

A Pathway to True Freedom

William Bergquist, Ph.D.

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Preface

If we were to review the long history of human beings living in communities, then we are likely to conclude that we humans prefer authoritarian domination to any sense of true individual or collective freedom. Narratives of the life we have lived over the past 25 centuries or so suggest that we are not just social animals who need other people but are also most comfortable in living in hierarchical structures. Like some of our primate ancestors, we seem to want an up and down in our tribal and larger communal settings.

Even during moments when we find a bit of freedom either because of reform in our social system or because of societal things being in limbo, we are inclined to escape from this freedom. We either return a dictator to power, find a new dictator, or regress to a false freedom that is filled with choices about toothpastes and chicken pie rather than about how we treat other people in our life or sustain our planet.

Today, we seem to be in the midst of escape and retreat. Authoritarianism is blooming in countries like Hungary and Russia. Traditional hierarchical structures are firmly established in China and North Korea. We even find the emergency of authoritarian rule and dictatorships in the United States. This so-called birthplace and bastion of democracy and freedom is in danger of becoming a mid-21st Century fascist state—in the model of Mousseline’s Italy or Hughie Long’s early 20th Century Louisiana. An important question can be raised in the midst of these challenging times: can freedom be sustained in our times? I would pose an even more difficult question: can true freedom be found and maintained in mid-21st Century societies (and especially in the United States)?

True Freedom: Dead or Alive?

Let’s pause for a minute and go back in time. Rome has been conquered. This is not Hannibal crossing the Italian Alps on Elephants during the early Christian era. Nor is it the Barbarians swarming into Rome during the Early Medieval period in Europe. This is June 4, 1944. Two days before the Allied Forces cross the English Channel and invade the Normandy Coast of France. This is the day when the Allied Forces enter Rome and defeat the Fascist dictatorship of Benito Mussolini. This is the day before Franklyn Roosevelt, President of the United States delivers one of his famous Fireside Chats.

Roosevelt has this to say, as reported recently by Heater Cox Richardson (2022b):

Roosevelt told the American people that Rome had fallen to American and Allied troops the previous day. He used the talk not only to announce this important milestone in the deadly war, but also to remind Americans they were engaged in a war between democracy and fascism. And while fascists insisted their ideology made countries more efficient and able to serve their people, the Allies’ victory in Rome illustrated that the

ideology of fascism, which maintained that a few men should rule over the majority of the population, was hollow.

Richardson provides further documentation regarding Roosevelt's June 5, 1945 speech:

Rome was the seat of fascism, FDR told his listeners, and under that government, "the Italian people were enslaved." He explained: "In Italy the people had lived so long under the corrupt rule of Mussolini that, in spite of the tinsel at the top—you have seen the pictures of him—their economic condition had grown steadily worse. Our troops have found starvation, malnutrition, disease, a deteriorating education and lowered public health—all by-products of the Fascist misrule."

President Roosevelt was optimistic in declaring that democracy was about to defeat fascism. And he was certainly correct in predicting the defeat of the authoritarian governments of Germany, Italy and Japan. The Allied Forces that represented what are now called "liberal democracies" were successful. Much more recently, Francis Fukuyama (2006) declared the ultimate victory of democratic ideologies and the end of any history concerning struggles between democracy and autocracy. We must ask, however, if the victory has indeed been won. Are we now in the dawn of a university democracy? Does this dawn lead to a new, enduring era of freedom for all citizens of our mid-21st Century world?

The answer quite tragically is "NO". Autocratic rule is still alive and well. And it appears to be growing more extensive and gaining more power. Furthermore, the very nature of freedom is not easily defined. We have found many forms of freedom operating in societies throughout the world. Some versions of freedom are trivial in nature. Other forms of freedom are actually fronts for new, obtuse authoritarian strategies. This book concerns the struggle to find strategies that sustain democracy and that ensure true freedom.

Sustaining Democracy and Ensuring True Freedom

President Roosevelt's Fireside chat in 1944 sets the stage for my exploration of ways to sustain democracy and ensure true freedom. Roosevelt had this to say:

We and the British will do and are doing everything we can to bring them relief. Anticipating the fall of Rome, we made preparations to ship food supplies to the city...we have already begun to save the lives of the men, women and children of Rome.... This, I think, is an example of the magnificent ability and energy of the American people in growing the crops, building the merchant ships, in making and collecting the cargoes, in getting the supplies over thousands of miles of water, and thinking ahead to meet emergencies—all this spells, I think, an amazing efficiency on the part of our armed forces, all the various agencies working with them, and American industry and labor as a whole."

No great effort like this can be a hundred percent perfect," he said, "but the batting average is very, very high.

As Richardson notes, the President's speech highlights the mundane features of a working democracy. Logistics apparently illustrate a key difference between democracy and fascism. While democracy is not as "clean" as a well-oiled autocracy, it somehow does a better job of getting the job done. According to Roosevelt democracy in 1944 "freed its people to work and think and fight in ways that authoritarian governments could not." Keeping this point in mind, I will remember to point throughout this book to the mundane advantages of democracy and true freedom while focusing primarily on the bigger and broader issues of rights, responsibilities, shared interests, and images of the future.

Most importantly, I will keep in mind the final points made by President Roosevelt in his Fireside chat. Richardson (2022b) notes that Roosevelt:

. . . warned his listeners not to read too much into the fall of Rome, because fascism had "not yet been driven to the point where [it] will be unable to recommence world conquest a generation hence. . . . Therefore, the victory still lies some distance ahead." But, he added, "That distance will be covered in due time – have no fear of that."

Apparently, we are to remain vigilant regarding the preservation of democracy and true freedom. Roosevelt more than Fukuyama recognized that democracy and freedom are never victorious. Rather they are preserved temporarily and require constant struggle and reinvention. I would like this book to contribute in its own little way to this struggle and reinvention.

Preview of What's to Come

I begin this book by turning back in time to a book on freedom that I co-authored in the early 1990s. It was based on my work in Estonia during the period of time when this country was breaking free from Russia (and the Soviet Union). I wrote about what I learned about freedom from working among the extraordinary citizens of this Eastern European nation. I now write in part about what has happened to Estonia since this time. I also benefit from what I have learned more recently about and the nature of true freedom. I am guided in this book by a biblical phrase etched on the wall of a church I attended as a youth: "You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free."

In section two I set the framework for identifying the nature of true freedom by pointing to what I believe are three key ingredients. The first is a balance between individual rights and collective responsibility. The second is a "harmony of interests" (taken from a mid-19th Century treatise). My third criterion is a shared, compelling vision of the future--borrowing from the concepts introduced over fifty decades ago by Fred Polak (1973).

The third section takes us directly into the current state of democracy and true freedom in our mid-21st Century world - and in particular in the United States. I turn to five guides for this analysis. The first is Timothy Snyder (2017) with ideas he offers in *Confronting Tyranny*. The second and third are Anne Applebaum (2020) and the team of Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (2018) who write about the potential death and possible preservation of democracy. The fourth, Heather Cox Ricardson (2024g) is widely read in her daily blog and now in her best-selling book

on democracy. In all of the chapters in this section, I spring off of my guides by sharing related psychological, sociological and behavioral economic insights about the ways in which democracies are now being challenged and the elusive nature of freedom.

I then turn in the fourth section to ways in which to define the nature of true freedom. I build on my previous analyses in this book, as well as my experiences in Estonia, the insights offered by my guides – and insights offered by a fourth guide, Riane Eisler, in her book, *The Chalice and the Blade* (Eisler, 1995). I propose that true freedom may be found in a societal chalice containing a balancing of individual rights and collective responsibility, a sharing of harmonies of interest, and a compelling vision of the future.

It isn't quite Roosevelt's fireside chats – but my proposal is being offered in a world that may be just as challenging as that which Franklyn Roosevelt observed while sitting by his own fireplace. I attempt to do some integration, looking at visions of the future that incorporate harmonies of interest and a balancing of individual rights and collective responsibility. This exploration of visions begins with a look back into some past visions. I then bring the exploration forward to the present time and introduce some present-day visions. In each case the images are fragmented. It will take considerable expertise and a multi-tiered strategy incorporating structures, processes and attitudes to bring about the creation and maintenance of a coherent vision of the future that is harmonious and balanced. I offer some suggestions in the final section of this book regarding how this multi-tiered strategy might be engaged.

Acknowledgements

The journey I have taken in preparing this book began with the observations I made and the remarkable experiences I had while spending time in Estonia during the early 1990s. This was a time when Estonians were gaining freedom from Soviet occupation. I have many Estonian colleagues to thank for guiding me through this exceptional time. I am particularly grateful to Ants Parktal who began it all by wandering into the graduate school where I served as president. He asks about taking some courses at my school and ended up earning a master's degree in psychology which he took back to his home country of Estonia. It was Ants who arranged for me (and several colleagues) to join him in Estonia.

My journey continued with my co-authoring of the book on freedom with Berne Weiss (who was emersed in a similar world of change while residing in Hungary). Together, Berne and I wrote about freedom using the work of Erich Fromm as a guidebook. I wish to acknowledge the remarkable wisdom offered by Ms. Weiss. Her wisdom is to be found throughout the current book.

I have continued to be deeply concerned about the matter of freedom over the thirty decades since Berne and I published our book. I have written many books regarding other psychological issues during these decades. These books have been motivated and inspired by my work with many graduate students and faculty members throughout the world. I was blessed to have presided over a graduate school that served mature learners from twelve countries in North American, Europe, the Mid-East and Asia.

Even with the excitement and challenge of writing about such diverse matters as intimate enduring relationships, deep caring (generativity) and health psychology, I have found that the issue of freedom keeps tugging at my mind (and perhaps my soul). The voices regarding freedom have become particularly strong in recent years with struggles regarding the preservation of democracy in the United States taking center stage in my own life and the lives of my fellow Americans.

My concern about freedom—particularly “true” freedom—has been complemented by my emerging concern regarding several related crises in American society. I have joined with my colleague, Kevin Weitz, in seeking to understand the psychological dynamics operating in what seems to be a set of crises regarding expertise and belief. Kevin and I recently wrote a book about these matters (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). Many of the ideas offered in this co-authored book are found in the present book. In many ways I consider my book with Kevin Weitz to be a companion volume with the present one. Matters of trust in expertise and openness to new beliefs go hand-in-hand with matters of freedom. I wish to acknowledge the rich insights offered by Kevin. They have deeply informed the concepts offered in this book. Frequent reference to the book written by Kevin Weitz and myself serve as evidence of my indebtedness to Dr. Weitz.

Finally, I have been blessed with the love and support of my wife, Kathleen, and my two children, Jason and Kate, during the three-plus decades of writing books and presiding over an international graduate school. Five grandchildren joined my supportive family during these decades. These five exceptional human beings remind me (as they grow taller and wiser) of the ultimate miracle of life—and the ultimate reason for finding true freedom. The journey in search of true freedom is engaged on behalf of the next generation and many generations in the future. Tragically, the prospects of my grandchildren living in a world of true freedom are somewhat in doubt right now. While this book on a pathway to freedom will not ameliorate these doubts nor ensure true freedom for my grandkids, I hope that it will offer some ideas regarding foundations on which a society of true freedom can be built and sustained.

William Bergquist

October 1, 2024

Section One

Escape from Freedom

Chapter One

From Collective to Individualistic Structures and Realities: Music and Society

I frequently listen to classical music while I am working and in the evening before going to bed. The music during the day tends to be from the so-called classical era (from Haydn to Beethoven, with some bowing to later composers such as Schumann, Brahms and Dvorak). For me, this is more than background music. I find the music of these 18th and 19th Century giants to be filled with wonderful themes, variations and intriguing dissonance. I must admit, however, that I find the often-predictable structure of their music to be reassuring and pleasant on the ear.

In the evening, the radio often trots out 20th and 21st Century fare. Much of it plays well in my untrained ears. The narrative work of composers like Copland, Barber and Thompson is fitting for my American ears. I also happened to be enthralled with Mahler's massive work, as well as the lyrical work of Debussy and Ravel, and the Russian compositions of Prokofiev and early Stravinsky.

Relevant to this book, there was the shift from a Sonata form during the classical era to the programmatic music of the mid to late 19th Century (culminated in the tone poems of Richard Strauss). The structure had changed but there was still the fundamental "storyline" of the musical narrative. A tale was being told. Then something happened in the 20th Century that made music harder for me (and many other musical novices) to hear and comprehend. The structure was abandoned! Sure, there was the structure (in some ways) of 12 tone music, but structure was abandoned for most of the 20th Century Composers. We do have the simple and highly repetitive structure of contemporary minimalist composers, but I don't think this qualifies as comparable in any way to the large, multi-tiered musical structures of 18th and 19th Century classical music. I don't think this is just the case of "growing accustomed" to a new sound-- like we are asked to do as old folks with rap and hip-hop.

I think the shift in musical compositions is aligned with a much broader and deeper change in many of our contemporary societies. The classical music of the mid to late 20th Century and early 21st Century is no longer based on a shared compositional "standard". The collective is no longer holding up. Now, the structure (if there is any) is unique to each composer--even each composition. There is sometimes the informal structure found in 19th Century narrative/programmatic compositions (as in the work of Richard Strauss). There might be a structure of frequent repetition of a specific theme, sequence of notes or rhythm (an extended version of what Ravel was playing with in Bolero). There is also the use of a unique sound (often dissonant) to which the composer frequently returns to gain a powerful effect. But none of these variations on a basic theme/structure constitutes anything like a compositional "standard."

The broader alignment to which I am referring resides at the heart of what many philosophers, art historians, and social observers, including myself (Bergquist, 1993), have referred to as post-modernism. In this new world (beginning probably 30 years ago), we must all look for and impose our own structure on our life and on the way in which we interpret and act upon reality.

The collectively imposed standard was dominant in many societies for many centuries. In Europe, we can look to the old days when church bells governed daily life (especially in John Calvin's Geneva). Among the Catholics there were similar (though not as stringent) calls to pray and a weekly ritual of church attendance and a yearly calendar of religious celebrations and holidays. Even further back, we can find the powerfully imposed standards in Judaism (that are still to be found in the more conservative branches of Judaism). Today, we still witness the strong role played by standards in Islamic countries. I remember hearing the pronounces from the high minaret in Istanbul when I was working in Turkey. These words of divinity were very impressive (especially for me as a person who grew up in a highly secular community in California).

The exertion of standards emanating from the minaret would seem to say much about how those who are observant should schedule their day and conduct their life (as if they were not already fully aware of their duties). As a respectful (but naïve) nonobservant, I find myself amazed at (and appreciative of) the way these powerful Islamic standards seem to culminate in the religious pilgrimage to Mecca during the observance of Ramadan. The remarkable flow of many people around the square is miraculous. This flow is what chaos and complexity theorists would describe as a self-organizing system. There is no formal choreography or organizing group – just powerful organizing and deeply-shared standards of conduct.

What about standards in our contemporary secular societies? Certainly, during much of the 20th Century – when the modern era was dominant in Europe, North America and many other “developed” countries – there was the structure imposed by corporate life. The 9 to 5 workday was normative, as was the weekend. While premodern societies typically did not (and still do not) have a regular workday, there are standards in the modern world. Premodern societies that have relied heavily on the extraction of natural resources (lumber, minerals, fish) or the cultivate of plants and raising of domesticated animals (agriculture). In these societies, the workday typically begins at dawn and ends at dusk. Work is often dictated by seasonal patterns (heat, moisture, wind, etc.) rather than an arbitrarily imposed standard.

Even older premodern societies (that are rare today) relied on hunting and gathering, with tribes being nomadic, traveling with the food source or with changing weather conditions. There was little imposed structure in agrarian or hunter-gatherer societies other than a keen awareness of the shifting nature of the environment in which members of the society lived and worked. There certainly are rituals and patterns in these societies, but the structure is usually informally imposed (“tradition!”) and adjustable (dancing with the environment). Perhaps, we shouldn't go too far in accepting an analysis of structure in premodern societies.

The structure might more closely resemble 19th Century music in the Western World – the structure is provided through the narrative being offered around a fire, during a dinner, while

sipping on some mind or mood-altering libation. In the hunter-gatherer society, is a narrative particularly appropriate since the traditions of this society are embedded in their culture, rather than in any one specific location (which is more often the case in an agrarian society). Is the narrative of journey in a hunter-gatherer society comparable to the narrative of journey in a Richard Strauss tone-poem?

So, where does freedom reside in each of these diverse societies?

Conclusions

All of this reflection on music and societal patterns leads to a fundamental question that I have been pondering since listening to old and new classical music and that I pondered while listening to calls emanating from an Istanbul minaret. What is true freedom? Is freedom something more or something else than the absence of imposed structure and standards? Can freedom be found in a society that stringently holds some standards? Is religious freedom (or liberation) to be found in the shared practices of those living in a sacred world? Is there such a thing as communitarianism that provides a balance between individual rights and collective responsibility. As a term used by some visionaries—including George Lodge (1995) who is an unlikely source—communitarianism might be just an idealistic fiction that soon falls apart midst the reality of contemporary polarized politics and religious zealotry. Or it might provide some guidance (as I will suggest later in this book).

These questions and a host of other, similarly oriented questions reside at the heart of the chapters in this section of the book. Each of these chapters is based on writing I did while spending time in Estonia during the early 90s when the Soviet Union was collapsing. My writing culminated in a book, *Freedom*, that I co-authored with my colleague, Berne Weiss, who was living through a similar transformation in Hungary (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994). Each chapter focuses on one or more aspects of freedom and addresses the fundamental issue of balancing individualism and the collective. Can Haydn and Mozart live comfortably beside Adams and Gorecki? Would 21st Century Haydn or Mozart be composing music with their own distinctive style applied to each of their compositions? Stay tuned . . .

Chapter Two

Psychic Storms and Freedom

Almost two decades ago, Francis Fukuyama (2006), an astute observer of contemporary political systems and ideology, declared that we have arrived at “the end of history” – or at least the end of competing political ideologies. According to Fukuyama, liberal democracy had won the day. The new world is one in which the cold war has been replaced by competition between scientific progress, enlightened government and new ethical codes, on the one hand, and fundamentalist terrorism on the other hand.

I would suggest that Fukuyama was right in some ways but wrong in many other ways. Today, we find many competing political ideologies in full flower around the world. And many of these ideologies are not only “trumping” liberal democracy but also throwing us back into an era of authoritarian rule. While the competition between rationality and irrational terrorism is clearly evident, it is not clear that the rational order is winning the day. Fundamentalist terrorism certainly continues to play a major role on the world stage. It exists alongside a new form of “terrorism”: the pandemic. The history of competing ideologies is clearly not at an end and challenges associated with terrorism and spreading viruses further complicate the picture.

The challenge to Fukuyama’s analysis was certainly evident in Eastern Europe during the early 1990s. The lingering ghost of authoritarianism in Eastern Europe that Berne Weiss and I identified during the early 1990s (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994) was tragically prescient. This ghost is still haunting many 21st Century countries throughout the world. We are finding the strains and often the profound, tangible presence of authoritarianism operating in Europe, Africa, the Mid-East, Asia, South America and even the United States. It has certainly not been confined just to Eastern Europe following the 1990s collapse of the Soviet Union.

Furthermore, today (during the third decade of the 21st Century) we are finding a powerful force moving many countries toward authoritarianism that was exacerbated by the pandemic (COVID-19) and that portends an even greater threat of rampant authoritarianism with future global outbreaks of highly contagious viruses. Our third decade also offers the profound and widely dispersed challenges of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence and contradiction – what I have identified as VUCA-Plus (Bergquist, 2020a) In the current chapter, I reflect on the nature of the VUCA-Plus challenges the resultant escape from freedom and turn toward authoritarianism.

Conditions of VUCA-Plus

Where do we begin in providing a capsule but compelling description of challenges we face in mid-21st Century world in which we now live and work – and in which many of us provide professional coaching services? We can use words like “bewildering”, “incomprehensible,” or “chaotic”. These words describe how we feel, think, or see. We can also provide a label. We may declare that we live in a “postmodern world” or perhaps in a “post postmodern world.” I have written about (and soon will be preparing a book about) what I am calling an “ironic world.” These titles might be nice and tidy, but they don’t say much about what this world looks like or how we think about and feel about it.

In recent years, four words have often been offered and grouped together as a way to distill the challenges we now face. These four words are volatile (V), uncertain (C), complex (C) and ambiguous (A). As a consolidated group of challenges, they are identified as VUCA. Recently, I have added two other characteristics: turbulence and contradiction. Pulling together these six conditions, I have identified the VUCA-Plus conditions of mid-21st Century life and work (Bergquist, 2020a; Bergquist, Sandstrom and Mura, 2023). In this chapter, I wish to broaden my consideration of each VUCA-Plus element—considering the polarities associated with each element. I also wish to introduce the opposite of VUCA-Plus. These are the conditions of stability (as opposed to volatility), certainty (vs. uncertainty, simplicity (vs. complexity), clarity (vs. ambiguity), calm (vs. turbulence) and consistency (vs. contradiction).

Environment and Epistemology

At this point, I will dwell briefly on the meaning to be assigned to each of the VUCA-Plus terms and then suggest how we might expand on VUCA-Plus. Two of the original conditions of VUCA (Complexity and Volatility) have to do with environment (the number and nature of the elements found in a specific setting). One of these conditions, *Complexity*, concerns the many elements in a specific setting as well as the dynamic interactions that exist among these elements. This setting is complex because we have to consider not only the number of elements (making the setting complicated) but also the interactions and interdependencies (making the setting complex) (Miller and Page, 2007). The second environmental condition, *Volatility*, refers to the rate and shifting rate of change among the elements as they interact with one another. It is all a bit confusing when everything is related to everything else – and everything is always changing.

The other two conditions of VUCA have to do with epistemology (the way in which knowledge is acquired and reality is defined). *Ambiguity* concerns the assessment of both the evidence available regarding reality and the meaning assigned to this reality. Reality can appear in quite “fuzzy” form. The fourth condition, *Uncertainty*, is about the stability of any assessment being made regarding reality. Under conditions of uncertainty, reality seems to be changing in unexpected ways over a short period of time. Why should we do an extensive assessment, make plans or offer expert predictions if our world is hazy, swirling and always surprising us?

VUCA is deservedly becoming the coin-of-the-realm among those who assess, plan and predict while serving in the mid-21st Century role of leader or expert. The challenges associated with VUCA are deservedly considered large in number and size, as well as multi-tiered and nested inside one another (Bergquist, 2021b). To make matters even more “realistic” – and challenging – we have added two other conditions to VUCA. They are turbulence and contradiction. Both of these conditions are interwoven in the tapestry of VUCA. They each add a further layer of challenge to that now being faced by us in our mid-21st Century society. Turbulence concerns the interplay between rapid change, cyclical change, stagnation and chaos within our current world. Contradiction concerns the ongoing delivery of messages that are each perfectly valid. However, each message offers quite different perspectives on and interpretations of reality.

We must make decisions in settings that are filled with volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Decisions must be made in a turbulent environment that is swirling with contradictory versions of reality and polarizing values. We are worn out having to grapple every day with the conditions of VUCA-Plus. Many observers of our contemporary social condition have gone so far as to suggest that this is an era of *Great Exhaustion* (e.g. Newport, 2016; Stoycheva, 2022). Thoughtful consideration and caring compassion are required – even when we are overloaded and tired. Furthermore, analyses we have made and decisions we have enacted are subject to frequent review and modification as we try to navigate a turbulent and contradictory VUCA world.

The Scenarios of Escape

It is tempting to escape when facing the challenges –let alone the shock and awe– that are associated with VUCA-Plus conditions. In seeking to find out more about how escape is engaged when faced with the conditions of VUCA-Plus, I turn first to the insights offer by Erich Fromm many years ago about authoritarianism and the escape from freedom. His insights are particularly relevant given re-emergence of bigotry and idolatry ghosts in mid-21st Century life and the potential escalation of authoritarianism in many societies. At a very basic level, Fromm suggests that "once the primary bonds which gave security to the individual are severed, once the individual faces the world outside of himself as a completely separate entity, two courses are open to him since he has to overcome the unbearable state of powerlessness and aloneness" (Fromm, 1941, pp. 140 - 141). I suggest that powerlessness accompanies VUCA-Plus and that we are ultimately left alone to confront the challenges of VUCA -Plus.

Fromm’s insights are also relevant because he offers hope as we face the prospects of powerlessness and aloneness. Fromm identifies a twofold process of discovering true freedom. One first experiences what he calls "negative freedom"; this being freedom from specific societal restrictions. The next step is "positive freedom," or the freedom to do something else and construct a new set of social institutions. These new institutions, in Fromm's utopian vision, offer greater economic and political equity while also encouraging creativity and community. I turn to

both the negative outlook with which Erich Fromm confronts us and the positive prospect that he offers to counter this major challenge to our mid-21st Century life.

Freedom and the Numinous

Experiencing the loss of constraint (negative freedom) and the challenge of making free choices (positive freedom) is frightening – especially under the conditions of VUCA-Plus. In seeking to determine the nature and outcomes of this fear, we turn, briefly, to insights offered by Carl Jung, who like Erich Fromm was a psychoanalytically trained social observer. Borrowing from the work of Rudolph Otto, Jung (1948) describes the effect of unbounded freedom and the “awe-ful” nature of choice.

In what some scholars identify as the first “psychological” analysis of religious experiences, Otto identified something he called the *numinous* experience. In his now-classic book, *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto (1923) creates a new word, “numinous”, combining the Latin words “numen” with the word, “ominous”. Otto (1923, p. 11) writes about a powerful, enthralling experience that is “felt as objective and outside the self.” His numinous experience is simultaneously awe-some and awe-full. We are enthralled and repelled. We feel powerless in the presence of the numinous – yet we seem to gain power (“inspiration”) from participation in its wonderment.

