precedent: used by Eric Klien in *The Laws of Oceania*, different from the Spivak pronouns only in the case of the "y" on "ey".

If you're into self abuse, more information as well as a complete listing of sets can be found at:

<http://aetherlumina.com/gnp/listing.html>

Now that we've learned a whole new language to play this silly game, how does it work?

To begin we used the rule set from another online Nomic called [Agora](#). This is called the *Initial Rule Set*, and will never change throughout the game. It is merely used as a starting point, an initial structure from which the game to evolve, and as a reference point later on to get a perspective on the evolutions that have taken place. The rules in the Initial Set are in effect at the beginning of the first game. Our Initial Set consists of rules [101-116](#) (immutable) and [201-219](#) (mutable). Initially rules in the 100's are immutable (cannot be changed) and rules in the 200's and higher are mutable (can be changed). Rules later enacted or transmuted (that is, changed from immutable to mutable or vice versa) may be immutable or mutable regardless of their numbers, and rules from the Initial Set may be transmuted regardless of their numbers.

(HUH? That's nice, but can you say that in English???)

This simply means that at any time, a proposal may change any rule, or make it able to be changed later even if it couldn't be originally.

A rule change is any of the following: (1) the enactment, repeal, or amendment of a mutable rule; or (2) the transmutation (change in status) of an immutable rule into a mutable rule or vice versa. (Note: This definition implies that, at least initially, all new rules are mutable; immutable rules, as long as they are immutable, may not be amended or repealed; mutable rules, as long as they are mutable, may be amended or repealed; any rule of any status may be transmuted; no rule is absolutely immune to change.)

OK... now we have all this stuff about how rules change, but what exactly is a rule?

A rule can be anything, from changing the wording of an original rule from the *initial rule set*, to changing how the rules themselves are written, to giving an individual a silly title, just because you can. Anything can be a rule in Our Nomic. This is because anything not specifically prohibited or regulated by a rule is permitted and unregulated. Even rule changes that amend or repeal their own authority are permissible. No rule change or type of move is impermissible solely on account of the self-reference or self-application of a rule. For example, this could be a legal rule if it were adopted (we'll get into that in a bit):

This rule hereby changes the gender of every player of Our Nomic to be male. On January 1st 2002, this rule will self destruct, repeal itself, and no longer exist, thus reverting all players to their original gender (if they had one to begin with).

Note that this is a fairly silly rule... there is no way that the rule would physically change the gender of any player, but in the realm of Our Nomic, that is exactly what has happened. Also note that the rule repeals itself on a certain date. This too is legal according to the rules. These kind of silly rules are highly encouraged in Our Nomic. Many times, too much emphasis is placed on passing mundane rules that affect the game structure, or other nitty-gritty details about how the game is played. Silly rules tend to promote gameplay, make things more interesting and keep Our Nomic what it was meant to be... a fun game solely for our distraction from the already mundane world.

The legislative process, how does a bill become a law?

Firstly, there needs to be a line of communication between the players. Our Nomic's primary communication system is via an Egroups mailing list. Our address through them is on_discussion@onelist.com. Anything posted to this list will be distributed to all Our Nomic players, including the speaker. You may also communicate directly to any player, including the speaker by e-mailing them at their approved Our Nomic e-mail address posted on the [Players](#) page.

All rule changes proposed in the proper way shall be voted on. All Players including Voters and the Speaker may make proposals. A proposal shall be made by submitting it to the Speaker. Currently in Our Nomic, there are two ways of doing submitting a proposal:

1. Debated Proposals (known as rule 303)

At any time a proposal may be submitted to all members of the on_discussion mailing list for debate before submission to the speaker for voting. A proposal submitted for the purpose of debate must be e-mailed to all members of the on_discussion mailing list and have the following as the first line of the body of the e-mail:

PROPOSITION (\$\$\$PROP#) FOR DEBATE

where \$\$\$ represents the author's initials and # represents the number of propositions submitted by this author. (e.g. DRJPROP3) A proposition submitted for debate in this manner will be protected in that no player may officially submit for voting the same proposal, or a differently worded proposal that causes the same result as the proposition originally posted for debate for a period of 7 days from the time the original proposition was posted for debate in the appropriate manner. If the proposal is not officially submitted for voting within the 7 day period, no player may repost for debate the same proposition, or a differently worded proposition that causes the same result as the proposition originally posted for a period of 7 days. In either case, the Speaker will be the sole judge of whether any proposal submitted for voting or debate causes the same result as a proposition previously submitted for debate.

2. Direct Submission

Any proposal submitted directly to the speaker for voting (including those of submitted by the speaker) must be accompanied by at least two (2) letters of support written by separate players other than the author to qualify for voting. Any proposals not meeting these conditions will be rejected by the speaker. These letters of support must be submitted to the speaker in the same manner as a proposal would be. This support must be gained through direct communication with other players. The on_discussion mailing list may not be used to lobby for support of a proposal that will be submitted directly to the speaker for voting. Players submitting letters of support on the behalf of the author of a proposal are in no way obligated to vote in favor of that proposal. Any proposal submitted to all members of the on_discussion mailing list for debate before submission to the speaker for voting under rule 303 is exempt from this rule. Any proposals rejected by the speaker for not meeting the conditions of this rule may be resubmitted in their original text under rule 303.

I've submitted my proposal, now what happens?

As soon as possible after receiving a proposal, the Speaker assigns the proposal a number and distributes the proposal along with its number to all players. Proposals will be adopted if and only if they receive the required number of votes and *quorum* is achieved. Quorum for a proposed rule change is the minimum number of players required for a vote, and is defined to be 20% of all Voters at the beginning of the voting period for that proposal. The prescribed voting period for a proposal is one week, beginning at the time the Speaker distributes the proposal to all players. If adopted, the rule must guide play in the form in which it was voted on. Each Voter has exactly one vote. The Speaker may not vote.

Voters may vote either for or against any proposal within its prescribed voting period. In order to be legally cast, the vote must be received by the Speaker by the end of the prescribed voting period.

How many votes does my proposal need to become a rule?

The required votes for a proposal to be adopted is as follows:

For a proposal which would directly alter the actions which are required of and/or forbidden to the Speaker:

- a) a simple majority of all votes legally cast, if the Speaker consents;
- b) a 2/3 majority of all votes legally cast, if the Speaker does not consent;

For rule changes that transmute immutable rules into mutable a unanimous vote is required.

For all other proposals, a simple majority of votes legally cast.

An adopted rule change takes full effect at the moment of the completion of the vote that adopted it.

A proposal not receiving enough votes to adopt it as a rule is considered defeated and placed on the [Dead Proposals](#) page.

This is a game right? So how do you win?

All players begin with 0 points. Points may not be gained, lost, or traded except as explicitly stated in the rules. The winner is the first Voter to achieve 100 (positive) points*. If more than one Voter achieves this condition simultaneously, all such Voters win.

When a game ends in this manner:

If there is only one winner, that Voter becomes the Speaker, and the old Speaker becomes a Voter.

If there is more than one winner, the Speaker randomly selects one of the winners, who becomes the new Speaker, and the old Speaker becomes a Voter.

All players' scores are reset to 0, and a new game is begun.

All rules and proposed rule changes retain the status they had at the end of the old game.

(* sort of... as with anything else in Our Nomic, these rules can be changed by a well supported proposition.)

You must be kidding, that's it???

No, we're not kidding. If you understood half of what was presented here, you too can participate in Our Nomic. There are many subtle details of the game that aren't covered in this document. That's because with each new proposal the game becomes more complex, and in some instances the very concept of gameplay is changed. This Primer is designed only to aid in understanding the basic game concept, and mechanics of play. For further help in your quest for knowledge about Our Nomic, ask your mentor!

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