Using more contemporary psychological terms, I propose that the boundaries between internal and external loci of control are shattered when one is enmeshed in a numinous experience. The outside enters the inside and the inside is drawn to the outside. In Jungian terms, our inner psyche is drawn outward by the numinous experience; it confiscates this experience and brings it back inside – where it becomes even more frightening and threatening to the ongoing integration of various parts of the psyche. It is through numinous experiences that deeply embedded archetypes residing in our unconscious are activated.

In the case of freedom that is found after political revolution, these archetypes, on the positive side, might involve images of the great warrior or martyr. The images associated with these archetypes might interplay with images of nature and birth rights evoked by even more primitive archetypes of the sacred mother or images of kingdom and progeny evoked by an archetype of the all-powerful father. These archetypes might instead (or in addition) evoke images of a new utopia – a paradise on earth.

There are negative archetypes, residing in the shadow domain of our unconscious, that can be potentiated by politically activated freedom. The archetype of chaos is readily activated – and it evokes images of the inundating flood – leading to massive destruction (Neumann, 1954). The complementary archetype of Satan evokes images of powerful evil forces that are sweeping in to fill the void (chaos) and take command – leading to Armageddon. These compelling positive and

negative images swirl around one another, creating a confusing and ultimately quite frightening intra-psychic storm.

The Psychic Storm

What does this psychic storm look like? We can get some sense of the storm's nature by looking at its more benevolent manifestation. Jung (and Otto) would suggest that the storm takes place when we are transported to another domain of experience while listening to a Bach mass or an opera by Mozart or Puccini (depending on our "taste," i.e. amenability). This type of psychic storm is a numinous-inducing experience. We view a miracle, in the form of a newborn child or the recovery of a loved one from a life-threatening disease. This leads us to a sense of the numinous.

Dacher Keltner (2023) has recently written about this kind of experience in his book about Awe. He writes about the wonder to be found in music and in visual designs (such as those found in the terracotta warriors in China). Awe is to be found in what Durkheim describes as collective effervescence—which is the emotional core of religion. This effervescence is evident in the "buzzing and crackling with some life fore that merges people into a collective self, a tribe an oceanic 'we.'" (Keltner, 2023, p. 13). Awe is also evident in spiritual and religious texts and in stories of life and death. These texts and stories "lead us to epiphanies—when we suddenly understand essential truths about life." (Keltner, 2023, p. 17)

The psychic storm can be quite horrifying—yet still somehow enthralling. Keltner (2023, p. 13) writes about the inspiring natural Awe to be found in witnessing a cataclysmic event such as an earthquake, thunderstorm or wildfire. Horrible and dreadful images and pictures of gods in primitive cultures continue to attract us—think of the superhero movies that populate our movie theaters and cable channels. These competing images lead us to feelings of profound admiration or profound disgust—often both. This is the perfect psychic storm. Somehow, a power from outside time or space seems to intervene and lead us to an experience that penetrates and changes our inner psyche. And we don't know how this happens. It is beyond our control or true comprehension.

I suggest that true freedom evokes a psychic storm. It is a numinous experience. When we first encounter freedom it is both enthralling and frightening. We are drawn to freedom and simultaneously seek to escape it. I found that this ambivalence exists in abundance when interviewing the citizens of Estonia for the book I co-authored with Berne Weiss in 1994. There was the all-inspiring songfest when Estonians began to sing their national songs despite Soviet bans on this music.

I suspect that these songs were just as much a numinous experience for those in attendance at the songfest as the performance of an oratorio by Bach, sung by a massive choral group and orchestra.

In fact, the Estonian singing was probable even more numinous – for it was saturated with not only the joy of once again singing (and listening to) an Estonian anthem, but also the fear, anger and pride associated with violating the Soviet regulations.

Escape and Neurosis

We face the exhaustion and deep fear associated with new-found freedom. We want to run away and hide from the psychic storm. Erich Fromm speaks to this yearning for escape, as do Jung and Otto. We escape from freedom—or we create or accept an illusion of freedom. According to Fromm (1941), there is another course open to each of us. We can simply give up our freedom and then try to overcome the aloneness associated with personal constraint (lack of freedom) by eliminating the gap that has arisen between our individual self and the world.

We submerge our own identity--and even a collective identity. This alternative, neurotic course of escape, according to Fromm, is characterized by its compulsive character. This neurotic pathway resembles that taken when we are threatened and in a state of panic: we look around us for help and are willing to sacrifice our own individual integrity to become safe (or at least feel safe). Living in the shadow of the numinous and our psychic storm, our behavior is characterized by Fromm as:

... the more or less complete surrender of individuality and the integrity of the self. Thus, it is not a solution which leads to happiness and positive freedom; it is, in principle, a solution which is to be found in all neurotic phenomena. It assuages an unbearable anxiety and makes life possible by avoiding panic; yet it does not solve the underlying problem and is paid for by a kind of life that often consists only of automatic or compulsive activities [Fromm, 1941, pp. 140-141].

This analysis offered by Fromm (and augmented by Jung and Otto) leads us to consider one of the traditional avenues of escape and distortion: authoritarianism. This is not the only avenue of escape and distortion. In subsequent chapters, I consider a second avenue, nationalism, as well as two of the more personal modes of escape: ethnocentrism and excessive consumption. However, right now I turn to the powerful force of authoritarianism that operated in Estonia after the collapse of the Soviet Union—and that seems to be operating in many Eastern European countries today (long after the collapse of the Soviet Union) and in countries far removed from Eastern Europe.

Escape into Authoritarianism

It is all too easy to frame authoritarianism as a personal trait to be found in individuals, rather than as a societal and cultural dynamic. While the work done by Theodore Adorno and his colleagues (Adorno, et al. 1950) regarding the authoritarian personality is filled with insights

regarding the origins of authoritarian perspectives, it is important to recognize that authoritarian dynamics operate at many levels. Societal and cultural factors play as big a role as personal traits – especially in a world filled with the anxiety-provoking conditions of VUCA-Plus.

Recognizing the multi-level nature of authoritarianism, I offer multiple perspectives on this dynamic. I once again turn to Fromm’s analysis as a foundation. At the heart of authoritarianism, according to Fromm, there are four major elements. I offer a few expanded reflections on each of these four elements and suggest how these elements relate to the desire found in each of us to escape freedom when faced with a psychic storm.

Shifting Locus of Control

It is at this point that I introduce an important concept that will be reintroduced at several points in this book. This concept concerns “locus of control” (Rotter, 1966) At some points in our life, we assume that we have some if not total control over what is occurring in this life. We feel responsible for what is occurring and take action to correct what we don’t find to be desirable. At other points, we assume that we have little if any control over what is occurring in our life. We have to sit back and watch what is occurring. For some of us, the internal locus of control is dominant; for others there is a proclivity to assume that we have little control over what is occurring. We are inclined toward an external locus of control. Furthermore, some societies and cultures are leaning toward internal locus of control. These societies and cultures tend to be highly individualistic. In other societies, external locus of control is dominant and a focus on the collective is often prevalent.

In turning to Fromm’s four elements, we first that there is the negation of one's own sense of self-effectiveness and control. An external locus of control prevails over an internal locus. How can one possibly confront volatility, uncertainty and complexity with any sense of self-assurance? How can one navigate a world that is turbulent and filled with both ambiguity and contradiction? Fromm suggests that we escape from the responsibilities of freedom by giving up the independence of our own individual selves. We let other people (especially those in authority) do the confrontation and navigation of VUCA-Plus.

As I just noted regarding the dynamics of a numinous enthrallment, the external takes control of the internal. We are no longer the “masters of our own souls” but have instead assigned this responsibility to some other persona or agency. Christopher Lasch (1984) would suggest that we diminish our sense of self (soul and all) under these conditions. We become a “minimal” self with very little in the way of a personal sense of identity or worth. We are ripe for authoritarian rule by an external entity that we perceive as being much bigger and more powerful than we are (a *numinous authority*).

Returning to the concept of locus of control, we find a clear and profound shift from an internal locus to an external locus. There is often an almost mythic sense that some powerful force in the world (or outside the world) is now propelling our personal and collective fate. Jung's archetypes come to play again. We are aligned with some primate image (archetype) to which we donate our personal agency and soul. In the loss of our sense of internal control, we are led to the diminution of our own sense of self and look instead for an externally-derived sense of a collective self—a widening of the pathway to authoritarianism.

Fusing with an External Identity

The second element leads directly from the first. As I just noted, there is the projection of one's own power onto another. Having abandoned our own individual identity, we fuse with the identity of a leader, a group, or an institution. This may be a church, an educational institution, a philosophy, a political party, or a national leader. During the early years of World War II, Fromm focuses, in *Escape from Freedom* (1941), primarily on the authoritarianism of Nazi Germany.

His analysis was still appropriate in the 1950's, when Fromm (1955) was writing about American culture, and in the early 1990s, when considering the reformation of authoritarianism in Russia and many other countries following collapse of the Soviet Union. In his later work, Fromm recognizes that the authoritarian dynamic is not restricted to right-wing politics—though he seems to have had something of a blind spot regarding the authoritarian orientation to be found in many socialist and communist regimes.

The issue of political orientation and authoritarianism has been a source of considerable debate among social scientists since Fromm first described the authoritarian personality in 1941. Like Fromm in 1941, Theodore Adorno and his fellow authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno, et al. 1950) focused on the right-wing and, in particular, on antisemitism in the right-wing. Through their focus on right-wing politics, Fromm and Adorno both revealed their left-wing leanings (both were associated with the Frankfort Institute which sought to blend Freudian and Marxist perspective). Milton Rokeach (1960) led the way in trying to correct this bias. He was particularly concerned that the authoritarian mode of thinking and feeling (which he labeled "dogmatism") not be restricted to the right wing. Eric Hoffer (1951) similarly thought that the authoritarian (the "true believer") is to be found at all points on the political spectrum.

My temporary diversion into the issue of ideological bias was taken because it is very hard not to take a biased position when analyzing the nature and dynamics of authoritarianism. I would propose that the politics of psychology might be just as important to explore as the psychology of politics. In many ways, political psychology (along with the psychology of money) is the "third rail" in the discipline of psychology—there is very little written explicitly about political psychology and that which is written tends to come saturated with specific biases.

Many of the social observers I am referencing in this book on freedom come to their observation with a strong political bias – often left-wing. For instance, Heather Cox Richardson (2020) thought that Hoffer’s notion of the true believer applies at the present time to those on the right wing – and in particular to the MAGA supporters of Donald Trump:

Key to Trump's popularity has been a rhetorical strategy identified in 1951 by political philosopher Eric Hoffer in a book called *The True Believer*. Hoffer noted that demagogues needed a disaffected population whose members felt they had lost the power they previously held, that they had been displaced. According to Hoffer, there's a psychological trick to the way this rhetoric works that makes loyalty to such a leader get stronger as that leader's behavior deteriorates. People who sign on to the idea that they are standing with their leader against an enemy begin to attack their opponents, and to justify their attacks, they have to convince themselves that that enemy is not good-intentioned like they are, but evil. And the worse they behave, the more they have to believe their enemies deserve to be treated badly.

Richardson goes on to offer a contrast between leaders who appeal to the worst fears of “true believing” citizens and those who appeal to the “higher angels” in the soul of these citizens:

According to Hoffer, so long as they are unified against an enemy, true believers will support their leader no matter how outrageous his behavior gets. Indeed, their loyalty will only get stronger as his behavior gets more and more extreme. Turning against him would force them to own their own part in his attacks on those former enemies they would now have to recognize as ordinary human beings like themselves.

Lincoln also made an appearance in Hoffer's book. Not all who rose to lead a mass movement were dangerous, Hoffer said. "[R]are leaders such as Lincoln, Gandhi, even FDR, Churchill, and Nehru... do not hesitate to harness man's hungers and fears to weld a following and make it zealous unto death in service of a holy cause; but unlike a Hitler [or] a Stalin... " they did not demonize their opponents. "They know," Hoffer said, "that no one can be honorable unless he honors mankind."

It is understandable that the political leanings of Richardson and many other critical social observers have often been a primary motivator for them to do their analysis – especially in the era of MAGA and Donald Trump. However, it is important that we take their leaning into account when assessing the validity of their observations – as well as the validity of my own work (with my own left-leaning biases).

Seeking Unity

My diversion has been taken not only to admit to my own bias, but also to set the stage for our shifting of attention to a deeper level of analysis – one that goes beyond differences in political

ideology. I turn to a profound desire to be found among human beings for some sense of unity. We are “social animals” that are saturated with hormones promoting nurturing and bonding behavior. It seems that we are wired to find some common purpose with other people and to create a shared home.

On the one hand, this search for unity leads us past the simple protection that comes from being part of a tribe rather than an isolated individual. This search moves us to the harmony of interest about which I have much to say in a later chapter. It also leads us to the creation of a compelling, shared image of our collective future. This is a second important concept to which I turn later in identifying the building blocks of true freedom.

However, there is another side to this search for unity that is less favorable. This is the “shadow” side of the human psyche. Just as Jung (and Otto) write about the powerful unconscious dynamics associated with numinous authority, Jung and his colleagues would suggest that there is a deep unconscious pull toward unity. Jung’s colleague, Erich Neumann (1954) writes about the *Uroboros*—a powerful archetypal image of the snake or dragon that is devouring its own tail. This image speaks to ultimate unity and the cycles that lead to this sense of everything ultimately being one. As Neumann (1954, p. 5, 8) notes:

In the beginning is perfection, wholeness. . . One symbol of original perfection is the circle. Allied to it are the sphere, the egg. . . The round is the egg. . . the nucleus of the beginning and the germ from which, as humanity teaches everywhere, the world arises. It is also the perfect state in which the opposites are united. . . .

At this point, Neuman (1954, p. 9) moves in on a telling observation that is quite relevant to our discussion:

This perfect state of being, in which the opposites are contained, is perfect because it is autarchic. Its self-sufficiency, self-contentment, and independence of any “you” and any “other” are signs of its self-contained eternity.

As a snake or serpent devouring itself, the Babylonian uroboros, symbolizes the unity as well as the consumption (or destruction) of the opposite – even if this means eliminating part of one’s “unified” state (one’s tail). We must destroy in order to cleanse, purify, sanctify and set “free.” The uroboros, according to Neumann and many Jungians and anthropologists of the unconscious, represents a primary, primitive and compelling pull toward unity.

At a rather mundane level we can observe this pull toward unity in the conformity to be found in many contemporary societies. The pull toward dressing, acting and thinking the same as other people can be considered a strategy for survival in an increasingly complex world. This pull was dramatically portrayed during the 1950s in such books as *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* (Wilson, 1955) and *The Organization Man* (Whyte, 1956/2002). A portrait of this pull was also offered

satirically in the musical “How to Succeed in Business Without Trying”. The pull toward conformity can also be seen as a form of soft authoritarianism – a theme to which I will soon turn.

At a more disturbing level we can turn to an account offered by Anne Applebaum—a guide to whom I will refer often in this book. In *Twilight of Democracy*, Applebaum (2020, p. 109) writes about the “strong preference for unity” on the part of many people around the world. She (Applebaum, 2020, p. 117) provides the following disturbing description of the contemporary American society:

The jangling, dissonant sound of modern politics; the anger on cable television and the evening news; the fast pace of social media; the headlines that clash with one another when we scroll through them; the dullness, by contrast, of the bureaucracy and the courts; all of this has unnerved that part of the population that prefers unity and homogeneity. Democracy itself has always been loud and raucous, but when its rules are followed, it eventually creates consensus. The modern debate does not. Instead, it inspires in some people the desire to forcibly silence the rest.

It seems that the preference for unity ultimately leads not just to a desire that one way of seeing and being in the world prevail, but also that all other ways of seeing and being are silenced.

In writing about the highly influential role played by one party (Vox) in Spanish politics, Applebaum (2020, p.124) is elaborating even further on the desire for and comprehensive attempts to bring about a repressive unity:

It wasn't an ideology on offer, it was an identity: carefully curated, packaged for easy consumption, cued up and ready to be "boosted" by a viral campaign. All of its slogans spoke of unity, harmony, and tradition. Vox was designed, from the beginning, to appeal to people who were bothered by cacophony. It offered them the opposite.

In a world that is becoming increasingly complex, unpredictable and turbulent (three of the components of what I have identify as VUCA-Plus), Vox (like many other political parties leaning toward authoritarian rule) has found a way to embed its ideology in the identify of many Spanish citizens. A deep lingering search for unity moves these residents of a mid-21st Century society from a mild conformity to a strident demand for a uniformity of thought and action.

An unswerving loyalty to not only party but also its definition of reality is demanded, absorbed and placed in a protected and ultimately unconscious domain in the human psyche. Societal discourse and behavior are dissolved in an archetypal Uroboros. All is understood. All is safe. All is well. Everything is perfect. Except the irreparable damage done to freedom.

The search for unity might go even further and even deeper than party loyalty and acceptance of a particular version of reality. The search for unity can be engaged as a matter of morality. Heather Cox Richardson (2022d) offered the following contemporary account:

Today [April 17, 2022], political scientist and member of the Russian legislative body Vyacheslav Nikonov said, “in reality, we embody the forces of good in the modern world

because this clash is metaphysical.... We are on the side of good against the forces of absolute evil.... This is truly a holy war that we're waging, and we have to win it and of course we will because our cause is just. We have no other choice. Our cause is not only just, our cause is righteous and victory will certainly be ours."

Nikonov was defending the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in which Russian troops have leveled cities, killed thousands, kidnapped children, and raped and tortured Ukrainian citizens.

Richardson turns to an earlier claim of morality on the part of a Russian leader:

The intellectual leap from committing war crimes to claiming to be on the side of good might be explained by an interview published in the *New Statesman* at the beginning of April. Speaking with former Portuguese secretary of state for European affairs Bruno Maçães, Sergey Karaganov, a former advisor to Russian president Vladimir Putin, predicted the end of the western democracies that have shaped the world since World War II. Dictators, he suggested, will take over.

Democracy is failing and authoritarianism rising, Karaganov said, because of democracy's bad moral foundations. As he put it: "Western civilisation has brought all of us great benefits, but now people like myself and others are questioning the moral foundation of Western civilisation."

Unity is thus being framed as a matter of good and evil regarding differing perspectives and practices. In recent years, this framing of good versus evil has often turned quite ugly, with opponents being accused (without any evidence) of being pedophiles and users of child pornography. What better way to define the opponent as immoral and profoundly inhuman than to accuse them of this "monstrous" act. Such a person not only is unfit for public office but is also unfit to even live on this earth. They must be eliminated (as has been done in many authoritarian societies).

Yet, what happens when we identify these people who hoist false claims of pedophilia as themselves being "monsters" and evil? Are we not making them the "other" and are we not considering them to be inhuman and unworthy of existence on this earth? When this extreme polarization occurs, both sides are regressing to a very primitive level. I will later describe a process called "schizmogogenesis" by Gregory Bateson that accelerates divisions between two communities. Here in the mid-21st Century we are witnessing this process in vivid display.

How do we account for this disturbing trend in contemporary societies? This search for unity through framing it as a matter of morality might be considered a matter of epistemological immaturity – as suggested by William Perry (1970). Perry has specifically proposed that there are essentially four modes (or stages) of cognitive and ethical development. In brief, the first mode is *Dualism*: a frame of reference that places everything into one of two categories: true or false, real or unreal.

A second mode is *Multiplicity* that leads one to question and not trust any categorization of reality into true or false categories: there is no truth and therefore there is no falsehood. There are only a variety of competing truths. The third mode identified by Perry is *Relativism*: there are specific truths that can be verified within a specific context (this context containing criteria for determining the truth). Fourth, there is a *Commitment in Relativism* – a framework that brings one past relativism to the embracing of a specific set of truths based upon which one can make specific judgements and take specific actions (knowing full well that other sets of truths hold equal validity).

The dualistic epistemology is to be found among young people and among those who are stuck as adults in this early stage of moral and cognitive development. A dualism of thought might instead be a matter of epistemological expedience – a matter of thinking in a fast, habitual manner about issues of importance (Kahneman, 2011). I would suggest that for adults, the imposition of morality on political thought and action might be evidence of this deeper pull toward a unitary epistemology of morality – based in the compelling search for unity and unconscious seduction of the Uroboros.

Declaring Unswerving Loyalty

I now return to Fromm's identification of the major elements of authoritarianism (keeping in mind the particular left-leaning perspective from which Fromm is viewing this important social/political phenomenon). He suggests that this third element is centered on the declaration of unswerving loyalty to a specific leader or agency. This third element, once again, builds directly off the first two elements. Having disowned our own personal power, as well as identity, we now rely on and are absolutely dependent upon the person, group, or institution in which we have invested all authority and power. As I noted earlier, the leader can become a numinous experience for us – being both compelling and a bit frightening. And the leader can offer us unity.

It is a matter of shifting power to the leader as a way of displaying one's own power onto someone else. The loyalist finds their own power to be scary. With power comes responsibility. Responsibility, in turn, requires free will and a hint of freedom. As we have already seen, freedom is not always desired. Thus, the loyalist denies that this power is ultimately their own. Members of an authoritarian group will transfer their personal power onto the leader and hold this person responsible for the enactment of roles and behaviors that they are themselves unwilling to perform for fear of failure, embarrassment, or even success.

The key ingredient in this authoritarian dynamic is the psychological process called projection. This is the process of displacement of power onto another person (or institution) that I just described. Fromm speaks of the power of projection in the establishment of authority in groups. He notes (Fromm, 1941, p. 174) that authority is often vested in the "magic helper," a person who is conceived by the group "as God, as a principle, or as real persons such as one's parents,

husband, wife, or superior." Jung's archetypes come into play here. The group members, in essence, "fall in love" with the group leader and invest this person with miraculous and numinous powers.

The psychodynamic theorist, Wilfred Bion (1961), would identify these powers as being of one or more of three types. First there is the power of *wisdom*. There is a shared assumption of dependency on the part of group members. Only the leader has sufficient experience and proven success to direct our future actions. A second Bionian source of power is *courage*. This source is based on an assumption that there is an enemy against which we must defend ourselves. Only the leader has sufficient commitment and strength to successfully defeat this threatening outside force. The third source of power from a leader, according to Bion, is *vision*. The dominant assumption is that only the leader has a compelling narrative to share regarding where we can find an ideal state—a new Jerusalem from which flows all healing and beneficent waters.

We project our own wisdom, courage and vision onto the leader because these personal sources of power (and responsibility) are much too frightening. They are ingredients of a psychic storm. Furthermore, with the assignment of power to the leader, we avoid the process that Bion (1995) (and his fellow object-relations based psychoanalysts) call the process of *metabolism*. This somewhat obscure term is used to label the psychological dynamics associated with making more manageable the anxiety associated with what I am calling the psychic storm.

We collectively metabolize the stress and fear created by a society in transition (such as found in 1990s Estonia) by offering both an explanation (this is why the transition is occurring) and hope (this is how we will successfully manage the transition). Our leader resides at the center of this metabolism. Successful metabolism often is beholden to collective myths regarding a social system's past history, present resources and future outcomes. Leaders are the ultimate guardians and transmitters of these myths. Wisdom, courage and vision reside at the heart of these myths and these myths enable the leader to retain and gain even more power.

It is important to turn to Bion's further insights regarding the dynamics of leadership. He suggests that members of a group (or other social system) collude to ensure that only the leader has sufficient wisdom. If the leader ends up not being super-smart or if someone else exhibits superior wisdom, then the system is in crisis. Similarly, if members of the system can't collectively identify a viable enemy (that is strong and ever-present but not too powerful or overwhelming) then there is less need for the leader's courage.

Thus, it is important for a social system oriented toward battle and courage to always have a viable enemy. Finally, a social system that is pulled toward the priority of a compelling vision must always collude to be sure that this vision is never actualized. A realized vision is often anticlimactic—and ultimately not an answer to anything. Without a vision of the future, the social system lacks sufficient motivation. There is little need for a visionary leader.

In returning to Erich Fromm's insights, we find that:

... the intensity of the relatedness to the magic helper is in reverse proportion to the ability to express spontaneously one's own intellectual, emotional, and sensuous potentialities. In other words, one hopes to get everything one expects from life, from the magic helper, instead of by one's own actions. The question is no longer how to live one self, but how to manipulate 'him' [the magic helper] in order not to lose him and how to make him do what one wants, even to make him responsible for what one is responsible oneself." (Fromm, 1941, p. 176).

A leader may use this authority and the power of wisdom, courage or vision to achieve good for the group and for society. Alternatively, the leader can use this power to satisfy needs for personal ego-gratification and/or acquisition of financial or physical resources. If the latter is the case, then neither the group nor society will be well served by this leader. The subordination of self to an external power will lead one to a loss of self-esteem and to further tendencies to debase oneself. "The courage of the authoritarian character," according to Fromm, "is essentially a courage to suffer what fate or its personal representative or 'leader' may have destined him for" (Fromm, 1941, p. 172).

The loyalist, an authoritarian character, is expected to suffer without complaining, to comply without questioning, to love without considering the source and basis for this love. Fromm suggests that the most important thing we sacrifice in moving to authoritarianism and to the projection of our power onto an outside authority is our genuine love for other people and, even more importantly, love for ourselves. Fromm takes a step further in his analysis of this unswerving loyalty. He describes this loyalty as a "masochistic" (self-punishing) tendency in the authoritarian character. It is also a collective regression for all those who declare this loyalty.

The individual and collective cognitive functioning of the loyalists becomes more primitive. The social system regresses to one or more of the assumptive states identified by Bion. Myths rather than reality prevail. Habitual thinking (what the behavioral economists call simplistic "heuristics") become dominant. Slow, reflective thinking is replaced by fast thinking (Kahneman, 2011), with the loyalists accepting the "truths" offered by the leader in an uncritical manner (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). Reality is being constructed by the revered leader, rather than through the processes of collective higher-order dialogue. (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Gergen and Gergen, 2004). As I will note when turning to a new fifth element, there is now only one centralized reality and very little room for consideration of alternative perspectives on reality. The state is the provider not just of control, but also a collectively shared and reinforced version of the truth.

As we join Fromm's masochism with the dynamics of collective projection and regression, we find that the loyalists are not only accepting the truths offered by the leader--but are diminishing

the credibility of their own ability to formulate and test reality in a VUCA-Plus environment. They self-punish by declaring themselves as unworthy (supposedly) of the attention being devoted to them by their beloved leader. Their leader deserves the unswerving devotion precisely because, as followers, they pale by comparison to their leader.

We can bring Jung and Otto back into our analysis. As I have noted, the power (wisdom, courage, vision) manifested by their leader becomes a numinous experience. At a very deep, unconscious level, the numinous experience is founded in a primitive archetype that leaves the loyalist's own personal psyche self-wounded and shrunk in size—creating the minimal self (Lasch, 1984) I mentioned above. Any kind of appreciative perspective regarding self is lost in the self-appraisal of deficiency. We are only saved, as unworthy recipient of forgiveness (for our sinful self), by the grace offered by the esteemed (and self-sacrificing) leader.

Identifying the Other

I turn now to Fromm's fourth element: we escape into authoritarianism by distinguishing ourselves from people who are devoted to different ideologies or agencies or are in some other way different from oneself. We typically exhibit hostility toward these other people (the "sadistic" tendency in the authoritarian character) and often project negative aspects of ourselves (or our own group or leader) onto them, using them as scapegoats and passive victims of our own personal self-hatred.

Barry Oshry (2018) has recently offered important insights regarding the identification of the "other" in authoritarian societies. He will serve as my guide throughout this book regarding the "Other." Aligning with Thomas Friedman's (2007) description of the "flat world", Oshry notes many of us are being exposed every day to many cultures that may look strange to us. Furthermore, many of these cultures do not look strange to the "others". Conversely, our own culture may look strange to the "others" but not to us. It gets particularly challenging if our life is filled with diffuse anxiety and uncertainty—and if our own culture seems to be under attack.

Many other cultures are likely to seem strange if our own culture is being challenged and our own version of reality is no longer the only viable alternative. As the postmodernists have noted, the grand narrative (Western version of reality) is now collapsing. Our society is splintered into many subgroups—each with its own narrative (Vandehei, 2024) Volatility and ambiguity exist in large part because of these splintered conditions and the many contradictions that reside in our splintered and polarized society.

Globally, we are even more divided (perhaps we have always been). Though Thomas Friedman (2007) has written of a flat world that contains many homogenizing elements, I suggest that our world is more like the curved and dangerous world portrayed by David Smick (Smick, 2008). The homogenizing elements portrayed by Friedman has produced coordinated international forces

both inside and outside government that hold the potential of destroying democracies as they now operate. Much of this nightmarish world was prophetically portrayed in Paddy Chayefsky's in *Network*—a movie that challenged many aspects of life during the second half of the 20th Century.

Playing the role of a powerful international businessman, Ned Beaty describes a world in which international boundaries are shattered. Governments that formally controlled the boundaries have been overridden by corporate boards and stockholders. National currencies have been replaced by the currency of oil and other precious commodities. The new world order, according to Beaty's character, will be run like a business, not like a government. The new world order will have no other purpose than the provision of profits to its anonymous stockholder. In alignment with Fromm's (1955) portrayal of a market-oriented American society, Chayefsky's arrogant businessman announces that ordinary citizens will be tranquilized by their own personal consumption of commodities skillfully marketed by those who control the international business conglomerates.

Our mid-21st Century world might be even more curved and dangerous than Smick portrayed 16 years ago--or Chayefsky prophesied in *Network*. Our world might be controlled by powerful entities that reside not just outside national boundaries—they reside outside those conventional laws that have governed our way of relating to one another in our mid-21st Century world. A recent account offered by our guide, Heather Cox Richardson (2024e), suggests that new players and new operations are assembling and enacting in major international operations that challenge the very foundation of mid-21st Century democracies. She offers the following account of thwarted investigations that were led by Robert Mueller:

In January 2011, when he was director of the FBI, Robert Mueller gave a speech to the Citizens Crime Commission of New York. He explained that globalization and modern technology had changed the nature of organized crime. Rather than being regional networks with a clear structure, he said, organized crime had become international, fluid, and sophisticated and had multibillion-dollar stakes. Its operators were cross-pollinating across countries, religions, and political affiliations, sharing only their greed. They did not care about ideology; they cared about money. They would do anything for a price.

These criminals "may be former members of nation-state governments, security services, or the military," he said. "They are capitalists and entrepreneurs. But they are also master criminals who move easily between the licit and illicit worlds. And in some cases, these organizations are as forward-leaning as Fortune 500 companies."

In order to corner international markets, Mueller explained, these criminal enterprises "may infiltrate our businesses. They may provide logistical support to hostile foreign powers. They may try to manipulate those at the highest levels of government. Indeed,

these so-called 'iron triangles' of organized criminals, corrupt government officials, and business leaders pose a significant national security threat."

Richardson (2024e) then turns to a recent book written by Anne Applebaum, one of our other guides:

In a new book called *Autocracy, Inc.: The Dictators Who Want to Run the World*, journalist Anne Applebaum carries that story forward into the present, examining how today's autocrats work together to undermine democracy. She says that "the language of the democratic world, meaning rights, laws, rule of law, justice, accountability, [and] transparency...[is] harmful to them," especially as those are the words that their internal opposition uses. "And so they need to undermine the people who use it and, if they can, discredit it."

Those people, Applebaum says, "believe they are owed power, they deserve power." When they lose elections, they "come back in a second term and say, right, this time, I'm not going to make that mistake again, and...then change their electoral system, or...change the constitution, change the judicial system, in order to make sure that they never lose."

Applebaum's observations are particularly poignant with regard to the topic of this book. The autocracy that she is describing hits directly at the heart of present-day democracy and ultimately at the heart of true freedom. Clearly, we have regressed a long way from Fukuyama's unified world in which the end of history can be declared. Or, perhaps, we have never moved toward Fukuyama's world and will always be writing a history of disagreement, conflict and undisciplined power.

I propose that these conditions are not only fraught with danger but also ideal for an authoritarian differentiation of and discrimination against anyone viewed as the "other" and any culture that is home to the "other." I noted above that under these conditions, we desperately want the social constructions offered by our revered leader to be accepted as reality. Under conditions of uncertainty and anxiety, we want to feel, as Oshry suggested, "that our culture is simply the way things have been, are, and ought to be." We want our leader to provide us with the assurance that our own social construction is now and will always be dominant. We want to believe Fukuyama and long for an end to the history of dissent and war. We want a flat world of uniformity – what I will describe as an environment of Serenity.

Oshry offers the obvious (but often ignored) observation that both we and the "others" were not born with the rules of our cultures; we first learned these rules from parents and elders, teachers, and peers. Later we learn from our devoted leaders – and increasingly from media:

Over time, we and the “others” learn our rules so well that we no longer experience them as rules. They become the lenses through which we view the world. Except we don’t see our lens and how it shapes what we see. Instead, we believe we see the world as it really is. Neither we nor the “others” experience our culture as an option, as one of many possibilities.

Thus, it is not just our emotional projection of courage, wisdom and vision onto our beloved leader, it is also the uncritical acceptance of specific narratives offered by the leader – narratives that tell us why we are right and why the “others” are wrong. As I noted before, the differences between us and the “others” can be defined as a moral struggle with the desired outcome being an achievement of unity. Authoritarianism thus controls both the internal life of our emotions and the external life regarding our perceptions of the external world. They reward us with the prospects of being absorbed into an archetypal Uroboros – the unconscious womb of secure and simple unity.

The Disguise of Authoritarianism

All of Fromm’s elements have been prevalent and are readily apparent in many societies when and where threat and the swirling of chaos are rampant. I suggest that Fromm’s analysis is applicable to the Estonian society in which I was temporarily working during the early 1990s. Furthermore, I have been making the case in this book that these four elements are to be found in many 21st Century societies. As already mentioned, I want to go beyond Fromm’s four elements. There is an element that I am calling the *disguise of authoritarianism*. This element is often less apparent than the other four, though just as powerful and pernicious.

I propose that an authoritarian state of affairs is disguised in what I identified earlier as the control of truth and reality by those in power. In his highly controversial 1980s critique of American society, Bertrand Gross (1980) identified what he calls the threat of *friendly fascism*. His disturbing analysis rings painfully true when applied to not only contemporary American society, but also societies operation in many other 21st Century countries. At the heart of friendly fascism, according to Gross, is the control of media by large corporate interests. There is no “neutral” press or mode of communication that is owned in any manner by the general public. The truths being conveyed by the media are based on several prevalent myths that are never tested and rarely are aligned with public interest.

One set of myths identified by Gross (1980, pp. 28-29) concerns the distribution of power. This myth suggests that a free and nonrestricted marketplace of ideas is alive and well in some (if not all) societies. There is no centralized or coordinated control over production or distribution. I suggest that Thomas Friedman’s (2007) flat world in some ways supports this myth – though he is a very discerning observer of contemporary life and would certainly be critical of certain aspects of this myth. As Friedman has noted, there seems to be an open and immediate

distribution of information and many digital forums for deliberation and debate about alternative world perspectives and ideologies. Gross would caution Friedman and those accepting Friedman's premise that the Internet and related enterprises might not be all that open and free. I suspect that Friedman would at least partially agree with Gross.

A second accompanying myth concerns the appearance of a great leader who represents and fights for the interests of the common people. He (or, rarely, she) is not beholden to the collective corporate interests. The third myth is a real doozy: if there is inequity in the distribution of wealth, privilege and power, then the "little people" will eventually rise up and secure their proper role in the governance of their communities and nation. This myth has a way of distracting us from the power of the first two myths. The hope embedded in the third myth "trumps" the threat inherent in Gross' first two myths.

The three myths would all be applaudable and worthy of commemoration—if true. Unfortunately, these (and other) myths are being perpetuated by those who benefit most from ensuring that none of these conditions ever takes place in the society they control. While Karl Marx suggested that religion is the opiate of the masses, we might find today that these three myths (and others like them) are now the true opiate of the masses (as are the real-life opioids). Our 21st Century societies are likely to remain saturated with complacency and the absence of true freedom while myths such as these remain prominent and unchallenged. In the United States (and many other countries, including Estonian), we are truly threatened by an impending state of friendly fascism. Other countries might already be fully engulfed in this form of fascistic authoritarianism.

In his description of the current state of the media, Gross (1980, p. 204) references George Orwell's description of "doublespeak" in his dystopian novel, *1984*. Gross suggests that there is now *triplespeak* which incorporates jargon (that can't be understood except by a small cluster of "experts") and the language of progress and prosperity (bolstering the three shared myths). Furthermore, *triplespeak* involves the continuing promulgation of untruths (lies) and alternative or optional "realities." In sum, "the more [that] lies are told, the more important it becomes for the liars to justify themselves by deep moral commitments to high-sounding objectives that mask the pursuit of money and power [the disguise of authoritarianism.]" (Gross, 1980, p. 265)

There is one other important insight offered by Gross (1980, p. 267). He suggests that the second myth is particularly misleading—because the "great leader" doesn't exist. Rather, the "friendly" leader will primarily be the dispenser of and reinforcer of the myths:

Friendly fascism in the United States [and elsewhere in the world] would not need a charismatic, apparently all-powerful leader such as Mussolini or Hitler. . . The chief executive, rather, becomes the nominal head of a network that not only serves as a linchpin to help hold the Establishment together but also provides it with a sanctimonious

aura of legitimacy through the imagery of the presidential person, his family, his associates, and their doings. The chief executive is already a TV performer, and his official residence is indeed “an awesome pulpit” form which he and his entire production staff can wield a potent “magic wand.”

Such is the portrayal by Bertrand Gross of the friendly fascist leader. Is this type of leader appealing to citizens of the United States or other mid-21st Century nations – or are we still drawn to the less friendly mode of leadership offered by the original Fascist leaders (especially Mussolini)?

Conclusions

I would add the perspective offered recently by our guide, Anne Applebaum, who points to the important role played by “clerics” in not only the political affairs of contemporary Europe, but also the political affairs of the United States. She (Applebaum, 2020, p. 20) that:

This book is about this new generation of *clerics* and the new reality they are creating, beginning with a few whom I know in Eastern Europe and then moving to the different but parallel story of Britain, another country where I have deep ties, and finishing with the United States, where I was born, with a few stops elsewhere. The people described range from nativist ideologues to high-minded political essayists; some of them write sophisticated books, others launch viral conspiracy theories. Some are genuinely motivated by the same fears, the same anger, and the same deep desire for unity that motivates their readers and followers. Some have been radicalized by angry encounters with the cultural left or repulsed by the weakness of the liberal center. Some are cynical and instrumental, adopting radical or authoritarian language because it will bring them power or fame. Some are apocalyptic, convinced that their societies have failed and need to be reconstructed, whatever the result.

It is a highly diverse set of actors to whom Applebaum points. Yet, in their diversity, they hold one thing in common. None of them are major, powerful leaders in their society. As Gross suggests, these clerics are more likely to be “efficient” white-collar executives than charismatic leaders in military uniform. They are more likely to “shout” with printed words (especially conveyed on the Internet) than with verbal rhetoric offered at large rallies.

Applebaum (2020, p. 17) mentions more specifically that the clerics are likely to be enablers of those who have the formal authoritarian control:

No contemporary authoritarian can succeed without . . . the writers, intellectuals, pamphleteers, bloggers, spin doctors, producers of television programs, and creators of memes who can sell his image to the public. Authoritarians need the people who will promote the riot or launch the coup. But they also need the people who can use sophisticated legal language, people who can argue that breaking the constitution or twisting the law is the right thing to do. They need people who will give voice to grievances, manipulate discontent, channel anger and fear, and imagine a different future.

They need members of the intellectual and educated elite, in other words, who will help them launch a war on the rest of the intellectual and educated elite, even if that includes their university classmates, their colleagues, and their friends.

As someone who has been an active player in the international political theater, Applebaum (2020, p. 21) provides further description of the cleric and offers a personal note regarding friendship:

Some are deeply religious. Some enjoy chaos, or seek to promote chaos, as a prelude to imposing a new kind of order. All of them seek to redefine their nations, to rewrite social contracts, and, sometimes, to alter the rules of democracy so that they never lose power. Alexander Hamilton warned against them, Cicero fought against them. Some of them used to be my friends. --

We liberal white folks used to say: “some of my best friends are Black.” Like Applebaum, we cannot say: “some of my best friends used to be knowledgeable and honest – and sane!” It seems that friendly fascism and the kingdom of clerics are quite seductive and a major threat to democracy. We shall be led to authoritarianism not with a bang, but with a whimper.

Chapter Three

Dwelling in Caves, Seeking Serenity and Finding Freedom

Fromm, Gross and Applebaum offered their critiques from the perspective of 20th Century European and American societies regarding a propensity to seek escape from freedom. I offer a comparable perspective regarding 21st Century society that focuses on an escape into serenity. My analysis and those of Fromm, Gross and Appelbaum, are preceded by a much earlier source: the voice of Socrates as heard through the writing of Plato. Socrates (Plato) offered an allegory of a cave and those who dwell in the cave. I will present my own account of the pull toward serenity, but first invite you to join me on a visit to Plato's cave.

Dwelling in a Cave

The cave portrayed by Plato is filled with people who have lived all their lives chained to a wall in the cave. These people watch shadows projected on the wall in front of them. The shadows are being projected on the wall from things passing in front of a fire that remains lit behind them. The cave dwellers believe the shadows are reality.

What about 21st Century life and “friendly” authoritarian rule? Are we all living in a cave? Do we never gain a clear view of reality, but instead view only the shadows that are projected on the walls of our cave? Do we live with an image of reality (shadows on the wall of the cave) rather than with reality itself? Plato concluded that we have no basis for knowing whether we are seeing the shadow or seeing reality, given that we have always lived in the cave.

What about the cave in which our Estonian colleagues were living in the 1990s – and what about the cave in which they are now lives? Do they find it hard to consider alternative perspectives and frameworks? Can they see beyond the shadows on the walls of their own cave? I would suggest that the Estonians of 1990 and of 2020 are not alone. Today, most of us live in a world that is becoming increasingly volatile, uncertainty, complex, ambiguous, turbulent—and contradictory (Bergquist, 2020a).

Turning back to Plato's allegory, we live with an expanded cast of characters in the cave. First, there is something or someone standing near the fire in the cave. Part of the fire's glow is blocked, thus limiting the shadow-images cast on the wall. The blocking feature can be a cultural or personal narrative (one of Gross' myths) that we absorb during our daily personal and collective lives. Narratives and perspectives block out some of the light coming from the fire in the cave. Not only don't we actually see reality, something or someone will actually determine which parts of objective reality get projected onto the wall. Those holding the partition that blocks out some of the fire's light have themselves grown up in the cave--but may hold a quite different agenda from other cave dwellers. What is the partition to be found in our own cave? How are members

of Estonian society and our own society (including ourselves) blocked from seeing the full light of the fire inside our cave?

There is yet another character in our contemporary cave. This is the interpreter, reporter or analyst. We don't actually have enough time in our busy lives to look directly at the wall to see the shadows that are projected from the fire (which we assume is the "real" world). The cave has grown large—and we often can't even see the walls of the cave and the shadows. We wait for the interpreter to tell us what is being projected on the wall, what is important to attend to and what the implications of these selected images are for us in our lives.

We are thus removed three steps from reality. We believe that the shadows on Plato's cave wall are "reality." We don't recognize that someone or something is standing between us and the fire and selectively determine which aspects of reality get projected onto the wall. Finally, someone else is situated inside the cave offering us a description and analysis. This is at the heart of the new way in which we are subject to authoritarian rule—we dwell in a cave that Gross has labeled "friendly fascism."

What part of the shadow cast on our walls is being blocked? Who is doing the blocking and why are they blocking part of the shadow? Are there political agendas, economic agendas, sociological agenda—even theological agendas? Behavioral economists such as Daniel Kahneman (2011), Dan Ariely (2012) and Richard Thaler (2015) (the latest Nobel prize winner) might ask: who is sitting at the table when the agenda is set? Who is framing our perceptions and reinforcing our conveniently operating heuristics (Gross's myths)?

What about our elected officials (and others sitting at the table)? Do they see the whole shadow or are they also viewing a partial image? What about interpretation? Are the "great leaders" of our society the interpreters? Or is someone else providing the most persuasive interpretation—perhaps a set of corporate leaders? Are prevalent myths dictating interpretation? How hard will it be to overturn long-standing and "honorable" narratives? At the very least, it might mean inviting new people to do the interpreting and to serve as elected officials in the enactment of laws based on a more diverse set of interpretations. It may also be critical that those safeguarding the behavior of cave dwellers come from diverse backgrounds and offer alternative interpretations of the shadows – or at least take alternative actions based on the prevalent interpretations.

I offer one poignant account of this matter of diversification that is offered by our most frequently referenced guide: Heather Cox Richardson. She (Richardson, 2022c) recounts the confirmation hearings of Ketanji Brown Jackson to become the first African American female member of the US Supreme Court. Senator Cory Booker spoke during the hearing:

Cory Booker moved Ketanji Brown Jackson to tears with a speech about the historic nature of her nomination. Booker's words came near the close of [a] contentious day of hearings.

"Don't worry my sister, God has got you," Booker told Jackson. Sen. Cory Booker . . . spoke about the historic nature of her being the first Black woman nominated for the Supreme Court, shifting the focus during an otherwise contentious day of confirmation hearings. . .

Booker made it clear that Jackson was being considered for appointment to the Supreme Court not to fill some racial or ethnic quota. Diversity without qualification is not diversity at all. It is superficial compliance. Rather, Ketanji Brown Jackson is being considered because of her exemplary qualification:

"You did not get there because of some left-wing agenda. You didn't get here because of some 'dark money' groups," the New Jersey Democrat told Jackson, referencing some of the Republican attacks on Jackson. "You got here how every Black woman in America who's gotten anywhere has done, by being, like Ginger Rogers said, 'I did everything Fred Astaire did but backwards in heels.'" Jackson reached for tissues multiple times to wipe tears during Booker's emotional tribute, which included lots of praise for the judge's record and how she's inspired countless Black women.

The matter of diversity did not go unnoticed by Booker:

Booker also grew emotional as he talked about how he'll react if Jackson is confirmed, a likely outcome given that even in the worst-case scenario she can be confirmed by Democratic votes alone. "When that happens, when you ascent onto the highest court in the land, I'm going to rejoice," he said. "I'm going to tell you right now the greatest country in the world, the United States of America, will be better because of you."

The confirmation of Ketanji Brown Jackson exemplified the push toward equity, justice and inclusion in our mid-21st Century world – and the accompanying conditions of VUCA-Plus. The world of contemporary cave dwellers might be changing or at least becoming more complicated (and filled with contradictions) Some of the world operating inside Estonia, the United States and many other countries may be changing.

First, there are now multiple fires burning in the cave and projecting multiple shadows on the wall. An African American woman now sits on the United States Supreme Court. The so-called grand narrative (of Western European and American origins) which defined much of our reality during the 19th and 20th Century is now collapsing. Gross's myths might no longer reign supreme. We now have multiple, conflicting and contradictory narratives that make it difficult for all but the most xenophobic people in the world to see only one set of shadows. At the very least, Gross's three myths may no longer reside on stable ground.

There is a second major change. This concerns the advent of social media and reality television as well as the purchase of goods and services directly from the source. Perhaps, everything is not

centralized, as Gross suggests. We might now be moving back to a time when there are no “middlemen” or interpreters. Does this mean that Applebaum’s clerics are offering diverse interpretations that enable multiple authoritarians to claim privilege and control? The term *disintermediation* is being used to describe this potentially seismic change in our societal acquisition and framing of knowledge. Are the middlemen losing control and does this mean that their bosses are also losing control? Is this part of the challenge leaders all over the world are now facing?

Regardless of the shifts now occurring in our world of knowledge, we seem to remain confused about what is “real” and often don’t trust our direct experience. We are facing many contradictions. We move with great reluctance (and considerable grieving) to a recognition that reality is being constructed for us and that we need to attend not only to the constructions, but also to the interests and motives of those who tend the fire and block images on the wall of the cave.

We must also identify and examine the agenda of those who offer us their interpretations (including those of us who offer psychological insights). Can Plato’s cave and his dynamic perspective on the nature of truth and reality provide us with the opportunity to gain insights about the nature of the cave? What about the world that is projected onto the walls of the cave, and the nature and agenda of the interpreters? And lest we forget, Plato (and Socrates) had their own agendas many centuries ago that influenced the way we look at the cave and the wall. Perhaps there isn’t really a cave or wall.

We should also consider whether or not to step outside the cave. Can we actually leave the cave? Is it safer to remain inside the cave than to venture outside without the help of interpreters? Should we (and can we) face the profound challenge of unmediated experiences outside the cave? As we step outside the cave, are we likely to confront some objective reality through our experience, or is the experience itself constantly shifting depending on setting, context, interpersonal relationships and the nature of our own past experience? Are we just moving to another cave? Is the entrance to our cave nothing more than the entrance to an adjoining cave?

Imprisonment in the Cave: An Expanded Version

Our increasing knowledge about the cognitive and emotional processes in which humans engage pushes us to an even more challenging perspective. The allegory offered by Socrates (through the voice of Plato) is actually much more extensive than the version I have offered. Plato provides us with more detail about life inside the cave and about what might occur if one cave dweller is allowed to step outside the cave and then returns to the cave. Profound implications emerge from this expanded version--and further questions arise about the role to be played by leaders and other cave dwellers in addressing these implications.

Inside the cave, its inhabitants (as prisoners) are chained so that their legs and necks are fixed, forcing them to gaze at the wall in front of them and not look around the cave, Behind the prisoners is the fire, and between the fire and the prisoners is a raised walkway with a low wall. People walk behind the wall. Their bodies do not cast shadows for the prisoners to see, but the objects they carry do. Prisoners cannot see any of this behind them and are only able to see the shadows cast upon the cave wall in front of them. The sounds of the people as they talk echo off the shadowed wall, and the prisoners falsely believe these sounds come from the shadows.

Apparently, the images swirling around the cave are much more complicated and diverse than are conveyed in our original description of Plato's cave. Does the cacophony of sounds and images move us to a state of denial and isolation? Do we try to close our eyes and cover our ears? A contemporary psychological observer, Ken Gergen (2000/1991) writes about a *saturated self*, suggesting that we are inundated with some many different images that it is hard to sustain a coherent sense of self. Does this saturation of self tend to lead us to be more vulnerable to a single, authoritarian voice and interpretation of reality? Are we more likely to seek escape from freedom if we are afflicted by what Gergen described as our collective mental disease--*multiphrenia* (rather than schizophrenia)?

Leaving the Cave

What happens when one of the cave dwellers is unchained and leaves the cave? Do they simply enter another cave, or do they discover that the world is something more than the shadows they have always assumed were reality? Do they find that the world outside the cave is even more blinding and that it is filled with many contradictory belief systems? Let's imagine that this single prisoner (that we will call the protagonist) is freed from the chains and is forced to turn and see the fire. Our protagonist would not believe it if they were told that what they saw before was not real.

Our freed prisoner is likely to struggle when first realizing that the images and echoes are not what is real in the cave. Would our protagonist be angry about their previous life in chains seeing and hearing only an indirect view of reality – or would they wish to return to the safety of the chains? If they are angry, where should the anger be directed? If they want to return to the chains, will this desire for escape from freedom be accompanied by a sense of personal shame?

The protagonist is then forced (or perhaps allowed) to leave the cave and confront the outside light and sound directly. The light would hurt their eyes and make it hard for them to see the objects that are casting shadows. The sounds are likely to be strange. Perhaps another language is being spoken or no words are to be heard – there being only the sounds of nature or no sounds at all.

Our protagonist might be angry and in pain. This would only worsen when the radiant light of the sun overwhelms their eyes and blinds them and when the new sounds (or lack of sounds) play havoc on their ears (and psyche). The sunlight and sounds are representative of the new reality and knowledge that the freed prisoner is experiencing. Slowly, her eyes adjust to the light of the sun. The sounds become less bewildering.

Gradually, the former prisoner can see the reflections of people and natural things in water near the entrance of their cave. A bit later, they can see the people and natural things themselves. Plato continues, saying that the freed prisoner would think that the real world was superior to the world they experienced in the cave. Our protagonist would feel blessed for the change, pity the other prisoners, and want to bring their fellow cave dwellers out of the cave and into the sunlight

Returning to the Cave

Here is where the central question emerges: can our protagonist come back into the cave and what would this "enlightened" person say to those still in the cave? How would the dwellers assimilate this radically different perspective? The cave dwellers won't know what to do with the returning unchained "revolutionary" who talks about a different reality. What happens when this person returns to the cave? Would this person be considered a "philosopher" (as Plato suggests) or would they be identified as a "fool" or as a person who is "mad"? The former prisoner's conveying of their experiences is likely to terrify compatriots. Our protagonist realizes that they cannot remain in the cave. They would stagnate. Other cave dwellers will not change or move forward. They perceive our protagonist as dangerous. Our protagonist might be killed or at least isolated from other cave dwellers (imprisonment in a jail or asylum?)

The returning prisoner, whose eyes and ears have become acclimated to the light of the sun and sounds of the real world, might be blind and deaf when they re-enter the cave, just as they were when first exposed to the world outside the cave. The cave dwellers, according to Plato, would infer from the returning prisoner's blindness that the journey out of the cave had harmed the returning prisoner and that they should not undertake a similar journey.

Plato concludes that the cave dwellers, if released from their chains, would reach out and kill anyone who attempted to drag them out of the cave. Would the cave dwellers then ask to be once again chained up - or perhaps they would reapply their own chains (establishing a myth of free-will and self-governance). Gross's friendly fascism would be reestablished. Order would be returned to the cave. The threat of true freedom would be quelled. All would be well in the kingdom, and everyone would live happily ever after, staring at images on the wall and hearing echoes emanating from unknown sources.

Personal and Organizational Caves

There are several different ways in which to view the life of cave dwellers. We can identify the cave as existing inside the occupant's head and heart. The cave mentality exists when people become trapped or caught in their favorite (habitual) way of thinking and acting. These heuristics (what behavioral economists analyze) confine individuals within socially constructed worlds and prevent the emergence of other worlds. Preconceived (and often contradictory) ideas become traps for people when they begin to hold onto their preconceived notions and biases that eventually become their reality.

The cave can also be viewed as a collective experience. This is the focus I am taking in this exploration of authoritarianism and freedom. An entire society can be perceived as the cave and its members as those who dwell in the cave. Expanding on Plato's allegory of the cave, we can assume that people collectively develop unconscious mechanisms and construct realities in order to handle anxiety and desire. Social systems are created and sustained by conscious and unconscious processes. We can become imprisoned or confined by the images, ideas, thoughts, and actions to which these processes give rise. Social systems become stuck in their traditional manner of thinking. There are rigid (though often tacitly held) rules about how things are done. There are Bertrand Gross's shared myths. These are collective heuristics -- the most powerful kind. This is what "friendly fascism" is all about.

Life in a community or nation is deemed as a mode of cave dwelling when those who live and work in a social system are set in their ways of thinking and refuse to change. A prisoner who was released or escaped returns to the cave (as a visionary leader). They describe a new, blinding and deafening reality. Members of this social system are confronted with this new reality--one that requires a new way of thinking. They must reassess organizational norms and societal expectations. They must drop traditional modes of functioning. Individually and collectively these cave dwellers must develop a new identity and new ways of relating to one another and their community's operations.

The cave dwellers are offered an opportunity to be liberated from the cave by the prisoner who escapes and discovers the "real" world -- or at least a different world. The cave dwellers are given the opportunity to discover that the world beyond the shadows of the cave is more richly textured, more complex, unpredictable, turbulent, and filled with contradictions. Perhaps this world is even more rewarding. The prisoner has escaped *TO* freedom and invites her colleagues to also escape to freedom.

Several disturbing questions appear once again: do the other cave dwellers (and perhaps even the escaping prisoner) soon wish to escape *FROM* this new freedom? Do they long for a world (inside the cave) that seems simpler, more clearly defined and ultimately less challenging? Do they blame the escaped and returning prisoner for their new-found anxiety? Does the visionary

leader suddenly become an uninvited outsider who wants to cause pain, confusion, uncertainty, and turbulence? Can the cave dwellers abide by the contradictions that the returning prisoner brings to the cave? These are questions worthy of serious and sustained consideration by citizens of any country –if friendly or not so friendly fascism and pernicious authoritarian rule are to be avoided.

The Search for Serenity

I wish to turn from the Platonic allegory of the cave to a much more recent portrayal of society and its challenges (and fictions). Specifically, I reconvene my analysis of VUCA-Plus and suggest ways in which many people try to escape from the mid-21st Challenges of VUCA-Plus by entering a cave (actually a rabbit hole). Rather than being born in a Platonic cave and never entering a world outside the cave, my inhabitants of reality have lived outside the cave and experienced a world that is swirling and saturated with diffuse anxiety (angst). They escape into a rabbit hole and enter a distorted and distorting wonderland of Serenity that is just as damaging to the human mind, heart and soul as Plato's cave. At this point, let me set the stage for this contemporary propensity for escape and serenity.

The Swirling and Angst-Ridden Conditions

Whether or not we are living in a 21st Century cave, the world is challenging. There is wild wind whipping around the cave and disturbing those writing and pronouncing the interpretive text. It is hard to read or write when coping with a storm. Even outside the cave – in a “real” world – there are mighty winds throwing us off course and back into the cave. We must make decisions in settings that are filled with volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Decisions must be made in a turbulent environment that is swirling with contradictory versions of reality and polarizing values.

We are worn out having to grapple every day with the conditions of VUCA-Plus. As I have mentioned, many observers of our contemporary social condition have gone so far as to suggest that many people find themselves exhausted with the flood of contradictory information pouring over them. Thoughtful consideration and caring compassion are required – even when we are overloaded and tired (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). Are we up for the task of being thoughtful and caring? Analyses we have thoughtfully made and decisions we have enacted in a caring manner are subject to frequent review and modification as we try to navigate a turbulent and contradictory VUCA world. Are we willing to redo our work?

I propose that collective anxiety – often identified as *Angst* – is not some ephemeral and diffuse fear that comes automatically with living (though this might also be the case). Rather, *Angst* in mid-21st Century life is linked specifically to the six conditions of VUCA-Plus. These six conditions not only create *Angst*, all six make the amelioration of the conditions of *Angst* that much more difficult. *Angst*, in turn, tends to pull us toward simplistic, reality-denying and polarizing beliefs and solutions (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). There is an important ramification here for those who seek to lead 21st Century organizations and social systems. These leaders and

consultants often must deal with the major VUCA-Plus-related challenges that escalate collective Angst.

Angst and Serenity

Angst can be induced in many ways. There are multiple sources of collective societal anxiety. I would suggest that many of these sources are to be found in the conditions of VUCA-Plus. We often seem to be stranded on a boat that is caught up in the “perfect storm” of VUCA-Plus and societal Angst—especially when we are confronted with a major wave such as COVID-19 (Bergquist and Mura, 2020; Bergquist, 2021b). We find the pervasive presence of Angst to pose many affective challenges. The VUCA-Plus conditions also pose many cognitive challenges. It is hard to determine what is “real” in a VUCA-Plus environment. How does one form beliefs, as well as predict and make decisions based on these beliefs in an elusive VUCA-Plus reality. Leadership in our 21st Century societies has become particularly challenging given the big VUCA-Plus waves that are crashing on our societal shore right now (Bergquist, 2020a; Weitz and Bergquist, 2024).

Rather than confronting the challenges of VUCA-Plus, we find ourselves in a real (or invented) land of Serenity. Instead of Volatility we find Stability. Uncertainty is replaced by Certainty. This is a world of simplicity rather than Complexity – while the Ambiguity of VUCA-Plus is replaced with clarity. Dwelling in this wonderland, we no longer have to navigate an environment of Turbulence. Rather there is Calm. There is also Consistency rather than Contradiction. We now find the compelling charm of our six conditions of Serenity in full operation.

Taken together these six conditions of Serenity yields something of a utopian environment. Perhaps, stability, certainty, simplicity, clarity, calm and consistency even offer us a touch of Eden . . . without the snake. At the very least, these conditions provide us with a cavernous wonderland in which we can dwell – at least temporarily.

Seeking Serenity

On the surface, Serenity does look quite tempting. It reduces Angst and opens the way for fast thinking and facile solutions (Kahneman, 2011). Furthermore, we can readily find Serenity in our world – at least in the short term. Over the long-term, however, Serenity is often elusive – and if we find Serenity in our mid-21st Century life, it often comes at a cost. Specifically, it comes with costs associated with the distortion of reality, the rigidity of thought and action, and most importantly, the loss of integrity in our relationship with other people and with the social systems of which we are a member.

For instance, *Stability* requires that we establish strong structures, processes and attitudes. This makes it hard to adjust to the shifting conditions in our mid-21st Century world. We establish what is equivalent to physical (and psychological) triangles in order to create and maintain stability. However, triangles are not easy to adjust. Unfortunately, our 21st Century demands agility—which means flexible structures, processes and attitudes. We similarly find that

Certainty (the second condition of Serenity) requires rigidity of thought. It is hard to be both certain and creative at the same time, yet the shifting conditions of our mid-century society requires that we be creative. This often means operating in organizational cracks (Stacey,1996) and the intersections between organizations (Johansson, 2004).

Simplicity is an aspect of serenity that requires us to narrow our vision and our criteria of verification. As suggested in the tale about the man who is standing beside the light pole looking for his lost keys (knowing that his keys are not located near the light), so it is that we attempt to find simplicity in our life by standing near the light rather than searching for a problem where it actually resides. Similarly, we search for *Clarity* by standing at a distance and reconstructing what we are seeing so that it becomes clear. We “fill in” what we don’t see or hear so that everything is comprehensive and meaningful. Jerome Bruner, a noted psychologist, suggests that we go “beyond the information given” (Bruner, 1973). Even more broadly we participate with others in the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) so that we might see, hear, and understand more “clearly.”

With regard to the two remaining conditions of Serenity, we find what seems to be a condition of *Calm* when we remain silent and immobile is often actually stress-induced freeze. We can easily mistake calm for the response we make when attacked as the weak and slow creature on the African Savannah (Sapolsky, 2004). Unlike the slow and weak rodents of the savannah who also freeze (rather than fight or flee), we humans don’t shake off our freeze; rather, we remain frozen in a physically unhealthy state of arousal. We freeze when confronted with mid-21st Century challenges – at a time when we should be taking action. Unfortunately, we are much harder to ignore than the rodent and are easily eaten by the lion (real or imagined source of stress) when we are frozen.

Similarly, we are inclined to get eaten when we insist on being *Consistent* and congruent in our beliefs and actions. We take wrong action and distort reality in order to avoid dissonance. We desperately seek out congruence and consistency between our self-image and our actions, between our espoused theory and theory-in-action (Argyris and Schon, 1974), and between our values and our choices in life. Serenity comes at the cost of integrity – and even our survival on a 21st Century savannah inhabited by VUCA-Plus lions.

Given this summary description of costs associated with Serenity, I turn now to a more detailed analysis of the six conditions of Serenity as each relates to its VUCA-Plus counterpart. I identify several distinctly different ways in which each challenge is manifest in our 21st Century world. These differences are framed as left column and right column polarities. In most cases, the left column represents the more conservative perspective on this challenge, whereas the right column is more likely to be at a cutting edge. I then identify ways in which the accompanying option of Serenity can be achieved as a way to escape from this specific VUCA-Plus challenge. I also expand on the costs associated with the engagement of each condition of serenity.

Volatility and Stability

We are living in a world where there is rapid change in an unpredictable manner. Furthermore, from a systemic perspective, volatility involves multiple changes that are often interwoven with one another. The rapid changes, cyclical changes and chaotic changes of a white-water world are clearly evident. The personal impact of volatility on our sense of continuity and stability is profound.

We are often surprised and unprepared. Consequently, we look to some form of continuity and stability in our world—a safe island on which we can land after being tossed about on a stormy sea. This island of safety offers a cure to the ailment of volatility—but at quite a cost. The cost is the loss of reality and the construction of a world that relies on a dualistic alignment with authority and a splitting of good from bad and “us” from “them”.

The Polarities of Volatility

Volatility refers to the dynamics of change: its accelerating rate, intensity and speed as well as its unexpected catalysts. The Left Column perspective on volatility would be centered on *Commitment* in the midst of volatility. This perspective concerns being faithful. We take action in a consistent and sustained manner. In this way, other people can readily understand and predict our behavior.

What about the Right Column? The focus from this perspective would be on *Contingency* in the midst of volatility. This perspective concerns being flexible. We keep options open and allow learning to occur in order to modify the actions taken. An appropriate engagement would involve emphasis on the intentions (goals, vision, values, purposes) associated with the issue being addressed. Which of these intentions should (must) remain constant and which can change depending on the shifting circumstances associated with this issue?

I introduce the metaphor of anchors at this point to address the issue of continuity and change. Originally introduced by Edgar Schein (1978) in describing the nature of careers, the metaphor of anchors can be expanded to help us make sense of this volatility-based polarity. I expand on this metaphor by noting that there are actually two kinds of anchors. The first type of anchor is the so-called *Bottom or Ground Anchor*. This is the large and very heavy anchor that most of us non-nautical folks envision. The bottom anchor consists of a shaft with two arms and flukes at one end and a stoke mounted at the other end—or they are slabs of concrete to which a ship is attached when moored. This type of anchor digs into the floor of the sea once the boat begins to move and provides tension on the chains connecting the anchor to the boat. These anchors are meant to be permanent—just as some intentions aligned with a specific issue are meant to remain stationary and are never to be modified (let alone discarded). Commitment is at the forefront.

The second kind of anchor is called a *Sea Anchor* (also identified as a drift anchor or drogue). It typically is not as heavy as the bottom anchor and is often shaped like a parachute or cone with

the larger end pointing in the direction of the boat's movement. The sea anchor helps to orient the boat into the wind and slows down (but doesn't prevent) the boat's drift. The sea anchor is used when the boat is far away from the shoreline and the sea floor is located many fathoms below.

The *Sea Anchor* contrasts with the ground anchors in that it is intended not to hold a boat in place but rather to align a ship with the wind and slow down its movement in any one direction. The sea anchor provides flexible anchorage in the midst of shifts in tidal action and wind. Those organizational intentions operate like sea anchors. It similarly provides alignment and direction for an organization or community as it shifts gradually with changes in the environment surrounding the presentation of a specific issue. Contingency is at the forefront. Polarity is addressed by acknowledging benefits inherent in both the ground (commitment) and sea (contingency) anchor.

The Search for Stability

We look out over our mid-21st Century world and see something that looks more like a stormy sea than *terra firma*. Miller and Page's (2007) would suggest our world resembles a rugged landscape. There is no one dominant element (no single presiding mountain); rather there are a host of ridges and valleys. We find no one intention (goal, purpose, desired outcome) standing out as of greater importance than any other intentions. Furthermore, as Miller and Page noted, the landscape might be dancing. Priorities are constantly changing.

Unexpected ("Rogue") events are to be seen in our rugged and dancing landscape. These are big things that occur in an organization or community. They often serve as the base for the powerful narratives that are to be found in all social systems. These are narratives about heroic actions, foolish or even disastrous decisions, or a moment of courage or honesty. These are frequently repeated stories about a critical and unanticipated decision made at the crossroads in the life of the organization or community. The success of an underdog (person or department) is often conveyed.

Nasim Taleb (2010) uses the term *Black Swan* when describing those remarkable and powerful events that have caught our world by surprise. We all know that swans are white—but what happens when a black swan is discovered? Similarly, how could we have predicted the Arab Spring, the election of an African American as president, or rapid expansion in the global use and influence of the Internet. As Taleb has noted, rogue events are not only unanticipated—these events are also often governed by power laws (exponential increases) that move the rogue event quickly from small to large. Within organizations and communities, small variations in the dominant pattern of the system can lead to major changes in certain, unanticipated ways. These are the rogue events and the emergence of a whole flock of Black Swans. As Taleb has noted, the rogue event is often preceded by periods of great stability (strongly entrenched patterns). This is what makes the rogue event so surprising and is often the reason why this event has such a powerful impact

We secure *Stability* (the first condition of Serenity) by dismissing or ignoring the black swans. An island of safety and stability awaits us when we pull ourselves away from our stormy 21st

Century world. Our island can be surrounded by a large body of water. We vigilantly protect ourselves from the outside world. Our island might instead be surrounded by small stretch of water and perhaps a sand bar that can be crossed at low tide. We sometime let in the outside world. It is essential we spend time considering how isolated we wish to be and for how long a period of time.

An island that remains closed to the mainland can serve as a *Buffer* against an unanticipated rogue event. In an organizational setting, this buffer might be a financial reserve or a human resource reserve. The latter reserve can be created by the cross-training of employees to step into functions other than their own if emergency action is required. The buffer might instead involve diversification of an organization's offerings. As in the case of a healthy ecosystem, diversity of products and services in an organization enables it to better survive changes in its "environment." Similarly, a community is more "adaptive" if its population is diverse (in terms of ethnic identity, race, socio-economic position, age, and gender identification) – despite the declarations made by advocates of "homogeny".

While buffers make sense as a way to secure stability, they also require an expenditure of surplus money and time – which isn't always available in organizations or communities (especially when VUCA-Plus is prevalent). Buffers also can become an excuse for "hanging in" with the old way of doing things. Agility usually requires that leaders of an organization recognize the real consequences of remaining unchanged – even though it is tempting to delay execution of a new initiative when a buffer is available. As system dynamics specialists (e.g. Meadows, 2008) have repeatedly demonstrated, delays can dramatically change the outcomes of a new initiative if and when it is finally enacted.

There is a more constructive way in which we can find Stability in the midst of volatility. We can offer *Organizational Leverage*. We set up a small stabilizing event or process in our organization or community to offset the volatility--much as we find with Buckminster Fuller's "trim tab." Fuller's trim tab is a small metal plate on the rudder of a ship that is set against the current direction of the ship – thus providing hydrodynamic stability for the boat. We set up a stabilizing trim tab in an organization as a countermeasure against newly emerging volatility and instability.

For instance, when a rogue event occurs, we remind our employees of our founding mission. This was done by the leaders of a major banking firm when they faced (unexpected) competition from another major bank that was dramatically changing several of its banking services. A major initiative in this bank focused on the founding story of the bank. Core values are represented in this founding story. The leaders of this bank recognized that they were about to introduce major changes in their own operation to counter their competitors' new initiatives. They wanted to be sure that these changes were still aligned with the founding values. The founding story served as a trim tab for this bank – and it yielded some benefits. However, this stabilizing initiative soon lost energy. Employees were not particularly interested in studying the bank's history when they had to learn new skills and acquire new knowledge that was aligned with new ways in which this bank needed to operate (if it was to survive).

A stabilizing trim tab was also introduced by the leaders of a utility company. Retired employees at all levels of the organization were invited (as volunteers) to mentor newly hired employees. The retirees provided a stabilizing history, knowledge of the business (at all levels), and a diverse set of skills that helped guide and support the transition of these employees into their new jobs. Once again, this trim tab intervention was of limited value. New employees politely listened to the “old timers” but paid more attention to the “new stuff” they had to learn.

We find that stability is rarely gained when engaged indirectly through a trim tab intervention. Conditions of volatility usually require that direct action be taken to “right the ship.” This typically means that leaders of the organization introduce *New Structures and Processes* without relying on trim tab countermeasures. Volatility produces stress and there is no escaping it with history or foundational values. We might set up a matrix structure that enables our organization to rely on existing functional departments (finance, marketing, production, etc.) while also readily establishing new product or service lines. We can also introduce organizational processes that acknowledge both the value of stabilizing expertise found among those employees who have worked for many years in the same job, and the value of emergent expertise to be found in job rotations and in ad hoc task forces (made up of both old and new employees from different divisions and levels of the organization).

At an even deeper level, Stability and Serenity are to be found in the way an organization or community plans for its future. The inability to avoid stress under conditions of volatility requires that we do some planning for rogue events and black swans—rather than ignoring them. *Contingency Planning* is required. This mode of planning requires (as the name implies) that we plan for various contingencies—some positive and some negative. I have written about a related planning process, *Pre-mortem Reflection*, that has been advocated by behavioral economists (Bergquist, 2014b).

While we are accustomed to doing “post-mortem” assessments after a project is finished, Daniel Kahneman and his colleagues (Kahneman, 2011) propose that we engage in slow and critical thinking prior to the initiation of a project. While optimism is valuable as fuel to get a project started, it is also important to recognize the potential problems and barriers associated with enactment of the project. This pre-project reflection not only helps a project team prepare for potential challenges (contingency planning), it also helps to reduce the depth of a change curve that inevitably accompanies major new projects or changes in an organization’s operations (Bergquist, 2014b).

Over the past decade I have frequently encouraged planning teams to identify and address probable problems and barriers associated with the project or organizational change that is about to be mounted—this is contingency and pre-mortem planning. However, I often take contingency planning processes and pre-mortem processes a step further as a constructive way in which to find stability in the midst of a volatile world. I invite them to identify some “black swans” that might impact on their project or change. The shade of black can vary—with both unexcepted positive events lighting the way and darker negative events posing a major challenge.

When I am working with a nonprofit organization these rogue events often involve surprising new sources of money or loss of financial resources. Unanticipated changes in public policy regarding funding priorities are introduced when I am working with a government organization, while dramatic shifts in the size or focus of a competitor is common when I am working with a corporation. I even introduce some more humorous or “far out” black swans just to lighten the conversation and encourage creative problem solving.

The swan might be a pill that significantly increases our intelligence. Or it could be the landing of friendly aliens on Planet Earth. I sometimes suggest that the black swan is the elevation of one member of the planning team to the position of Emperor (commanding all operations in the world). The key factor is the encouragement of agility rather stability in the midst of volatility. Planning must be contingency-based and begun (premortem) before a project is initiated. Strategies for securing stability such as the use of buffers, history, retired employees and trim tabs must be viewed as adjunctive to a direct confrontation of the stress and challenges associated with Volatility.

Uncertainty and Certainty

Evolution and adaptation to an evolving environment requires variance and uncertainty (anomalies). While we may seek to find a stable and predictable environment in our mid-21st Century life, we are liking instead to find a lack of continuity and resulting lack of clarity regarding what is going to happen from day to day in our life. There is an important systemic impact: it is hard to plan for the future or even for one or two days from now. Nothing seems permanently to be in place. At a personal level, we must keep schedule and expectations quite flexible.

The Polarity of Uncertainty

Uncertainty refers to the lack of predictability, the increasing prospects for surprising, "disruptive" changes that often overwhelm our awareness, understanding and ability to cope with events. In this case, the Left Column perspective on Uncertainty would center on the *Assimilation* of changes into existing framework. This perspective concerns making sense of and finding meaning in what is occurring in the present reality. By contrast, a Right Column perspective on Uncertainty would center on *Accommodation* to changes by adjusting or reworking existing framework. This perspective concerns learning from and adapting to what is occurring in the present reality.

The appropriate management of this polarity would involve the creation and maintenance of a learning organization (Argyris and Schön, 1978). Emphasis is placed in such an organization (or community) on the learning that takes place after either a success or failure in addressing issues associated with uncertain conditions. The polarity is addressed by recognizing that learning always involves structures and concepts that already exist (assimilation). We don't learn if the incoming experience is totally alien to us. However, as we bring in and incorporate new information, the existing structures must change (accommodation). New experiences simply

bounce off us (they are dismissed) if we are unwilling to accommodate. A joint assimilation/accommodation process is required.

The Search for Certainty

There is a strong pull in our VYCA-Plus world to be rigid rather than being flexible and open to new perspectives and practices. We are likely to become stubborn If we are not prepared for a high level of uncertainty and for new learning. We find one specific way to be in the world and look for other people who think and act in a similar manner. Together, we created a Bubble of Belief. We collectively push for laws that enforce this one way of being in the world and seek to elect those leaders who are just as committed to this one way of thinking and acting. If we can't elect them in a legitimately recognized manner, then we are likely to join with others in manipulating the existing system or simply imposed our own choices by force. Our rigidity leads to authoritarianism – as a cure for the seeming malady of uncertainty.

The search for *Certainty* is a major driving force for many people. It is probably the most compelling of the six pathways to serenity. In writing about the quest for certainty, John Dewey (1929) had the following to say:

When theories of values do not afford intellectual assistance in framing ideas and beliefs about values that are adequate to direct action, the gap must be filled by other means. If intelligent method is lacking, prejudice, the pressure of immediate circumstance, self-interest and class-interest, traditional customs, institutions of accidental historic origin, are *not* lacking, and they tend to take the place of intelligence.

We see even in the early 20th Century perspective of John Dewey that the lure of Serenity is present. We can easily replace intellectual assistance with prejudice, immediate pressures, self-interests, customs, etc. that lead us to certainty and the comfort of serenity. I quote Dewey (1931, p. 329) once again:

It is our human intelligence and our human courage which is on trial; it is incredible that men who have brought the technique of physical discovery, invention and use to such a pitch of perfection will abdicate in the face of the infinitely more important human problem. What stands in the way (of a planned economy) is a lot of outworn traditions, moth-eaten slogans and catchwords that do substitute duty for thought, as well as our entrenched predatory self-interest. We shall only make a real beginning in intelligent thought when we cease mouthing platitudes. Just as soon as we begin to use the knowledge and skills we have, to control social consequences in the interest of a shared, abundant and secured life, we shall cease to complain of the backwardness of our social knowledge.

Here in the middle of the 21st Century, our search for certainty might require that we *Confine Ourselves* to a small, confined silo where we can control (and therefore predict) everything. We set up large, thick boundaries between ourselves and those who are “other.” (Oshry, 2018). In search of Serenity, we establish a closed system that can't sustain itself over the long term. Ironically,

this strategy of confinement is aligned with a “modern” approach to management: the focus is on control so that one can predict and subsequently plan and execute without disruption. I am reminded of the witch in the musical *Into the Woods*. She confines her daughter in a tower so that nothing can harm her. However, the daughter can’t survive (psychologically) in this closed system and must find a way to escape the tower. Like the witch, we often suffocate those which we love when we seek to find safety and certainty for them.

If we are unable to control and build strong walls and towers, then we must *Limit Our Aspirations* and house these aspirations in the past: “we have always done it this way and will always do it this way in the future.” This is the perspective of the recalcitrant in Everett Rogers (1962) model of innovation diffusion. The recalcitrant is a person who is resistant to all new ideas. They are never likely to “leave home” and venture into new territory. Actually, in some cases, these recalcitrant often seek out certainty and resist change because they were “burned” in the past by uncertainty when they were trying to introduce something new in their own organization or community. Failure in the enactment of new ideas not only leads to loss of the idea but also to loss of someone willing to try something new.

There is a third option, we ensure certainty by *Finding and Securing Power* in a system. With power comes control and with control comes an ability to do things “the good old way.” There is also the matter of self-fulfilling prophecy. We can establish a system of power that will ensure our own assumptions about other people (and ourselves) are being fulfilled. We assume that those “Other” people are unskilled, untrustworthy and/or different from us. Without any power, they will fulfill our expectations—because we are free to act in a manner that elicits their poor performance, disruptive behavior, and/or strained relationship with us.

It seems that Certainty comes at a great cost. We can manage volatility a bit with some pre-mortem planning; however, certainty is another matter. For us to be “certain” about something is to be removed from any serious attempt to deal with the other five conditions of VUCA-Plus. It is impossible to be certain when volatility, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence and contradiction are swirling around our head and heart.

Complexity and Simplicity

We live in a world that is not just complicated (with many moving parts) but also complex (with many parts that are interconnected) (Miller and Page, 2007). We must take into consideration many different things and multiple, inter-related events that simultaneously impact our life and work. The systemic impact of this complexity is great. It is very hard in mid-21st Century life to make sense of or even find meaning in that which is occurring every day. At a personal level, this means that we often must spend a considerable amount of time trying to figure out what is happening before making decisions or taking actions. Slow thoughtful analysis is required (rather than fast “knee-jerk” and habitual thinking) This requires discipline and sustained concentration – which is hard to maintain in our fast-moving world.

There is an alternative. We can choose to reframe our world so that it is not complex. We can ensure that fast, habitual thinking wins the day. This requires that we radically distort the reality of our mid-21st Century life. To do this distorting of reality, we must join with others who distort their world in a similar manner. We can engage in even greater distortions when relating to these other people who perceive reality in a manner that is aligned with our own perceptions. We form an echo chamber with those who think like us. Our Bubble of Belief is impenetrable. We devote energy (and money) to ensure that those who lead and have power are also thinking like us. They might even have helped to “teach” us how to think in this simplistic and fast manner. We are fully devoted to these people who are now in authority – or are vigorously (and often violently) seeking to be in authority.

The Polarities of Complexity

Complexity entails the multiplex of forces, the apparently contradictory information flow, the sensitive interdependence of everything we touch, leading to the sense of confusion in which it's hard to make smart decisions, steeped as we are in the moving dance of reality. A Left Column perspective on Complexity would center on being *Clear Minded* in the midst of confusion. The central concern is sorting out what is most relevant and most easily confirmed while dancing with reality. The opposing Right Column perspective on Complexity would center on being *Open Minded* in the midst of confusion. From this perspective, we would be primarily concerned with recognizing and holding on to the multiple realities that reside in the dance with reality.

Coaching and consulting services can be appropriately and effectively used in addressing this polarity through encouragement and even facilitation) of the slow, reflective thinking that is described and advocated by behavioral economists – particularly Daniel Kahneman (2011). Slow thinking incorporates both clarity of mind (identifying and setting aside biases and sloppy heuristics) and open-mindedness (consideration of alternative perspectives, practices and options). In the midst of pervasive anxiety associated with Complexity (and the other conditions of VUCA-Plus), it is critical that thinking and decision-making slow down. The polarity between clear and open mindedness can be effectively managed with the use of tools offered by Kahneman and his colleagues (Kahneman, 2011; Kahneman, Sibony and Sunstein, 2021).

The Search for Simplicity

As I have already noted, there is a strong, widespread push for simplicity in our life. This push is aided in mid-21st Century by the media that we consumed. We ask other people at work to “give it to us in bullet points.” We want to know the ten keys to success or the seven steps to take on the journey to health (or even happiness). We want sound bites when we pick up the news on our handheld device or even when we are viewing our evening news on cable TV. “Tell me what I need to know and how I solve the problems I am facing. Make it fast and digestible.” This demand for simple information and simple solutions is particularly prevalent when Angst is swapping the country or at least invading our workplace or household.

This search for simple, easily digestible views of reality is actually not new. It goes back to at least the world of Ancient Greece and the insights offered by Plato in his parable of the cave. According to Plato, we are all living in a cave and never gain a clear view of reality. Instead, we view the shadows that are projected on the walls of the cave. We live with an image of reality (shadows on the wall of the cave) rather than with reality itself. Plato notes that we have no basis for knowing whether we are seeing the shadow or seeing reality, given that we have always lived in the cave.

Plato thus speaks to us from many centuries past about the potential fallacy to be found in our search for simplicity in 21st Century societies. Most importantly, in our search we can never know whether we are living in the cave or living in the world of reality outside the cave. It gets more complex. Today, we live with an expanded cast of characters in the cave. First, there is something or someone standing near the opening of the cave. There are narratives and perspectives that serve as partitions which block out some of the light coming into the cave. These partitions are cultural or personal narratives that we meet with every day. Not only don't we actually see reality, something or someone is determining which parts of objective reality gain access to the cave and are projected onto the wall. Those holding the partition have grown up in the cave; however, they may hold a quite different agenda from ours and other cave dwellers. They may even control the media in our mid-21st Century world.

There is yet another character in our contemporary cave. This is the reporter or analyst. We actually don't have enough time in our busy lives to look directly at the wall to see the shadows that are projected on the wall from the "real" world. The cave has grown very large. We often can't even see the walls of the cave and the shadows. We wait for reporters to tell us what is being projected on the wall and for the analyst to tell us what the implications of these images are for us in our lives. At times, we might even turn to historians of the cave to trace out wall image patterns and trends. Our reports and analysts—even our historians—share their interpretations in sound bits. We are thus removed three steps from reality.

On behalf of Serenity, we believe that the shadows on Plato's cave are "reality." We don't recognize that someone is standing at the entrance to the cave and selectively determining which aspects of reality get projected onto the wall. We don't acknowledge that someone else is standing inside the cave offering us a description and analysis. We can hope for a direct experience or at least for "honest" interpretations. Yet, we remain confused about what is "real" and often don't trust our direct experience. We move, with great reluctance and considerable grieving, to a recognition that reality is being constructed for us and that we need to attend not only to the constructions, but also to the interests and motives of those who stand at the entrance to the cave and those who offer us their interpretations.

Plato's metaphor of the cave does provide us with the opportunity to gain insights in our reflections on the nature of the cave, the world that is projected onto the walls of the cave, and the nature and agenda of the interpreters. This requires that we tolerate (or even feel comfortable) with Complexity. We should also consider whether or not to step outside the cave (direct experience). However, we

must recognize that we might actually not be able to step outside the cave. Or we might just be stepping into another cave. Perhaps it is safer to remain inside the cave than to venture outside without the help of interpreters. Should we (and can we) face the profound challenge of unmediated experiences (stepping outside the cave)? This certainly leads us far away from Serendipity – but may open the door (or cave entrance) to the fresh breeze of VUCA-Plus diversity – and reality.

Ambiguity and Clarity

Living in the mid-21st Century we are likely to find that many of the things we encounter and events that are happening around us can be quite confusing. Our world is often not very easy to observe clearly and the conclusions we reach about reality are often not consistent. Our collective blurry vision has an important systemic impact. As a society we can't trust the accuracy of what we see or hear. Furthermore, we can't trust what "experts" tell us about the world in which we are living (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). If we are being honest with ourselves, then we are forced to adopt a social constructivist view of the world. There is no fundamental reality that can somehow be accurately assessed. Rather there are alternative constructions of the "real" world – which leave us with no clear, unambiguous sense of what is real and what is false. The traditional objectivist perspective must be abandoned. There is no objective way in which to assess the real world. We are living in Plato's cave and the light we see projected on the wall is often flickering and not clearly seen.

What does this mean for us personally? It means that we often must look and listen a second or third time to ensure that what is seen or heard is accurate. And we must examine our own assumptions and our own constructive frame of reference to fully understand the way in which we are viewing the world. This task is quite challenging given all of the distorted lens and shades that are blocking our vision and creating our Bubble of Belief. How do we deal with what Frederick Jameson (1991) once called the "troubling ambiguity" of postmodern life?

We can regress to what William Perry (1970) titles a "Dualistic" perspective. We subscribe to the reality offered by one particular "expert" who arrives at our doorstep with a mantle of authority. This authority can come from academic or research-based pedigrees or from a position of power. Unfortunately, academic and research-based credibility can readily be questioned given the inherent instability of academia and research in the mid-21st Century (Weitz and Bergquist, 2022). It gets even worse when this instability is accompanied by acknowledgement of social construction as an underlying framework for assessing the value of expertise that is offered. We are faced with the prospect of transitioning to what Perry titled a "Multiplistic" perspective – where all expertise is questioned. Better to turn to power as a second source – that is much more stable and reassuring. It is authority embedded in power that will often win the day when the world is saturated with ambiguity. Regressive Dualism triumphs . . .

The Polarities of Ambiguity

Ambiguity concerns the 'haziness' in which cause-and-effect are assessed. Causes are hard to attribute. Relativity seems to trump established rules. Conditions of ambiguity weigh heavily on

our ability to hold contradictory data and still function and make choices. An accompanying Left Column perspective on Ambiguity would focus on *Tolerating* Haziness. The primary concern would center on being patient and willing to remain in "limbo" until such time as the haze clears and actions can be taken. The Right Column perspective stands in opposition. This perspective would focus on *Engaging* the haziness. The primary concern is establishing a viable "truth" and "reality" upon which one can base and guide actions

As Ken and Mary Gergen (2004) proclaimed, "truth is only found within community." More specifically, they would suggest that truth is found in trusting relationships: "constructivism favors a replacement of the individual as the source of meaning with the relationship." Even more to the point, truth is found in dialogue – and disagreement. There is an insistence that we respect and learn from other people: "one is invited into a posture of curiosity and respect for others."

Those engaging in this trusting dialogue can introduce multiple templates for assessing the nature of any challenging issue. One of these templates concerns the identification and analysis of both the immediate issue (the figure) and the context within which this issue is situated (the ground). A second template concerns the distance from which a specific issue is being addressed. It should be examined close up (as an intimate portrait) (proximal perspective) and at a distance (as a broad landscape) (distal perspective).

The third template involves temporal distance. The issue should be examined as it is currently being experienced (in the present time) and as it will probably be (or could be) present at some point ahead of us (future time). The polarity of engagement and tolerance is managed when each of these three templates is applied to the analysis of an important issue. The convening issue can be viewed from multiple perspectives – which allows for both immediate engagement and tolerance of certain immediate circumstances as well as longer term and "bigger picture" engagement and tolerance.

The Search for Clarity

As we look at the world (from inside the cave or outside the cave) it is important to consider what we are looking at and what we are not looking at (ignoring) or seeing through distorted lens. This means that we look back at our own attention strategies. Michael Polanyi suggests that we attend to that from which we are attending (Polanyi, 1969). The lens we are using greatly impacts what we are seeing. Most importantly, as I suggested with regard to templates, we can look at objects and events that are distant in time and space, or we can look at objects and events that are close to us in time and space.

The distant (distal) objects and events are usually seen more clearly than objects and events that reside very close to us in time and space. Thus, in our search for clarity, we often remain at a distance and view everything from afar. We become historians of the past and might believe that we need only replicate that which we believe worked in the past. As Mark Twain suggested, history might not repeat itself, but it does rhyme – and we can see this past history through lens that we believe are objective and free of present-day emotions and biases.

We also seek clarity by reducing everything to a distant number rather than a more intimate narrative (Bergquist, 2021a). Statistics provides at least probability – which is reassuring in our search for not only clarity but also certainty. This “ideographic” approach to assessing reality leaves us with the capacity to accurately predict how many boxes of Cheerios will be consumed this month. We are given a specific number (very clear) and specific prediction (hovering on the edge of certainty). We don’t have to taste the cereal at all or even meet any of the people who have chosen this cereal. We can look at a distance and need not get emotionally involved with anyone eating Cheerios today.

What then happens when we focus on the act of a specific person choosing a specific cereal (or choosing something other than cereal for breakfast)? Everything gets less clear and less certain. We are suddenly involved in “nomothetic” assessment, with a focus close up on the actual muddy act of making food choices at breakfast. The cereal eater might surprise us. They might choose a waffle rather than Cheerios. They haven’t eaten a waffle in more than a decade. We are witnessing a “black swan.” Why the waffle? Does the breakfast eater even know why they made this choice? The behavioral scientists have won major awards (in economics rather than psychology) by delving into these fuzzy decision-making processes. They are willing to live with ambiguity and have offered many valuable insights based on this tolerance of ambiguity (cf. Kahneman, 2011; Ariely, 2008; Ariely, 2012; Thaler, 2015; Lewis, 2017).

What happens when we move in even closer to the subject of our study. What happens when this “subject” is us? What do we do with personal and highly intimate portraits of our own life experiences. Often known as phenomenological studies, these inquiries inside our own psyche produce insights of great value to not just ourselves but also other people. I would point, in particular, to the autobiographical and visual portrayal of his own internal psychic dynamics that are provided by Carl Jung (1963) in *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* and in his large, breathtaking volume titled: *The Red Book* (Jung, 2009). It is in these two documents that we see Carl Jung “upfront and personal.” Very few other psychologists (or authors of fictional or nonfictional books) have been as brave (though Jung did request that *The Red Book* not be published until after his death).

The phenomenologists take it one step further. They challenge the fundamental assumption that one can be objective in their reporting of events or description of objects. Like Michael Polanyi, phenomenologists push for an exploration of one’s own biases and perspectives as an observer and commentator on human behavior. Instead of trying to be objective, one can be honest and transparent. That means being candid about one’s own assumptions, biases and purposes for writing about or discussing a specific event or object. One of the best ways to do this is to be interviewed about one’s direct experience regarding this event or object.

I personally witnessed the profound engagement in this phenomenological process on the part of a graduate student attending my graduate school in the early 1990s. Living with AIDS, my student had just lost his own partner to this disease. I encouraged him to “enter the mouth of the dragon” and focus his dissertation on the experience of losing one’s partner to AIDS and

preparing for one's own death (which was likely during the early years of AIDS). My student took on this profoundly challenging task by conducting in-depth interviews with six other men with AIDS who were grieving the AIDS-related death of their partner. Taking a phenomenological stance, my student first was interviewed by a colleague regarding his own experience. In this interview, his own biases, fears, hopes and reasons for conducting this study were revealed.

I have never seen a more "objective" study in which everything of importance was revealed regarding the researcher's own biases, assumptions and motivations. His dissertation ended up being rough but saturated with profound insights not only about AIDS but also the processes of grieving and dying. My student died several months after completing his dissertation and being rewarded the doctorate. This dissertation process was close and personal for me. I can't be objective about it even more than 20 years later. The whole engagement is unclear for me and filled with my own feelings of admiration, sadness and a sense of privilege that I was able to be with him for this final act of his life. Thus, I, like most people, can be clear from a distance but not clear up close and personal. Numbers are simpler than narratives. Big pictures (distal/ideographic) are clearer and less emotionally-distorting than local pictures (proximal/nomothetic). Serenity can ultimately be achieved only by closing our eyes and our hearts.

Turbulence and Calm

The condition of turbulence exists in the whitewater world where four patterns of change intermingle: rapid change, cyclical change, non-change (stagnation) and chaotic change. Those with an authoritarian proclivity thrive in this environment. They block up flow by throwing everything but the kitchen sink into the turbulent river. Since the turbulence often comes in the form of information about reality, the "everything" often includes misinformation, conspiracy theories and simply a massive set of lies (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024).

The barriers are relieving for many people in that the river is now slowed down. The river might no longer flow (leaving everything in a condition of stagnation). Under these conditions of blockage, authoritarians are able to easily navigate upstream, traveling back to a world of the past. In doing so, they take command of narratives concerning this past life. They screen and distort so that American life in the past was somehow "great" and can be "great again" under new authoritarian rule. The river will never again be turbulent. Life will once again be pleasant and calm.

It should be noted that authoritarians are unable to do all of this alone. It takes considerable funding to block the powerfully flowing river and to deliver a distorted but compelling and calming message "from the past." Enter the power and financial elite. They provide support for the authoritarians, assuming (with some justification) that turning to the reconstructed "good old days" will mean a return to days when people in positions of wealth were allowed to remain in power—and were often praised for their wealth rather than being restrained in their acquisition of more wealth through new taxes and restraint on the formation of 21st Century monopolies.

While the authoritarians and power/financial elite wish for and seek to block flow of the turbulent river, the reality is that turbulence (and other contributing conditions of VUCA-Plus) still exist in the 21st Century world. Furthermore, much of this turbulence began to occur following World War II (and was created in part by this war). Specifically, all four turbulent patterns were present in the world after World War II. Some things were changing rapidly (including attitudes about sexuality), while other things pretty much remained the same (such as attitudes in the United States about communism). There were cycles (such as attitudes about specific psychotherapeutic approaches that came in and out of favor).

Finally, there was absolute chaos. Many things in life were swirling around the lives of people in charge of American life – leading to communist “witch-hunts” in the 1950s and unrealistic fears of alien invasions on the part of citizens living in the midst of an anxiety-filled cold war. A Left Column perspective in a white-water world existing after World War II would focus on *Centering* in the midst of these multiple conditions of change. The kayak perspective primarily concerns a search for and finding the core, orienting place that provides one with balance and direction. Agility plays a central role with movement of the double-bladed paddle back and forth.

Given the presence of white-water following the Second World War, does it still exist today. In agreement with Peter Vaill (2008), I would propose that we live with even greater turbulence today. The white water is all around us at this point in the 21st Century. We are awash in a turbulent world. Authoritarian forces are fully in operation that influence and seek to block the turbulent flow of contemporary events. Some things in our life and work are moving rapidly, while other things are moving in a cyclical manner. We are also likely to find that some things are not moving at all—even if we would like them to move. Perhaps, most importantly, some things in our life and work are moving in a chaotic manner/ They are swirling about in an absolutely unpredictable manner. We might be able to adjust temporarily to one of these four conditions, but soon find that we are facing a different set of conditions that require a quite different manner of planning, execution and leadership.

What is the systemic Impact? Four systems (rapid change, cyclical change, non-change and chaotic change) are all operating at the same time – and they are often bumping into one another. There is another important factor that we must add to this complex equation. We know that any system will become chaotic when it moves fast. Overly rapid change damages everything in a system and makes this system hard to manage. Thus, in a world where accelerating change (the first system) is becoming more prevalent, we are likely to find that chaos (the fourth system) will also become more prevalent. The cyclical changes – that are more predictable – will become less prevalent.

Stagnation (the third system) will also tend to decline in magnitude—or it will become more isolated from the other systems. While reduction in the size of this third system might initially seem to be a positive outcome, we find that this is not the case, for the third system is often a source of stability for any system (especially a human system). That which Talcott Parsons (1955) called “latent pattern maintenance” tends to reside in the third system. Furthermore, we know

that the nutrients in a natural system (such as a mountain stream) reside primarily in the so-called “stagnant” portion of the stream. This is where leaves eventually end up and where they sink to rot (convert into new forms of nutrition for other living beings in this stream). We might find that this same nutritional function is being served in human systems. Put simply, this third system is just as important as the other three.

Given these characteristics of a whitewater world, we find that the personal impact is likely to be great for any of us who are living and working in this environment. The white-water world requires a search for balance and direction which in turn requires ongoing attention. Apparently, we need a kayak when navigating the white water. A canoe will just tip over, for it doesn’t have the flexibility of a kayak. Furthermore, we must find our center of gravity when steering our kayak through the white water. Peter Vaill (2008) goes so far as to suggest that this center of gravity is often found in our embracing of a core set of principles and values—even operating from a spiritual perspective regarding life and work.

One might wonder if this core can be found in basic religious beliefs or in an alliance with some authoritarian figure. Do we find balance when guided by a set of firm religious tenants or a strong dictatorial leader? We would suggest that this rarely is the case, for this leader and these beliefs, alliances and tenants are much too rigid. They operate like canoes that can only move in one direction (forward). Furthermore, the person operating the canoe has a single-bladed paddle that requires one to shift the paddle from one side of the canoe to the other side when navigating the white water. One is working with a “one-dimensional” tool when counterbalancing and adjusting to changes in the water’s direction. This makes navigation very difficult. Similar limitations are also found when leading an organization or community through white water. Single-edged solutions simply don’t do the trick in turbulent environments.

By contrast, the person navigating a kayak engages a two-bladed paddle that makes counterbalancing and shifting directions much easier. Similarly, a multi-dimensional tool makes the navigation of white water in an organization less challenging. Successful white-water leaders employ a variety of tactics and strategies when navigating the white water. At times they stick to tried-and-true procedures, while at other times they might rely on new procedures that have been generated and tested in skunkworks. The leader might look for a competitive advantage by venturing out to a new international market or they might look for a collaborative advantage by joining a consortium started by one of their competitors. The term Agility can readily be applied to the successful operations of a kayak—and to the successful leadership of a mid-21st Century organization. This term does not readily apply to someone or some organization that is caught up in the vice-grips of a rigid religious belief or authoritarian rule.

The Polarities of Turbulence

As I have noted, the condition of turbulence exists in the white-water world where four patterns of change intermingle: rapid change, cyclical change, non-change (stagnation) and chaotic change. A Left Column perspective would focus on *Centering* in the midst of these multiple conditions of change. This “kayak” perspective primarily concerns a search for and finding the

core, orienting place that provides one with balance and direction. Agility plays a central role with movement of the double-bladed paddle back and forth.

The Right Column perspective focuses on *Forethought* in the midst of multiple conditions of change. From this perspective, we must “lean” and “learn” forward by allowing for and participating in multiple points of balance and direction in our work and life. For the kayaker, this means looking “downstream” in order to prepare for the upcoming challenges presented by the white-water river they are navigating. What might be found around the next bend in the river and how does my current position on the river prepare me for what might await me around the bend? Kayakers and leaders do contingency planning when navigating their turbulent environment.

We can address this polarity in an appropriate and effective manner (in keeping with the white-water metaphor) by focusing proximally (up close) on our centering and at the same time focusing distally (at a distance) on what might await us. Specifically, this means using the centering – and the agility – to think outside of the immediate box and to “lean into the future” (Bergquist and Mura, 2011) with forethought. Otto Scharmer (2019) offers a *Theory U* way of thinking about and acting in a world of turbulence. He writes about “learning into the future.” In order to do this anticipatory learning, Scharmer suggests that we must first seek to change the system as it now exists. Scharmer is emulating John Dewey’s suggestion that we only understand something when we give it a kick and observe its reaction. However, Scharmer goes further than Dewey. He suggests that we must examine and often transform our own way of thinking in the world – which requires both centering and forethought – if this change is to be effective and if we are to learn from this change in preparation for the future.

From the perspective of whitewater navigation, this would mean that we experiment with different ways of engaging our kayak in our current whitewater world. We particularly try out some changes that might make sense in terms of how the river is likely to operate around the next bend. Will there be more rocks, greater drop in elevation, more bends, etc.? We take “notes” on how our kayak is behaving in response to changes in our use of the paddle, our way of sitting in the kayak, etc. Scharmer requires that we not only try out several ways of kayaking, and take notes on these trials, but also explore and embrace new ways of thinking about the kayak and the dynamic way it operates in the river’s turbulence. These new ways are activated by what we have learned from the current trials. The new ways, in turn, influence other changes we might wish to try out before reaching the next bend in the river. Effective learning, in other words, becomes recursive and directed toward (leaning toward) the future.

None of the learning is easy. Furthermore, it is hard to determine which changes to make and how best to reflect on these changes. These processes are particularly challenging to engage when we are still navigating the current white-water world. An expert on white water navigation might join us in the kayak (without tipping it over!). They can help us manage the real-time interplay between centering and forethought. It takes a particularly skillful coach or consultant who is herself both centered and forethinking if she is to be of benefit in the management of this dynamic,

turbulent polarity. The request should read: “Coach or consultant is needed who is willing to travel—on a white-water river—and is willing to learn in real time alongside their client. A proclivity toward leaning into the future is prerequisite.”

The Search for Calm

It is certainly understandable why we search for calm while navigating a treacherous white-water world. We do experience the Great Exhaustion. We might steer our craft to a quiet spot in the river (the stagnant system) or we might simply put our craft over to the side of the river and sit on the bank for a short while. In an organizational or community setting we look for calm in several ways. The most obvious is consumption of mind and emotion altering substances. We drink a beer or something “heavier” while sitting on the bank. Things seem to be a bit less turbulent after one or two cocktails. We avoid dealing with the multiple crises in our life by downing a bottle of wine every evening or by taking some of the pills we procured from our somewhat shady friend. Or there are the medications we are taking for our sore back that seem to be helping as well with our sore life.

Alongside the pills are the denial and isolation strategies. We focus on only one segment of the white-water system. We may see only the recurring challenges—such as the annual audit or the drop in sales that occurs every Fall. We might instead focus on the part of our life that has remained the same for many years. We still go down to the local tavern and drink with our buddies. We leave the swirling world around us at the front door of this welcoming Bar. Daily rituals of many kinds make it a bit easier to deal with that which is always changing.

Conversely, we might be addicted to the thrilling challenge of fast-moving operations in our organization. There is always a crisis and challenging deadlines. As long as we focus on the short-term, we don’t have to worry about the long-term and serious, deep-seated challenges to our business. We never look down the river to what await us, for the current rapids offer us sufficient “highs”. Neuroscientists tell us that we can easily get addicted to our own adrenaline. Under these conditions, a vacation from the “stress” of work is actually unpleasant—for we are in withdrawal from our own addictive internal chemicals. Similarly, we need the threatening competitor (“it is all win-lose”) as well as toxic (and addictive) company politics (“Can you believe what he/she did! We must counter it!”).

The calm might simply be applied at one moment as a short-term stress-reduction technique: “I am calm. I am perfectly calm!” We take a deep breath, meditate, put on some soothing music, work out in the gym for an hour, curl up for a brief mid-day nap, sit in the hot tub, or take a long hot shower. We might instead apply some “micro-aggression” against someone lower in the pecking order of our organization or community. There is something calming for some of us when we kick the cat or our daughter or a clerk in our office. Some of these short-term remedies do work. We are calm—but only for a brief moment and sometimes at the expense of other people or our own productivity.

Finally, there is a major, long-term calming strategy. This involves the search for sanctuary. We find short term relief in the stress-relieving mini-sanctuaries we create (music, hot tub,

meditation, etc.). This mini sanctuary might be a large, soft chair in our living room where we can read or listen to recordings featuring our favorite jazz pianists. We might also find this mini sanctuary in our garage where we can work on a new cabinet or in a spare room where we set up our easel and paint brushes. However, we long for relief that is not momentary. We find (or create) sanctuaries that last a day or two (festivals, fairs, vacations, etc.). Or we find sanctuaries that can last for a longer period of time--such as spending an extended period of time at a Zen Center or Recovery Center. Traditionally, sanctuaries were often established for people who had lost a battle or violated some societal norm. These losers and transgressors would enter (or escape to) a sanctuary that provides healing and learning. The heiau called "The City of Refuge" on the Big Island in Hawaii has served this important purpose (Bergquist, 2017).

Sometimes sanctuary is a time and a ritual, like evening prayers for the Jew or one of the five times of prayer for the Muslim. Sometimes it is a practice, like stopping in the park to feed pigeons on the way home from work at the end of the day or having a quiet cup of coffee in the staff room of a busy corporation. Not always, but often enough to keep us engaged, these moments take us to a place we call our true home. We are rested and renewed. We say, "Now I am more myself again." Sanctuary enables us to stop, hide, get away, rest, and become "more myself again." It enables us to find calm—away from the turbulence of everyday life. Yet, we can't live in sanctuary all the time. We might heal and learn in a Heiau – but must return to a VUCA-Plus world that continues to do damage and elude comprehension.

Contradiction and Consistency

We have now arrived at the final condition of our VUCA-Plus environment and at the sixth condition of Serenity. This condition is likely to drive people to Perry's Dualism and an authoritarian regime than any of the other conditions of VUCA-Plus. It is also a condition that is mostly likely to prove challenging to the leader who views themselves as open-minded. We are confronted with messages that are being delivered all the time that are valid – though ambiguous. We often wish that they would remain vague, for when they are clear, these messages often point in quite different directions.

At a trivial level, we are inundated with advertisements that conflict with one another. Which, after all, is the best way to brighten our smile? Do we need one of those fancy whitening trays prepared by our dentist or will one of those much less expensive whitening toothpastes be sufficient? And what about mouth odor, wrinkles and digestive challenges? There is a false sense that we are free when we have all of these trivial choices to make. As Erich Fromm (1955) noted many years ago, there is a pervasive marketing orientation in American life (and in most other Western countries) that distracts us from real matters of freedom. In mid-21st Century life, this distraction is not confined to Western societies. We even find it in the very different societal structures of China (Ma, 2019). Yet, in the midst of this widespread escape from true freedom, we find a new challenge – this being contradictions in the marketing messages we receive every day. It is hard to be Serene if the world is hitting us hard from many different angles and forcing us to make difficult decisions about things that aren't ultimately of real importance.

At a more profound level, we find the radical contradictions offered by political candidates. The men and women running for office often seem to be living in quite different worlds. Their differences are not easily resolved. There often does not seem to be a meeting ground. The moderate candidate and those advocating compromise seem to be out-of-date with current polarized political realities. The splitting of political reality into profoundly contradictory camps is exacerbated by the misinformation, lies and distortions offered by one or more of the camps (Weitz and Bergquist, 2022). It is one thing to acknowledge that there are valid differences in the way two political candidates view the problems their constituents are facing. It is quite another thing to be confronted with profound differences based at least in part on the inaccurate information provided by one or both candidates. Contradictions based on different viewpoints can be addressed constructive dialogues whereas falsehoods and deliberate lies often can be addressed only in a courtroom.

There is major systemic impact when contradiction is saturating our 21st Century life. Credible advice is being offered by people and institutions that can be trusted—but the advice is often inconsistent. As a result, we can't trust any expertise, since the "experts" don't seem to agree on anything. We collectively regress to Multiplicity--to use William Perry's term (Perry, 1970). Faces with no one clear "reality," we decide that there is NO true reality. We turn collectively to expedience in our alignment with authoritative version of "truth." Whoever has the most power and the highest status provides the "truth" and those who offer their version of the truth from outside the circle of power and status are ignored or isolated. The new golden rule is in effect: "those with the gold rule [and provide the truth]!"

At a personal level, contradiction can have a challenging impact. To remain "sane" we often must change our mind about certain issues or at least be open to new perspectives and ideas. It is not hard to try out a new teeth-whitening procedure. It is a whole other matter to change our political affiliations or our attitude about something as important as domestic violence or climate change. We become cognitively "lazy" —because we are tired, overwhelmed or alienated. We fall back on habitual behavior and fast thinking (heuristics). Under these conditions, the contradictions will disappear. We listen to one expert and one point of view. We rely on one source of dental advice and one political party.

Life becomes much easier: "Don't change the news channel or pick up a newspaper or social media posting that offers an alternative interpretation of the daily news—or even a more balanced perspective." After a hard and demanding day of work and some time playing with our kids, the last thing we need is a thoughtful analysis offered from several different political perspectives. Enough already! Authoritarianism makes it much easier to relax and retire from the daily challenges of life and work. No more contradictions. It is all clean and simple. Our Bubble of Belief is soundly in place and will never be disturbed by disruptive messages.

The Polarities of Contradiction

Contradictions exist when we are presented with two or more perspectives or sets of practices that are of equal validity and are equally useful. However, these perspectives and practices differ

in significant ways from one another and are not readily reconciled. The Left Column perspective would focus on *Appreciating* the value of each viewpoint or practice prior to choosing the best one. The primary concern from this perspective is to determine where the greatest truth is to be found. Which option is most aligned with one's personal values?

The Right Column offers an alternative perspective. It concerns *Integrating* the diverse perspective and practices. The primary concern from this perspective is recognition that there is one (and only one) unified reality which can be viewed from multiple, complementary perspectives. The differing perspectives and practices that we encounter are only components of a larger, unified perspective or practice.

These two columns need not remain in conflict with one another. A tool called Polarity Management was first introduced by Barry Johnson (1996) as a way to address the many contradictions we face in our individual and collective lives. We turn to the perspectives to be offered by Barry Johnson and his polarity management tool. As Johnson notes, when confronted with two viable options, we tend to linger briefly on the advantages inherent in one of the options. Then we begin to recognize some of the disadvantages associated with this option.

We are pulled to the second option. Yet, as we linger on this second option, we discover that this perspective or practice also has its flaws and disadvantages. We are led back to the first policy – and must again face the disadvantages inherent in this first option. The swing has begun from option one advantage to option one disadvantage to option two advantage to option two disadvantage back to option one advantage. We are whipped back and forth. Anxiety increases regarding the swing and failure to find the “right” answer. The vacillation also increases in both intensity and rapidity. This is what the dynamics of polarization are all about. There is inadequate time and attention given to each option.

Polarity management begins with a reframing of our focus from either/or to Both/And – thus bringing in the Right Column focus on Integration. The next step is to recognize the value inherent in each perspective or practice – thus bringing in the Left Column's focus on Appreciation. Rather than immediately jumping to the problems and barriers associated with each option (which drives us to the second option), we spend time in the appreciative column seeking better understanding of the merits associated with each option. Only then do we consider the “downside” of this option – and only then do we turn to the other option (once again noting its strengths and then its downside).

With this preliminary analysis completed, we shift our attention to what happens when we try to *maximize* the benefits of either option at the expense of the other option. We search for the rich insights and productive guidance to be found in each option, rather than seeking some simple resolution of the contradiction. There is an important cautionary note to be introduced at this point. Barry Johnson warns that we must not try to maximize the appeal of any one side; rather we must carefully optimize the degree to which we are inclined toward one side or the other as well as the duration of our stay with consideration and enactment of this side. How serious are we about focusing on this one side and how long are we going to sustain this focus?

Optimizing also means that we must find a reasonable and perhaps flexible set-point as we act in favor of one side or another. Finding these acceptable optimum responses and repeatedly redefining them is the key to polarity management. We must be flexible in both our appreciation and our integration of contradictions. Johnson has one more important point to make regarding the management of polarities. He identifies the value inherent in setting up an alarm system as a safeguard against overshooting either side of the polarity. It would be prudent to build in an alarm system that warns us when we may be trying to maximize one side and are on the verge of triggering negative reactions coming from the other side. As in the case of turbulence, we must seek both balance and forethought in the midst of addressing contradictions.

The Search for Consistency

Must we engage the difficult slow-thinking processes advocated by Daniel Kahneman when we are seeking to manage contradictions and polarities? We can instead find consistency and eliminate contradictions by adhering rigidly to a schedule. The same outcomes are produced each time we engage this schedule. If we have a regimented routine, there are likely to be predictable impacts on other people and our environment. Everyone is relieved. When this routine is highly restricted, then all of the outcomes and impacts are likely to be closely related to one another – and fully consistent with one another. We order the same breakfast at our nearby restaurant and know exactly how this meal will assist digestion and prepare us for a day of routine work. We are wearing a suit of psychic armor that is made of one metallic material and is without any unnecessary joints or opening that would allow for flexibility, variance inconsistency – or incongruence (Bergquist, 2023a; Bergquist, 2023b).

Consistency is also found when we block out all diverse viewpoints. The club one chooses to join is highly selective. The “other” is never allowed in. Homogeneity is of highest priority and group think is a pre-requisite. We don’t want “no bad news” (to quote from *The Wiz* a musical remake of the Wizard of Oz). In many instances, this purity of thought and belief is reinforced by a formal or informal “black ball” system. One is admitted to the club only when everyone inside the club agrees to the invitation. Admission to the “inner temple” requires not only a test of shared belief, but also a process of “purification” (or “initiation”). Initiates are required to sacrifice a part of their identity. They endure trials that test their commitment and their willingness to subjugate themselves to the will of those who are already members of the inner temple. Purification ensures consistency. All inconsistencies are scrubbed away. Serenity is assured. However, this is quite a sacrifice to make on behalf of one’s search for consistency. Cognitive and emotional congruity are attained but at the cost of a deeper level of personal integrity.

Finally, we find consistency in our life when we become “true believers.” This often accompanies our entrance into the inner temple. There are a set of tenants in our religion or life philosophy that requires us to think, feel and act in a certain manner. Each of the tenants is compatible with each of the other tenants. We find a long history of debate and resolution associated with each tenant that ensures full alignment. This is “God-given” “Gospel” and contains no contradictions (though there are often many contradictions that are never acknowledged).

Furthermore, each tenant is aligned with an overall view of the world and with a set of commandments regarding how one should act in this world. There is nothing but consistency in our life when there is full alignment with the food we eat, with the prayers we pronounce several times each day, with the people (“fellow believers”) we allow into our life, with the person we choose to marry, and with the way in which we are preparing for our own death. All of these “faithful” preferences and practices fit within a single comprehensive and rigid framework. With this framework in place, there is little opportunity for contradictions to arise in any domain of our world or at any moment in our life. Yet, at what cost . . .

Conclusions

In essence, there are two ways in which to address the challenges of VUCA-Plus. We can escape to Serenity – and absorb all of the costs associated with this condition of denial and dysfunction. We can instead remain with these challenges and find ways in which to embrace and find both energy and partial solution within each challenge. Furthermore, I believe that we can “manage” the polarities that reside inside each of the six VUCA- Plus conditions.

I find myself asking a first question: am I being overly optimistic in suggesting that polarity management can be helpful as we face the challenges of VUCA-Plus and begin the journey to true freedom? I also ask a second question: can we really hold on to two or more contradictory beliefs without dropping one of them? Perhaps I should replace these two questions with a third and fourth question. Third, do we have any other option if we are to successfully address the overwhelming challenges of VUCA-Plus and if we are to find true freedom? Fourth, if there is another option is it just some form of regression to serenity?

Management of the challenge of VUCA-Plus as well as the polarities inherent in each condition of VUCA-Plus brings us to a level of meta-learning. We learn about the management of each condition and each polarity by spending time reflecting on and learning from this management. What are the ways in which we most successfully identify, analyze and manage the contradictions inherent in polarities associated with the six conditions of VUCA-Plus?

I propose that Polarity management enables us to hold two or more beliefs in abeyance as we slowly and thoughtfully consider the merits and drawbacks associated with each of these beliefs. I believe that we can apply what we have learned from engaging each of these six conditions to our work with each of the other conditions. This meta-learning enables us to lean into and learn into a future that will undoubtedly pose even greater challenges than we now find in mid-21st Century life. Am I being too optimistic? The alternative is to remain frozen on a 21st Century savannah inhabited by many VUCA-Plus lions (real and imagined). We stand motionless and helpless watching and feeling the polarities swirling around our psyche and soul. Not a very healthy stance . . .

Chapter Four

Hope, Skepticism and Freedom

In this chapter and Chapter Five, I turn away from general pronouncements regarding challenges associated with the journey to freedom and with life lived in a cave or in a wonderland of Serentiy. It is time to examine the real-life journey led by the citizens of Estonia as they rid themselves of Soviet Rule and began to establish their own independence. This was not an easy process for citizen of Estonia to undertake in the early 1990s. As a newly minted Estonian diplomat noted in 1992:

Independence is . . . difficult for people living in Estonia because they must now think for themselves. They can no longer tum to other people for guidance. There is no one to tell them what to do.

Freedom was a source of great hope—but also great challenge—for the citizens of Eastern Europe during the early 1990s. Berne Weiss and I arrived at this conclusion in *Freedom* (1994)—our book about the social revolution that occurred in Estonia and Hungary during years when the Soviet Union was collapsing. In our book, Berne and I distilled concepts of freedom taken from Western literature along with our personal experiences in Hungary, Estonia, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Most importantly, our conclusions were based on our interviews in Estonia and Hungary. Hope of freedom was alive and well in both countries.

While there was hope in both countries, it was also true that many years of public lies and a long history of war and invasion in both countries left the residents of Hungary and Estonia with a legacy of profound skepticism about the lasting effects and endurance of freedom in each country. A sense of betrayal lay close enough to the surface to encourage a widely held wait-and-see attitude. Men and women who came from both countries were reluctant to commit to hope and were skeptical about solutions that had thus far been offered for longstanding problems. As one Hungarian put it, "You Americans have a solution to every problem, and we Hungarians [and Estonians] have a problem for every solution!"

Yet, these same men and women also witnessed major shifts occurring in their countries and in their personal lives as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. They expressed the belief that these changes are irreversible and that the challenges awaiting them primarily concern their ability to live with and sustain their new freedom. Although past history led to skepticism, current history led to hope and challenge. In setting the stage for our discussion of the reactions of Hungarians and Estonians to this freedom, Berne Weiss and I began with these contradictory feelings of hope and skepticism and, in particular, the sources and the expression of these feelings.

Contradiction and other conditions of VUCA-Plus were alive and well in Estonia and Hungary of the early 1990s.

I provide our original analysis, while also bringing this analysis up to date with the arch of hope and skepticism since the early 1990s in societies throughout our volatile, unpredictable, complex, ambiguous, turbulent and contradictory world. I suggest that there are often ironic juxtapositions of hope and skepticism that often bump into each other amidst the swirling conditions of VUCA-Plus in many mid-21st Century societies.

Setting a Context

We must keep several points in mind when considering the hopes and skepticism of the Estonian and Hungarian people. First, any discussion of the experiences of freedom in Eastern Europe must begin with the acknowledgment that the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union was not predicted either inside or outside the Soviet Union by anyone other than a few who seemed to be speaking more from their dreams than from any firm grasp of reality (Skirbekk, 1992, p. 121). (This might give us pause to weigh the significance of dreams.)

Why did the collapse occur so rapidly and so broadly? Morin (1992, pp. 90-91) suggested that the old Soviet system was strong for many decades precisely because of its weaknesses. For instance, centralized planning was disastrous throughout the region--which covered part of two continents, more than a dozen nations, and double that many languages. Planning was hindered because of inadequate communication, and expensive and inefficient transportation systems. Apparently random decisions determined production across the vast expanse of the Soviet Union. The enormous diversity of culture and resources made accurate planning virtually impossible.

Yet the communication and transportation problems led to strong interrepublic dependencies, as each republic began to specialize in the production of certain goods or services. For example, during the Soviet era, citizens of Hungary produced buses but had no automobile industry. Estonia produced vodka (that was often marketed as a "Russian" product) yet relied on Hungary and other countries for automotive products. Often goods and services were generated to serve the primary purpose of keeping everyone employed. It was precisely because the Soviet distribution service never really worked that people throughout all the republics became absolutely dependent on the few goods and services that did make it to their markets.

Similarly, the inability of the Soviet regime to homogenize (and "Russify") the diverse populations led to greater dependency on the central government because this was the only source of union among the republics—a union imposed by force and maintained by the continued threat of force. Russian became the universal second language because citizens in each republic were required to study it in school from the earliest grades. They rarely learned the languages of

their neighboring republics. Ironically, one of the few places where men and women from different cultures came to share and mutually celebrate their similar and differing values was in the work camps and gulags of Russia.

The Soviet Union unraveled rapidly because the weaknesses were suddenly turned against the regime rather than supporting it (Morin, 1992, pp. 91 ff; Feher, 1992, pp. 108-109). Communication and transportation became so dysfunctional that many citizens received no goods or services from the state. They either lived on very little or began to produce and provide their own local goods and services. The efforts at centralized planning became so convoluted and inefficient that the Soviet Union came to a standstill and simply was too big and too bloated to make any effective transformation (despite the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev).

There was a second key factor that led to hope. Widespread violence was virtually absent in the Eastern European revolution. Peace is a necessity in the formation of democracy (Morin, 1992, pp. 99-100). Major changes occurred without the traditional imposition of Soviet force or, for that matter, the violence that accompanies most revolutions. Estonians speak of the "singing revolution" in their country that took place without any deaths or destruction of property. In *Summer Meditations*, Vaclav Havel (1992, p. 5) writes of the significance of the nonviolent nature of the revolution that swept Czechoslovakia and much of the rest of Eastern Europe:

The idea that the world might actually be changed by the force of truth, the power of a truthful word, the strength of a free spirit, conscience and responsibility –with no guns, no lust for power, no political wheeling and dealing –was quite beyond the horizon of . . . understanding . . . but it was the only way that made sense, since violence, as we know, breeds more violence. This is why most revolutions degenerate into dictatorships that devour their young, giving rise to new revolutionaries who prepare for new violence, unaware that they are digging their own graves and pushing society back onto the deadly merry-go-round of revolution and counterrevolution.

Even where violence is being experienced in Eastern Europe, it usually occurs not as a result of a change in the structure of government but rather as a result of the liberation of pent-up nationalist and ethnic hostility. Tragically, this form of violence is allowed to be acted out because of the heightened disarray that accompanies a change in governmental form. Dictatorships of a somewhat different form did emerge (especially in Russia). Havel was only partly right. Vladimir Putin is a much less visionary but horribly more realistic actor.

A third key factor that we must keep in mind concerns the nature of major changes that occurred in Eastern Europe during the 1990s. These changes were short-term, illusory or primarily cosmetic. The same people were often in charge and the same policies often were followed--though different words were now being used. Truth was still being distorted and extreme statements were still being made. Only now they were the opposite of what was said before. In

other words, the more that things seem to change in the former Soviet Union, the more, in some sense, they seemed to stay the same. Is this still the case? Are Vladimir Putin and other leaders of Russia and many of the former Soviet satellites (such as Orbán in Hungary), simply new versions of the old established patterns of authoritarian leadership? Is there still a Czar in charge – whether we are talking about Russia or Hungary?

As those doing research on complex systems have noted, there are often deeply embedded patterns (called “fractals”) that provide an enduring structure for many systems. Furthermore, the more complex the system, the stronger is the role played by these fractals. They keep the system in balance (providing the “glue” for system integration) and enable the system to operate in a relatively efficient manner (the same dynamics operating everywhere in the system). As often repeated by these researchers, “nature” tends to be a bit lazy – making maximum use of a few principles and dynamics. Fir trees, for instance, replicate the same basic structure in their branches and needles.

Perhaps, the system called a “human society” also tends to be a bit lazy, relying ultimately (especially under VUCA-Plus conditions of stress and angst) on the “good old ways” in which authority is formed, reinforced and engaged. The powerful and reoccurring patterns in former Soviet countries, might also be manifest in the dominant epistemology (ideas about truth) of these societies. Was this epistemology actually shaken up after the downfall of the Soviet Union – or was it just set aside for a moment or reshaped for new consumers (those on the other side of the political spectrum)? Did any change in thinking actually endure?

Citizens of the former Soviet Union were accustomed to believing that the truth was whatever was the opposite of the official information. That kept the options simple. With the new-found freedom came more sources of information and more VUCA-Plus conditions of ambiguity and contradiction. There were new opportunities (and obligations to sift and weigh information, provide thoughtful analyses, and generate helpful ideas. Good or bad?

This can sometimes feel more like a burden than a gift. In the West, we are hardly strangers to the proliferation of information and the increasing complexity that comes with freedom. We are fully acquainted with VUCA-Plus. In the past, we trusted that the neighborhood school was the “right” school for our children because it was nearby; we trusted that our family doctor provided us with the best up-to-date care. Now we shop and compare. We feel obliged to be informed consumers of everything from education to nutrition—because most of us have had the experience of buying empty packaging and consuming a whole lot of bullshit (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). During the early 1990s, Hungarians and Estonians met the duplicity of bureaucracy but not the duplicity of the marketplace. Today, there seems to be greater awareness throughout the world regarding the prevalence of lies and premeditated dishonesty (Ariely, 2012)

Berne Weiss and I witnessed the magnitude and unpredictability of changes that took place in Eastern Europe during the early 1990s. We also witnessed and marveled at the remarkable lack of violence that occurred during the revolution and pretenses of change. We are now ready to examine in greater depth the nature of hope and skepticism that was shared by the citizens of both countries.

The Hope of Freedom

In both Hungary and Estonia, optimism during the early 1990s was liberated for the first time in many years. Berne Weiss and I witnessed or were told about the great celebration and euphoria that have accompanied the many tangible steps that have been taken in each country toward a new freedom. The experiences of freedom assumed many different forms—as it has for many years in the United States and most other Western countries.

During the cold war, the ideology of the West emphasized individual freedom as the basic defining difference between East and West. Now the physical wall was torn down, and the Soviet troops returned to their homelands, which predated their Soviet conscription. In the context of the political standoff, freedom was a code word. For many in Eastern Europe during the 1990s, freedom had much to do with one's ability to travel, to speak the truth as one saw it, and to access an expanding domain of information and personal choices. In many instances, freedom was experienced in a very personal way. In other instances, freedom was viewed more broadly, in terms of national liberation. National flags were flown for the first time, native songs were sung in the home language and governments were formed within specific national boundaries.

Freedom of Speech

The people we interviewed spoke about newly found freedom of speech. In the past, most Hungarians and Estonians felt comfortable talking freely at home and with trusted friends about the affairs of their own and other governments. In some instances, they could offer criticisms in public in various veiled ways (humor, satire, metaphor, and so forth). Now in the 1990s they could talk freely in public about their discontents and openly expressed their opinions without fear of reprisals.

Most Americans probably cannot fully appreciate the profound feelings that this newly acquired freedom can evoke in people who have long remained silent (Belenky and others, 1985). The profundity became apparent when Berne Weiss and I listened to story after story about the need to remain silent on important issues and the pervasive uncertainty about what one could and could not discuss with other people. We listened to old men and women tell their stories of repression and discrimination - about confinement in concentration camps. Their children and grandchildren sat in amazement and deep respect as their elders spoke of early life experiences for the first time.

As witnesses and victims of the Holocaust and the Stalin era, these older men and women grew up in silence. Now for the first time in their adult lives, they are able to speak up and recount stories from their youth that they had not even been able to tell their own family members before the revolution. One of the young Estonians I interviewed, for instance, recalled how she had found out only two months earlier that her grandfather had been sent to Siberia in 1942. She can now more fully appreciate the courage of this man. She can personalize the repression and cruelty of the Soviet society into which she was born.

In many cases, the older men and women in both Estonia and Hungary had remained mute about these experiences in order not to implicate their children and grandchildren in their youthful protests or arbitrary confinements. One of the women I interviewed, who was a mental health worker, suggested that the freedom to tell the stories of past times ultimately liberates people to mourn: "Ten years ago we could never talk about the Holocaust experience. I must find the real root of their problems Now my new patients can speak directly about their experience." In healing the individual psyche, what follows mourning is forgiveness and love. Healing the collective psyche requires people to mourn their history to find the forgiveness and love that follow.

Freedom of Private Ownership and Enterprise

A major source of freedom in Hungary and Estonia during the last decade of the 20th Century was the return of individual ownership and the accompanying return of individual initiative and reward. Several of the adults we interviewed in both countries had the land their families once owned returned to them. Others had the opportunity to buy and own their homes. As one interviewee stated, "We made a law to try to return what the Communists took from the farmers, and we have [vouchers] and if you had lands before the Communist time and the Communists took it from you, you can [get] vouchers, and they are good to buy land or property, and this way we have privatization, and we give the people the feeling that what the Communists took you are getting back." Johann, an agrarian reformer in Estonia, spoke eloquently of families reclaiming not only their farms but also their agricultural heritage. Other Estonians and Hungarians returned to their families' occupations: fishing, crafts, ownership of small shops. Entrepreneurial Hungarians and Estonians spoke of the ability to start their own businesses or invest in existing ones.

The pathway to enterprise was not without barriers. As the Estonian government leaders that we interviewed noted, there was still much to learn throughout Eastern Europe about capitalism and entrepreneurial ventures. I personally taught a course on marketing at a newly-created Estonian business school—even though this is not remotely my area of expertise. It appears that in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man or woman (or psychologist) is king. I was the temporary king. However, the Estonians are fast learners. They soon did not need me as a marketing expert. The

entrepreneur who started this business school was soon joined by many other newly minted entrepreneurs.

During these early years of liberation, ownership in both countries was usually linked directly to the operation of a small business. The notion of ownership through stock purchase or other forms of investment was still a new idea and did not fit very well with the small business traditions in both countries and throughout Eastern Europe. Free enterprise, for good or ill, was liberated in both countries, and citizens were now free to make money – and lose money. In doing so, they were likely to learn much about doing business in the manner of the West. They certainly didn't need me as their temporary king of enterprise.

It should be noted that the world in Eastern Europe was not just replete with the formation of small businesses. Big businesses were being quickly “confiscated” during the 1990s by those who previously had served in major Soviet government roles. Massive enterprises are owned by former government and communist party operatives – topped off by Vladimir Putin himself, as the lead entrepreneur. Once again, it may be that nothing ultimately changes in many sectors of a newly liberated society. Like nature, human beings are “lazy” about real, fundamental change in deeply embedded patterns. Why not return to the rule of a Czar?

Entrepreneurship and Culture

While there has been pulled toward authoritarian rule in Russia –and in Hungary – the personal entrepreneurial spirit in Estonia has remained intact. Perhaps it is because Estonia never had a Czar! In reflecting back over thirty years later, it is quite apparent that the Estonians did learn how to conduct business in a Western manner –and with many Western customers. Most importantly, the Estonians created a vibrant electronics industry, producing many devices and processes for digitally based communications. I am not surprised that this has been a focus of Estonian entrepreneurship, for the majority of citizens in this country were using mobile devices even in the early 1990s – the land lines in Estonian being of little use (as was typical of many Soviet infrastructures of the time).

As Alexander Theroux (2011, p. 18) noted in his insightful observations of Estonian society:

Estonia is more than just technologically hip: it is mobile phone addicted and completely Internet literate. In 2010, Estonia got rid of every one of its street telephone booths and canceled the use of telephone cards intended for them. . . . In this small country, Wi-Fi is everywhere. Voting can be done on line by way of a national identity card. I believe that they have more cell phones in the country, percentage-wide, than does the United States
...

It is important to note that Skype was created in Estonia – exemplifying this very successful focus on digital communication. While Theroux's observations are now a bit dated, the emphasis of

technology and personal entrepreneurship still holds sway in Estonia. One of the cities in Estonia, Tartu has become a new Silicon-Vally, while national economic policies regarding a balanced budget, low public debt and a competitive tax system has enabled Estonia to sustain economic growth—and be rated by the World Bank as having an “advanced economy.”

It would seem that Estonia abandoned its primary reliance on the extraction of natural resources (farming and fishing) as it joined Western Europe (and the European Union) in creating the new 21st Century economy; however, this doesn't provide the full picture. Estonia continues to live in both an old, almost Medieval world (as evidence in the continuing preservation of the old town in Tallinn) and in the new digital world. Several years ago, I co-authored with Ken Pawlak a book about the six cultures that exist in American higher education (Bergquist and Pawlak, 2008). Two of these six cultures seem quite appropriate in describing what is occurring in Estonia (and many other societies in our contemporary world).

These two cultures are what we label the virtual culture and the tangible culture. While these two cultures stand in opposition to one another, they also need one another. The virtual culture is represented in Estonian reliance on digital communication devices, while the tangible culture is represented by the preservation of Old Tallinn and (I would suggest) the strong emphasis in Estonia on national identity as witnessed in its music, the pride it takes in its long-standing universities, and its retention of the Estonian language (that is understood by very few people outside Estonian). I wonder if this dual emphasis on tradition (tangible culture) and innovation (virtual culture) may play a major role in the interplay of hope and skepticism about freedom in Estonia (and many other 21st Century countries). This interplay might be embedded in and helps to create the ironic condition that I introduce later in this book.

Freedom of Choice

Accompanying the new freedom of entrepreneurial spirit in Estonia, is the freedom of choice. As noted by one of the Estonians I interviewed:

I hope my children know more than me so they can choose because the freedom for me is the possibility of choice. I can make choices. And sometimes I make wrong choices, and then I have to correct them. And that's a normal life.

Exercising the right to make choices is not always easy, as one young man told I:

Now everything depends on their daily choices, daily decisions, and that's a fear for them. They never learned to make decisions. They are used to having the same kind of car, the same kind of bread, the same on the TV, and now everything is turned upside down and they can choose between twelve channels and they have to walk in a shop and choose a car, and maybe they make a wrong decision and they buy an old bad car for much money.

Everything depends on them from now on, and that's a responsibility they are not used to.

More profound than the choice of consumer goods are choices concerning church affiliation or noninstitutional spiritual practice and the choice of friends. We heard stories of religious leaders who had fought long-term battles with the Soviet government to allow them to worship in their churches and had paid great prices for the limited religious freedom that they were granted. Hungarians and Estonians can now freely worship and recruit new members to their churches, explore alternative lifestyles, purchase homes, and express their unique abilities.

Sadly, this is not the case with all societies that have experienced freedom during the past 30 years. In some countries (especially in the Mid-East), there has been increased constraint on the practice of certain religions – even violent actions being taken against those of alternative faiths. The so-called “advanced” countries of Europe and North America have not been immune to this “cancerous” tendency. What is it about human beings that we find freedom of choice for ourselves in order that we might eliminate freedom of choice for other people?

It should be noted that even after the Soviet Union collapse, many Hungarians and Estonians felt that the state/party combine still sought to discouraged them from following their religious leanings, and some of them felt challenged to circumvent the obstacles. Even though the governments in both Estonian and Hungary made the return of church property to the religious institutions a high priority (and even provided some financial assistance to churches), there remained a skepticism about actual, deeply embedded support for religious practices among many of the people we interviewed.

Other Estonians and Hungarians whom Berne Weiss and I interviewed during the early 1990s, indicated that religious practice was not important for them. They had either been “brain-washed” by the Soviet regime to devalue religion and spiritual practice or (more often) they simply exemplified the growing “secularization” in most societies throughout the world. For these more secular citizens, the government policy (official or unofficial) about religion didn't really impact their lives. It was other types of choice that had a major impact – often regarding consumer and/or economic choices: what do I buy and where do I work?

Even though there was a fair amount of indifference about religious practices, there was an awareness in the early 1990s, that many religious groups were stepping into the vacuum created by the potential for private education and social services. Not all human services were to be provided by the government. One Hungarian woman who worked for a political party spoke of meeting with a local parish priest to discuss the feasibility of a collaboration between the church and the local self-government on a senior center in a newly restored church building. She reported that the social workers in the local government were reluctant to approach him because they were not accustomed to dealing with priests. There were now more denominations vying for both

followers and the state's financial support. In various quarters, there was concern over the appearance of religious sects and New Age spiritual beliefs that many Estonians and Hungarians viewed as a sort of opportunistic infection of the spirit.

The quite justifiable critique of Soviet officials and ideologues regarding the negative aspects of religious institutions remained intact even after the collapse of the Soviet government. One of the citizens we interviewed provided the following comment:

Cults were the subject of a panel discussion and forum for a group I was attending. This group met monthly to discuss significant public issues. As with many such discussions of emotionally charged subjects, the outcome was inconclusive. Should the state control religious groups? How can people protect impressionable spiritually curious young people from cults? Where are people to look for guidance on their spiritual path? A young man who attended the meeting with his wife, expressed dissatisfaction. He had gotten no clear-cut message of what to believe. No decision was reached. There were no agreed-upon answers to the questions, and everyone was simply left to contemplate them.

In that moment, it seemed that one of the more difficult tasks imposed by the new circumstances was cultivating a tolerance for ambiguity. Citizens now had to begin making their own choices about complex and often elusive belief systems. They no longer lived in a world of dualism (right and wrong, truth and false)—either accepting or rejecting the dictates of their government officials. These men and women were now sailing on a storming sea of conflicting perspectives and belief-systems—sailing without a rudder and with no anchor through the newly-emerging conditions of VUCA-Plus that were already beginning to swirl around the heads and hearts of their Western compatriots.

Life was indeed filled with existential angst. Perhaps it is best to become a skeptical and perhaps alienated secularist. One can live for a while without a firm foundation of beliefs. However, it is in this state-of-mind that one often turns to a distorted world of Serenity. Or without a core set of beliefs and convictions one can become just as opportunistic as the manipulative former Soviet leaders. Have the citizens of either Estonia or Hungary learned how to navigate this stormy sea of choice – and are any of us doing a much better job during the challenging 21st Century years of VUCA-Plus? How are we doing with the irony and contradictions that pervade our own societies and cultures? How many of us have surrendered to the distorted world of Serenity?

Freedom of Movement

Concrete manifestations of restrictions—namely, physical barriers—were destroyed when the Soviet Union fell. These barrier-collapses were some of the most dramatic and concrete manifestations of new-found freedom. Many "Berlin walls" were toppled literally or figuratively.

Citizens of both Estonia and Hungary could now move freely around their own countries and travel to other countries. As one of our interviewees noted:

Freedom for me means border lessness, being able to come in and talk to people who live a thousand miles away from here. This is a practical translation of what freedom means to me. Talking with my Cuban friends, with my American friends, with my Swedish friends.

Even more simply, citizens could now move freely through their own cities and towns. For instance, for the first time in forty years, the men, women, and children of Tallinn, Estonia, could sail on the ocean by their city. Estonians could travel upon the ocean that virtually three-quarters of them saw and smelled every day of their lives – this was a very big deal. The oceanside fences and watchtowers had been torn down. The guards left the beaches and docks of Tallinn, allowing its citizens to resume their accustomed vocation or avocation of fishing, swimming, and boating. This was a simple but powerful statement of freedom.

Perhaps, this is one of the important, distinguishing features of freedom in the European communities, as compared to the freedom experienced temporarily in many Mid-eastern countries. The recipients of temporary freedom in Egypt and other North African countries found little opportunity (or often little need) to communicate or travel beyond the borders of their own country. The barriers imposed by language and culture made it unlikely that these newly freed citizens had many friends in other countries. Most of their outreach was through the press and social media (reporting on the events of the uprising).

Economic constraints also made international travel impractical for many of these Mid-East citizens. Even when there has been movement to other countries (often by reluctant refugees), the movement has been restricted. Refugees often are caught in temporary camps that have become a long-term (perhaps permanent) reality for them. Whether we are considering the refugees escaping from Mideast repression or those (closer to home for most of us) who are caught in camps on the Southern United States border, there is very little freedom of movement. These displaced citizens are embedded in (and are often trying to escape) the temporary freedom afforded by a society in chaos.

The “revolutions” in most countries have been insular with new barriers being erected within the country. Barrier-forming interactions have often been directed toward those who are identified as being “others.” (Oshry, 2018) Refugees flee from their own country because they have been persecuted, bombed, extorted, and forced to flee. And there is little support waiting for them in the camps where they are forced to reside. Does sustained freedom always require an outside audience and support (both psychological and financial/political) from this audience? Is temporary freedom, arising from chaos, simply a new form of tyranny if no one is there to assist? Would the men, women and children living in European camps identify themselves as “free” if

they can't move further into other European countries? Would the Central American families caught in holding facilities at the United States border identify themselves as recipients of American support for "the huddled masses yearning to breathe free"?

Freedom of National Autonomy

Along with the more personal aspects of freedom, the men and women Berne Weiss and I interviewed during the early 1990s spoke about the collective sense of freedom in their country – coupled with a new nationalistic spirit. Citizens in each country were now free to plot their nation's future course, to pick their country's own friends and enemies, to determine their country's own destiny, and to make their own collective mistakes. The spirit of nationalism that accompanied the new freedom created a need for new bonds. In *Freedom*, Berne Weiss and I expressed our hope that these bonds would be based on trust (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994). We hoped that these bonds would replace the pervasive conditions of mistrust that were created when Soviet officials encouraged neighbors to spy and report on one another. Was our hope realistic?

Yes, in many ways, the foundation was laid during these early years of freedom for a nation-wide base of trust in both Estonia and Hungary. In part, it should be noted, this trust has been sustained because of the renewed threats of Russian leaders to reclaim both Hungary and Estonia (especially Estonia). The recent actions taken by Russian leaders against other Eastern European countries (such as the Ukraine) have reinforced the fears of invasion and loss of national autonomy. This threat of an enemy may be a key ingredient of national unity and shared trust in many parts of the world – ranging from South America to the Korean peninsula and from Israel to Taiwan.

Even if dependent on the menacing external enemy, the discovery or creation of a sense of national autonomy has allowed men and women in many countries to dream collectively and to recall their own distinctive history. It re-invokes memories and stories from the past that can once again be told about national heroes, aspirations, and achievements. During the early 1990s, it allowed the men and women of both Hungary and Estonia to mourn and celebrate collectively as well as individually. Over many centuries, most of the countries in Eastern Europe, including Hungary and Estonia, have experienced only brief, intermittent periods of freedom from totalitarianism. These brief historical "dreams" are embedded in a past that includes centuries of invasion and conquest and the more recent public (Soviet) history, in which reality was shaped to ideology.

The hope that Berne Weiss and I expressed during the 1990s might not have been fully justified; however, there is the lingering impact of temporary autonomy that might never be tapped down again. The genie might be out of the box and not easily shoved back in. The memories and historical accounts remain vivid and compelling – passed down from generation to generation –

to be renewed again and again during the long search for autonomy and freedom among those living in these countries.

Clearly, history and the past are very important in both countries. Men and women whom we interviewed showed us their family genealogies; they spoke of triumphs, defeats, and humiliations of several hundred years ago as if they had occurred only yesterday. They indicated in every way possible that they will not and cannot forget their past lest they lose their vigilance and become too complacent or idealistic. A similar observation might be made about the new sense of identity and autonomy to be found in many other countries over the past thirty years. Even though the “springs” in many countries were short-lived, they often produced a sense of history and pride that lingers even after the loss of freedom and national autonomy.

It is remarkable that personal histories are so very long. Invasions that happened four hundred years ago are experienced by Hungarians and Estonians as personal humiliations. Public histories, on the other hand, have in recent years been remarkably short. Soviet books on Estonian history, for instance, only briefly addressed the life of this country prior to 1942 (the year of Soviet occupation), focusing instead on the introduction of communism into the Estonian society. Both personal and public histories create and sustain unrealistic expectations (hopes) and skepticism – often, ironically, in the same person.

Skepticism About Freedom

As is the case with hope, skepticism about freedom comes from both personal and collective experiences for Estonians and Hungarians. There was very good reason during the early 1990s for skepticism and pessimism – given not only the failure of many expectations regarding the positive impact of freedom but also the deterioration of many domains of society beyond even the low levels left by the crumbling Soviet empire.

Economic Hardships

The liberation of both Estonia and Hungary brought about major economic hardship, which fed the skepticism and pessimism in both countries. While the citizens of Estonia and Hungary were much better off economically than those living in most of the other Eastern European countries during the last two decades of the 20th Century, economic hardship was everywhere. While there were more choices in the supermarket, there was less money to purchase the new goods. As one of our interviewees noted: "We used to have the money but no choices; now we have the choices but no money." Men and women who had lost their government-guaranteed jobs were now unable to find new jobs because of the collapse of their economic systems. Older citizens were particularly hard hit because they were either on pensions that couldn't keep up with rampant inflation or had lost their pensions altogether. Frequently, their children were unable to support them – nor could these older citizens readily move in with their children.

The citizens of Hungary and Estonia had expected major changes that would lead at least to short-term prosperity. They hoped for a longer-term transition into the prosperous status of their neighbors in Western Europe. They found instead economic decline and stagnation. Estonians and Hungarians often became weary during the early years of the 1990s and questioned whether real economic change had occurred in their countries, if it will ever occur, or if it has already occurred and left them in worse shape.

Many of those we interviewed spoke of their daily struggles to survive in their communities. They want ready to feel their Estonian and Hungarian identity – an identity that had been denied them for the last forty to fifty years--yet just at the point when the potential for a renewed identity was at hand, they had to scramble to secure an economic base. As Abraham Maslow (1998) noted many years ago, the motive to survive will predominate over higher order aspirations (such as finding one's personal or collective identity) every time. Today, we find greater economic prosperity in both countries (and in most of Eastern Europe); however, as I have already noted, another existential threat has damped the economic optimism: this is the threat of Russian invasion. Once again, security reigns supreme.

Before leaving this skepticism regarding economic prosperity, I would like to dig a bit deeper. A sense of economic wellbeing is based not just on the daily realities of living without needs and wishes being met, but also on a comparative sense of wellbeing. In many instances, the sense of economic privation is aggravated by the dreams that were brought to life by liberation. For many young people in Eastern Europe, who had been inundated with American social media beamed in from the West, the liberation of their country enabled them to dream of prosperity and consumption in their own country. I am reminded of a similar condition that was operating in South Africa during this same period of time. There were very primitive living conditions in many of the townships (where many Black South Africans lived) – yet each home (hut) had a TV where episodes of *Dynasty* (displaying massive American wealth) were being replayed many times.

Prosperity had clearly not yet come to pass in either Eastern Europe or South Africa. Some individuals in Estonia and Hungary were now becoming wealthy (or are at least more publicly displaying their wealth) which further aggravated the economic skepticism. Communication with the West's media and travelers from countries in the West were becoming more common, thereby compounding the problem of contrasting economic conditions. In essence, liberation led to a worsening of economic conditions in Eastern Europe. Citizens of these countries were becoming more keenly aware of their own privation in comparison to the living standards in the United States and Western Europe. While there were major discrepancies during the Communist era, in terms of both income and the perks one might receive, conspicuous consumption among the elite and wealthy was conspicuously absent. There was no Soviet version of *Dynasty* showing on the state-run TV stations. Now there is a Russian version that stars Vladimir Putin.

Social Dislocation

Although by 1993, Hungary and Estonia have not yet inherited the West's economic prosperity, they have begun to inherit some of the problems of the West that seem to accompany freedom. First, they were now experiencing more social dislocation and unrest, often manifested in increased crime and violence, than was true in the past. The men and women whom Berne Weiss and I interviewed spoke of the painful process of losing friends because of differing opinion about politics, economics, or religion.

In the past they had a common enemy – which was Soviet leadership and bureaucracy. Now there was nothing that kept them together. As can be observed throughout the world, a common enemy unites people. When the enemy is lost, then the previously suppressed disagreements emerge: our past friends might even now become our enemies. With freedom from external threat comes an internal threat. The re-emergence of threat from the East (Russia) might lead again to re-establishment of old alliances and even friendships. Or are the differences now too deeply set for a return to the olden days?

I wonder about the potential permanence of polarization among the populations in Estonia and other Eastern European countries (as well as other countries in the world) because of the way in which this polarization is often exhibited. During the time when Berne Weiss and I were in Eastern Europe, many of the citizens of these countries were not terribly charitable. They celebrated national days while taking great delight in confronting their Communist neighbors. These charitable citizens waved the national flag in the face of their neighbors and repeatedly recited the many failures of the previous regime.

Residents of both Estonia and Hungary found that their differences of opinion and discrepancies in values were often large. They finally could speak their mind – and found that they were not holding the same beliefs as others in their country. Sadly, unlike many citizens living in so-called “mature” democracies, the Estonians and Hungarians had not yet learned how to live with diversity. Are conditions any better today?

More generally, have conditions regressed in the “mature” democracies? Has polarization in many countries brought about division among neighbors. Do we still need an external enemy to find room for acceptance of those living with quite different perspectives in our own communities? The answers to these fundamental questions about the future of social democracies may not be what most of us want to hear. Social dislocation in Hungary and Estonia, as in most societies, has often been displayed in rending of the social fabric and lack of respect for the rights of other people.

I suspect that social dislocation might be found throughout our contemporary world but that it has been greater in former Soviet countries. The stage was set for a sense of alienation during the

Soviet era, with the building of large, impersonal housing projects and dehumanizing factories – especially in those Soviet-Bloc countries that had become Soviet satellites against the will of those residing in these countries. Arbitrary reassignments of location or occupation were particularly prevalent among those who were defeated. Their country had been invaded and/or they were members of a minority group. Ironically (and sadly) the architectural style that in Eastern Europe was known bitterly as socialist realism looked identical to the style that developed in the United States during the 1930s and later (notably exhibited in the housing projects of the Bronx).

In the United States this model of urban development is called functional – but it often leads to the same kind of alienation and anomie found in the Soviet Union. Colleagues of mine in Estonia spoke of the remarkable observations made by Robert Sommer, the noted American environmental psychologist who was the author of a widely read book called *Personal Space* (Sommer, 1969). Visiting Estonia on a Fulbright Fellowship, Sommer reported on (and wrote in non-English publications) about the “stone cities” that littered the landscape of Estonia. I would suggest that the “stone cities” also litter most of the countries (such as the USA) that purported to be “modern.” When back in the United States, Sommer did write about the dehumanizing environment (“hard architecture”) created in the prisons (stone fortresses) of America (Sommer, 1974).

More generally, Robert Sommer wrote about environments and public spaces that tend to draw people together – such as a public fountain or plaza. These spaces are labeled *sociopetal* by Sommer for they pull inward. Sommer (1975) also described the role played by street art as a sociopetal venue that draws people together. By 1980, Sommer found it important to describe the important sociopetal role played by emerging farmer’s markets (Sommer, 1980)

By contrast, there are public spaces and architecture that drive people away from one another. These might be highways systems that lead people out of urban areas into suburbs – or they can be an alienating form of public housing that might drive people away from one another but can drive them into their own isolation. At a more intimate level, we find *sociofugal* separation in church pews, library carrels and even the design of homes with separate bedrooms for every member of the family.

Today, we can point to the rapid expansion in digital sales. No need for a farmer’s market or even a standard supermarket when one can order food on-line. It is only the emphasis of fresh local-grown food that attracts many people to the farmer’s market that is held several times a week in their community. The sociofugal spaces that are forged by freeways, suburban sprawl, home designs and digital marketing are alienating not only in disruption of one’s relationship with other people (even members of one’s family), but also relationship with one’s own personal identity and sense of self-worth.

Why is hard architecture and alienating cities of stone to be found everywhere – and not just in the Soviet Union? Why do sociofugal forces seem to outweigh sociopetal forces in most of our lives – whether in the USA, England or former Soviet countries? Many observers and critics of culture throughout the world – such as Frederick Jameson (1991) suggest that architecture worldwide was bitten by the fascist bug, which became most virulent after World War II – when fascism presumably had been defeated. The architecture remains like the scars of pox after a plague.

At the time Berne Weiss and I wrote our book there was only elevated hope and accompanying disappointment about their living environment. These alienating living conditions were not changing rapidly – and still haven't changed much in either countries of the former Soviet Union or in the United States. What was once the utopian (and fascist leaning) vision of the 1930s (e.g. see *Life* magazine covers of the 1930s) has become something of a stoney nightmare – and not just in prisons.

Berne Weiss and I found during our stay in both Estonia and Hungary that some people who longed for the old ways of living in Eastern Europe hoped to begin moving out of high-density urban complexes and back to the country, or at least to the suburbs. The rural or suburban state was certainly much more appealing to many Estonians than was urban life. Their traditional life in the country (agriculture) or on the coast (fishing) often seemed a more "natural state" to Estonians. It would seem that freedom comes not just through shifts in the rules and regulations of a society, but also ultimately through changes in the daily living conditions of its residents.

Did liberation bring about changes in such living conditions? Or did those living in these "stone cities" simply learn to adjust to life in a large, impersonal complex. Sadly, it seems that adjustment was often the outcome. As a result, the alienation that one experienced in the housing centers that were built during the Soviet era in Estonia as well as that found in many other areas of Soviet life, seems to have led to a widespread, low-level depression, which in turn seems to be linked to passivity. The Soviet system was apparently saturated with alienation. What is the relationship between depression, authoritarianism, and the experience of freedom? I would suggest that this is a fundamental question of our time.

During our early years in both Estonian and Hungary (while the Soviet Union still existed), Berne and I experienced the remarkable peace and security that comes with knowing that one can walk freely on city streets or parks at night. We realized at the time that this probably would not last for long in either Hungary or Estonia after these countries broke free from Russian rule (and strict enforcement of the law). Our predictions proved to be accurate. Law and order declined significantly in both countries during the early 1990s. Is crime often (or even always) freedom's fellow traveler?

Even more generally, social collapse in Estonia and Hungary during the early 1990s was manifest in a significant increase in the occurrence of begging and theft in the major cities of Hungary and Estonia. This collapse was evident, as well, in the much more serious increase in hate crimes and even potential outbreaks of civil war between rival factions or ethnic groups. Similar manifestations of social collapse were soon unwinding in Bosnia and Georgia, among many other former Communist countries and Soviet republics. We need to be careful here in our attribution of cause, for these conditions of social collapse were widely found and still are found today in countries throughout the world.

Governmental Uncertainty

Another problem in the early 1990s was the turbulence of governmental processes. Neither Hungarians nor Estonians were used to the public airing of dirty linen on the part of their political leaders. They were not accustomed to abrupt transitions in government, public infighting among various political parties, or disruption in governmental services that often accompany a change in political control. In other words, they had not encountered the messiness of democracy! Bureaucracies in the old Soviet Union may not have worked very effectively; however, there was at least the public appearance of continuity and clarity of roles and responsibilities. Now (in the early 1990s) there was confusion and frustration. Long lines may no longer have been as common at public agencies, but simple, clear answers were also now less common.

Unlike the Hungarians and Estonians, who instinctively refused to believe everything their government told them, we Americans have tended to accept what our government tells us—at least until the last two decades of the 21st Century. We therefore had a difficult time understanding the resurgent popularity of the Communist party or various socialist parties in Eastern Europe during the last decade of the 20th Century. During the 1980s, Solidarity in Poland was at the vanguard of what would become a domino effect, toppling Soviet-influenced or Soviet-controlled regimes in the Warsaw Pact nations. In feeling their way to a new system, the Poles set an example for how a shifting economy could pinch people and a scrambling political system could be upsetting.

Remarkably, things changed during the 1990s. The Polish citizens gave a surprising measure of support to the Communist party during this decade. Not only Poles, but many Hungarians and Estonians came to appreciate the accomplishments and values of the previous system. A memorial service for Janos Kadar in Budapest in the spring of 1993 drew twenty thousand people. Today, during the third decade of the 21st Century, we find a pull back to old ways of ruling a nation in the strong leadership and widespread support for strong leadership in the figure of Russia's Vladimir Putin and in the aligned leadership of Hungary's Orbán. For Putin, this authoritarian rule is coupled with a desire for the return of high international status and reclaiming of former Soviet territory. For Orbán, it is more a matter of stemming the influx of Mid-East refugees (driven by the "Great Replacement Conspiracy Theory") and stabilizing the

Hungarian economy (via restrictive and repressive Orbánomics”). One step forward and one (or two) steps backwards. Is this the nature of profound social change pitted against social and institutional stability?

Part of the message of the late 20th Century cold war concerned opposition of Western countries to socialist economic systems that came with political repression and its attendant restrictions on individual freedom. However, that opposition might have been more firmly fixed in the minds of those living in the West than in the minds of Eastern Europeans. One possible way to read the emerging signals since the collapse of the Soviet Union is that with Soviet influence and power removed, many people preferred an economic system that offers more basic security than unlimited opportunity. Western democracy and postmodern capitalism might not be preferred by those living in the East (or for that matter by some citizens of the West).

From the perspective of almost thirty years following the Soviet collapse, we can observe a mixed outcome. Clearly in some of the Eastern European countries (such as the two countries Berne Weiss and I studied) there has been a gradual (even at times dramatic) embracing of a free-market economy – driven in particular by the digital technology revolution. In other countries (inside and outside Eastern Europe) there has been a much more regressive move following the Soviet revolution (or other societal revolutions). Freedom appears to be experienced and reacted to in different ways in different societies and cultures. There is no one formula for success – and frankly not all societies might be prepared to handle freedom – at least for the next couple of decades.

Lack of Governmental Credibility

The skepticism and pessimism found in Hungary and Estonia during the early 1990s, might be even more firmly grounded on the long history of subterfuge in both countries. Eastern Europeans always knew that propaganda about the West, and in particular the United States, wasn't very accurate. As a well-traveled young banker said in one of our interviews:

Now I'm realizing that I was taught many stupid things and stupid ideas about communism. The whole thing was very one-sided. They were trying to limit information about the outside world. They were painting the same one sided picture about the Western world that in the fifties the United States was painting about Russia, at the [time] of the Rosenbergs [the Americans convicted of spying for the Soviet Union and subsequently executed]. The same sort of one-sided information that we had. Somehow, we didn't take it seriously.

One wonders about the extent to which we Americans were particularly naive in accepting U.S. propaganda about Soviet life at face value. Had we simply fallen victim more readily to the illusions of freedom and to ideological conflict, or were we more accepting of our government's statements? Should we equate believing with being naive? Does a viable democracy require a

high level of uncritical belief in what is being conveyed from the government? This is an especially important question to ask today. As the warfare between the American media and government leadership escalates, is democracy being threatened at some core level? Are there profound crises of expertise and belief that are not easily resolved (Weitz and Bergquist, 2014)?

Because the citizens of Hungary and Estonia were exposed for so many years to systematic lies, there was a lack of belief in any public statements when freedom came to both countries. These men and women knew that they had been lied to and were fully aware that information was often defined by those who had power (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). For many years, the public definition of reality in Eastern Europe had been at odds with privately held perspectives. How widespread has this alienation of information been over the past 30 years? And has this alienation spread widely to other societies?

We find a renewed attention to these dynamics about truth and reality in the research conducted by behavioral economists--most notably Kahneman (2011), Ariely (2008, 2012) and Thaler (2015). Their research findings suggest that public "truth" can be quite pliable. These psychologists (accounting for two Nobel prizes in Economics) write about the heuristics that simplify and often distort "reality". They offer an extremely important question: who is sitting at the table when the truth is being formulated? The Hungarians and Estonians (as well as the citizens of many other former Soviet satellites) seem to have been more aware of these epistemological dynamics than those living in the United States. What does it mean that both Kahneman and Ariely were raised in Israel? Is there a healthy skepticism about truth and reality to be found in Israeli culture that resembles that found in Hungary and Estonia?

The dynamics of epistemology as related to freedom might go even deeper. One of the discoveries we made while in Eastern Europe was that Communist party membership during the Soviet era was often unrelated to ideology or even political preference. While the rhetoric of the party was clearly ideological and political, men and women joined the party for many different reasons – only some of which related to sociopolitical issues. At a very basic level, membership in the Communist party could for some people be considered a substitute for membership in institutions of a religious, spiritual, or cultural nature that were lost when Hungary and Estonia were first invaded.

As Nicolas Berdyaev (1960, p. 158) notes in his remarkable analysis of the origins of Soviet communism, communism is inevitably opposed to any formal or informal religious institution because it is itself a religion. Berdyaev, a Russian Orthodox theologian, suggested that communism as a surrogate religion:

. . . professes to answer the religious questions of the human soul and to give a meaning to life. Communism is integrated; it embraces the whole of life; its relations are with no special section of it. On this account its conflict with other religious faiths is inevitable.

Intolerance and fanaticism always have a religious origin. No scientific, purely intellectual theory can be so intolerant and fanatical, and communism is exclusive as a religious faith is.

The young people who earlier joined the youth branch of the party primarily for social purposes were often joining local churches during the early 1990s –not because they necessarily were becoming religious but because they were looking for institutions that could provide settings and occasions for social gatherings and activities –much as young people in the United States often do. The older Estonians and Hungarians were also often joining the newly emerging political parties to establish or, in many instances, sustain friendships.

Given the small population and size of Estonia, the existing friendship patterns have been particularly important in establishing the new parties. As one of our interviewees noted, the many small parties that littered the political landscape of Estonia during the 1990s were nothing more than the blending and extension of friendship patterns and business alliances. Perhaps the invention of Skype in Estonian exemplifies this strong desire for connectedness (even if it is now done digitally).

Berne Weiss and I found that the urge to join was related not just to a desire for connections. It was also related to a more practical, economic motivation. Older men and women joined the Communist party in order to get a job, hold a job, or obtain a promotion. Our interview with a new Estonian diplomat, for instance, revealed that "in the past [Soviet era], in order to get a better job, or to get an apartment, or to go as a tourist to other parts of the country or abroad, or to go on a business trip, one must be a member of the Communist party."

For other citizens of Soviet-era countries, this membership often meant protection or even survival. It was not safe to remain unaligned with the party. There was another small (but important) group of citizens who found that communist membership was required but at the same time was very dangerous. A colleague of mine grew up in a Soviet satellite country. As a beautiful and sophisticated young woman, she was strongly desired by men heading the Communist party in her home country. Someone like her was likely to have been killed in a struggle among male leaders before she reached the age of 30. Fortunately, my colleague was able to escape to the West before losing her life in the midst of conflict between competing male egos.

Things did not change after the Soviet collapse. Life in a former Soviet country was still not safe for some people – especially those who were members of a minority race or religion. Antisemitism, in particular, role its ugly head. Things also did not change regarding economics. Ironically, many of the privately ambitious and most entrepreneurial of the citizens in both Hungary and Estonia were previous members of the supposedly collective-oriented, anti-individualistic Communist party.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that by the middle of the 1990s many of the most successful free market" entrepreneurial capitalists in both countries (as well as other former Communist countries) were former members of the Communist party. As one of our observant interviewees noted:

You know the changes are not like throwing out the ones who are not needed and keeping the good ones. I mean it was a smooth development or a smooth procedure when those guys were replaced Those who were active members of the party, they are still in high positions in some companies.

This condition is even more prevalent today. We can look anywhere in the former Soviet countries to find that the big tycoons were former Soviet officials. The most glaring example, of course, is the Russian oligarchy. It was often troubling and enlightening for us to interview men and women who were former Communist party members. They described their new business enterprises or their new affiliations with American or Western European corporations. In most instances, they seemed to adjust easily to their new entrepreneurial or corporate roles, leading one to wonder how different Communist party membership was during the Soviet era from contemporary private enterprise and corporate membership.

A corporate fast tracker we interviewed had previously worked for an ad agency. She described a co-worker this way:

When it was a Communist regime, she believed that she was a fighter; she was running in front. And when the changes came, she just turned back and she started to talk about the business and advertising . . . because she found something else to believe in.

Perhaps American businesses attract many of the same type of ambitious men and women who were attracted to the Communist party in the Soviet Union. Do we find throughout the world those men and women who are willing to embrace a specific corporate culture ("drink the punch") in an uncritical manner? To use the term coined by Eric Hoffer (1951), are they ready to become "true believers" in an alternative social system at a moment's notice?

The Truth About Truth

We have arrived at a point where we can step back from the economic, political and cultural world of Estonia. We can look more broadly at the role played by epistemology in the experience of freedom. We are ready to look at the more fundamental way in which we arrive at and act upon our discovery of truth and reality. These ways of viewing and interpreting the world in which we live provide the foundation for any economic, political or cultural enterprise. We communicate, resolve conflicts, solve problems and make decisions on the basis of our

assumptions about the information we receive, the analyses we engage regarding this information, and the ways in which we turn observations and analyses into action.

Specifically, I will examine truth and reality through the lens offered by William Perry (1970).. When, as Perry proposes, the simplistic truths of the dualistic frame of mind (that is, when clear-cut goods and bads, rights and wrongs) have been shattered, as they have been in Eastern Europe, then the next step is not to a thoughtful, ethically oriented relativism or commitment in relativism. Rather, there might be a *faux dualism* and a turning to expedient, often cynical Multiplicity. Truth is “faked” and right/wrong are such convenient arbitrary categories. The Multiplist moves to another level of dualism, having abandoned all hope of finding a simple universal truth (the expectation of the dualist). If there is no one truth, then there must be no truth, no ethical standards, no agreed-upon standards of conduct. Rather, there is only the standard of profit, of social status, of getting ahead of one's fellow citizens. A new form of Dualism emerges. The Golden Rule becomes: "the person with the gold determines the rules."

We found this form of faux Dualism and Multiplicity in both Hungary and Estonia – particularly among many of the former party members. They lost their idealistic dreams or never had them but were expedient even in their decision during the Soviet era to join the Communist party. As one of our interviewees noted: "In college I had one friend, a girl, who seemed to be political, but when the political changes came, I realized that it was only for interest. . . . [S]he started to do something else, and she became apolitical."

I was particularly disturbed about and have reflected often on the story told by a famous Estonian scientist we will call Endel. What is the truth about Endel? His narrative of survival and even triumph under the Soviet regime is filled with the use of humor, coded messages, and indirection. He danced carefully and artfully around the political forces operating in Estonia and elsewhere in the Soviet Union. The politics of the Soviet Union seemed to keep him alive, out of prison, and "in a comfortable bed with a beautiful woman." Sadly, the political processes also seemed to have given him enormous influence over the scientific endeavors of the Soviet Union.

An important question must be posed regarding the decisions made and actions taken by Endel (and many other Soviet Multiplists). In choreographing and performing this elaborate and artful dance, did Endel sell out his own country and his own scientific integrity? At this point in his life, could he even tell the difference anymore that exists between expedient compliance with authorities and his own personal values and ideals? Endel seems to be the quintessential Multiplist who will say anything to survive and thrive. Perhaps we have to be more charitable. He might have been an idealist and cosmologist who patiently and successfully kept his dream alive in a strange and very alien world. Perhaps he is both—as were many other scientists, teachers and artists of the Soviet era.

Other, more clearly idealistic, or less skillful, men and women who often exemplified a Commitment in Relativism joined the Communist party because they saw it as the only mechanism through which they could improve their community and society. While they were not particularly enamored of Marxist doctrine, nor (specifically) the Soviet brand of Marxism, they knew that this was the only game in town. Many of these Hungarians and Estonians were among those who (along with Gorbachev) led the reforms within the Communist party that set the stage for the liberation of Eastern Europe.

Others with a Commitment in Relativism did not fair very well during this era in Eastern European history. These were the men and women who spent years in prison or risked their lives during the 1970s and 1980s in fighting for a more responsible Soviet regime. By the middle of the 1990s, many of these men and women, who still cared deeply about the welfare of their communities and country, were locked out of community organizations and public service. Other former members of the party who were much more opportunistic and self-serving became successful beneficiaries of the new freedom. Under such circumstances, skepticism and pessimism were certainly justified.

What, then, is one to believe about public pronouncements made in Estonia and Hungary over the past 30 years? Are the success stories I have offered regarding Estonia accurate? What is the new reality, and is it to be believed? As a psychologist in Prague pointed out in 1993, "We used to know what the rules were and the consequences of breaking them. Now we don't know what the rules are, so there's no way to know what the consequences are for breaking them. We don't even know if we are breaking them." In addition, images from the Western world were not (during the 1990s) and still are not all they were expected to be. All is not "right" in Western Europe and America. The Estonians and Hungarians have found that there are major glitches in the world of 21st Century capitalism that they now view openly. It seems that the free market begets competition, not cooperation. People in the West are not very kind to one another. Harsh conditions prevail in an environment of scarcity – and under conditions of VUCA-Plus.

Many Eastern Europeans believed that Soviet tales of homelessness and hunger in the West were part of the Big Lie. Finding out that such problems do indeed exist in the land of plenty adds to the sense of losing one's balance on shifting ground. The men and women of Hungary and Estonia look at the economic volatility and inequities in the West and wonder what price they must pay for freedom. They examine the alternative lifestyles, modes of production, and governance systems in the West and realize that their newfound freedom has led to the flooding of their own culture with disparate and often incompatible values, aspirations, and images of the successful life. 21st Century freedom seems inevitably to be accompanied by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence and contradiction. The question becomes: would things have been any better if the Soviet Union still existed in the 2020s?

Living in Irony

In many ways the intermixing of hope and skepticism in Estonia (and elsewhere in the former Soviet satellites) during the early 1990s exemplifies the condition of irony portrayed by the philosopher, Richard Rorty (1989). Specifically, I propose that citizens of these post-Soviet societies were living and perhaps are still living under conditions of the profound and pervasive contradictions found in VUCA-Plus. They are, in Rorty's terms, ironists.

According to Rorty (1989, p. xv) the ironist is the "sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her most central beliefs and desires." By "contingency" Rorty is referring to the contextual and transitory nature of all belief systems—a stance that is aligned with Perry's Commitment in Relativism: "[the ironist] is someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance." (Rorty, 1989, p. xv)

Irony in Estonia

These conditions of irony seem to apply to the life of Estonians. I am apparently not alone in this appraisal of Estonian culture. Theroux (2011, p. 86) offered a complementary analysis when he turned to an observation offered by the noted psychologist, Erik Erickson:

. . . Erikson once offered the idea that "a nation's identity is derived from the ways in which history has, as it were, counterpointed certain opposite potentialities; the ways in which it lifts this counterpoint to a unique style of civilization . . .

From Rorty's perspective, the contradictions faced by the Estonians were not just those that can disintegrate a civilization (or society). They are contradictions that are accepted as being contingent (shifting with the times and conditions of the social system). These contradictions, in other words, are not a sign of a society's weakness, but rather a sign of its capacity to absorb and embrace profound differences. According to Theroux, such a society is strong—with the potential agile capacity to adjust and adapt to rapidly changing and unpredictable conditions.

I must, at this point, become an ironist myself and point to the opposite conclusion. It is articulated in the second half of the sentence Theroux quotes from Erikson. Does the counterpointing of opposite potentialities instead let a civilization "disintegrate into mere contradiction." (Theroux, 2011, p. 86). Theroux soon turns to the fundamental question: "what did all the contradictions [in Estonia], never mind the pain, lead to? Are [the Estonians] the weaker for it or stronger? Were they stimulated by it all or simply subdued? More importantly, is the nation now a vital and progressive body, growing by the day, or a white elephant?" (Theroux, 2011, p. 86) Though I am inclined to believe that Estonians have effectively handled the contradictions, Theroux's questions must remain unanswered.

I am unwilling, however, to halt my analysis at this point—leaving us without any affirmation regarding the way(s) in which irony interplays with freedom and helps to determine a nation’s future. Is the country of Estonia vital and progressive or a white elephant? There might be an answer to Therouz’s questions that is offered in a general manner by Rorty. He replaces the modern notion of enduring truth (a dualist frame) with a utopian thought in its continually evolving form (Rorty, 1989, p. xvi):

A historicist and nominalist culture of the sort I envisage would settle . . . for narratives which connect the present with the past, on the one hand, and with utopian futures, on the other. More importantly, it would regard the realization of utopias, and the envisaging of still further utopias, as an endless process—an endless, proliferating realization of Freedom, rather than a convergence toward an already existing Truth.

Music and Social Cohesion

Is Rorty’s utopian vision aligned with what I witnessed in Estonia following the Soviet collapse? What connects the present with the past – and with an envisioned future in the country of Estonia? While I certainly witnessed the regression to a dualistic frame, I also saw the remarkable ability of many Estonians to embrace both hope and skepticism. Without becoming too Pollyannish about the challenging circumstances still to be found in Estonia, I found during my time in Estonia that there was societal “glue.” This glue (social cohesion) enabled citizens of this newly independent country to embrace both hope and skepticism. I suggest that this glue was found in the enduring culture of Estonia – and in particular in the music of Estonia.

It is remarkable to note at almost any level how music (and related art forms) can hold and convey contradictions and irony – whether it be the bitter-sweet ballad portraying something about lost love, or the heroic anthem of a nation that has lost its sovereignty. In the case of Estonia, the role played by music in its own quest for sovereignty is noteworthy. As Theroux (2011, p. 5) notes: “Music is a big Estonian thing. In tea shops, in restaurants, on street walls, one constantly comes across fliers, sheets and handouts for concerts, pop shindigs, musikah, and shows for rock groups.” In my own time in Estonia, I would rarely walk down a street in Tallinn without hearing a musical group in rehearsal and I fondly recall the tradition at Tartu University of multiple choral groups singing across a ravine.

Music has meant much more than this in Estonia. Often called “the singing revolution”, the story of Estonian independence begins with the “illegal” singing of nationalist Estonian songs at a major song fest during the early 1990s. Without any violence, the Estonians softly but firmly asserted their national identity and demand for independence through their music and related art forms.

I had the distinct honor of attending a concert at the Tallinn Symphony Hall that featured the music of Arvo Part (the noted Estonian composer), with the orchestra being conducted by Neeme Jarvi (the noted Estonian conductor). The concert hall was electric with the return of both the music of Part and the musical leadership of Jarvi. While many other factors contributed to the intermixing of hope and skepticism – and the sustained drive toward independence despite the skepticism – I witnessed not just the manifestation of Ironic courage but also one of its sources in the music of Estonia.

Conclusions

In bringing this chapter on hope and skepticism to a close, I am left with hope that culture (and music) can provide the ironic blending of hope and skepticism. Estonian music and culture can provide a bridge between the past, present and future. At the same time, I am skeptical about my own optimism, for I fully acknowledge the power of regressive authoritarianism and the appeal of a dualistic frame or (in a state of disillusionment) a multiplistic frame (attending a false dualism).

Midst my own embracing of both hope and skepticism, I choose to believe and move forward with a commitment to the enduring virtues of a free society – a social system in which citizens have difficult but important choices to make about both individual rights and collective responsibilities. Freedom comes with a price, but it also comes with great potential rewards.

Chapter Five

Nationalism and Freedom

Authoritarianism was evident in Estonia when I was working in this country during the early 1990s (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994). It was manifest in the concern for reestablishing traditional and hierarchical models of authority – in the passivity of Estonian men and women as learners and as architects of their own personal and collective futures. Like many Eastern European countries (and many other countries for that matter) Estonia has traditionally been ruled by authoritarian hierarchies imposed from outside.

Some of the structural elements of communist ideological thinking are not far from traditional habits of mind in Estonia: authority (manifested in hierarchy), a strong positive valence placed on rational thought (scientism) and a tension between the rational/higher elements (associated with the West and Europe) and the dark, mysterious East's impulses. I now turn briefly to the tensions inherent in these structural elements.

Authority and Freedom of Thought

Some of the Estonians I interviewed commented on feeling a new sense of freedom of thought after the liberation of their country. The thought police no longer controlled the public dialogue. The reality, however, is that the way in which people were thinking and what people were thinking about arose from forces more numerous and subtle than just the presence or absence of thought police. The cumulative history of habits of thinking preceded the Communist era by at least four hundred years in Estonia.

The historical narratives of this country are shaped by repeated invasions and occupations from both East and West. These narratives, in turn, have a profound impact on the way in which political and societal discourse takes place and the content of this discourse. When conducting the interviews in Estonia, I asked the following question: “Has your life changed since the political changes?” The response was often: “How much do you know about our history?” And then my interviewees would often provide a brief summary of their history. The historical roots go so deep that they take on mystical and mythic overtones. Estonian thought is saturated with Estonian history-- as is the case in many (if not all) societies. While history and thought are often intertwined, I would suggest that there is some irony embedded in the Estonian narratives. They contain the seemingly contradictory themes of both individualism and collectivism.

The Irony of Individualism

There was always an authoritarianism residing in the history and blood of Estonia. Nevertheless, Communist authoritarianism and the efforts of communists to build a governmental system ruled by the "workers" were always alien to Estonians. A strong Protestant emphasis on individuality and individual relationships with God (Weber, 1958), has always been dominant in this country.

Here is where the irony resides. Even with the strong emphasis on individualism and the Lutheran disdain for truth mediated through formal authority and hierarchy, there is still a solid tradition of authoritarianism in Estonia. A social critic, Tiit, whom I interviewed indicated that "many years of socialism have led us as a people to look for authority outside ourselves." He also noted sadly how a Nobel nominee in his country sits passively in the Estonian legislature, relying on guidance of his political party leaders.

The tradition of authoritarianism can also undoubtedly be traced back to the frequent occupation of Estonia by other countries and cultures that are strongly authoritarian: Germany, Poland, and Russia. This is where history and thought intermingle in Estonia. While the Estonians I interviewed have long desired to be left alone to tend to their farms and families, they are accustomed to invaders who bring authoritarian structures with them. The invaders often provide the stable and efficient government and public services to which the Estonians themselves tend to pay little attention – with their dislike for collective action.

Estonians have seemingly been glad to delegate authority to outside people – though obviously they would much prefer to delegate these tasks to their fellow country men and women rather than invaders with foreign customs and values. I turn once again to the outside observations made by Alexander Theroux (2011, p. 37). He put it this way:

Estonians, arguably, were – are – shyly obedient. Dutiful. Highly serious. Earnest beyond words. The concepts all tend to merge. . . . May one suggest that as a nation, the people [of Estonia] are too regulated, too orderly? The restlessness is certainly there, the pride, no question about the anger, but what about the concentrate discipline to revolt?

I would take some exception to Theroux's conclusions regarding revolt. The Estonians obviously did revolt during the early 1990s. But it was a gentle revolt – the singing revolution. There was exceptional discipline (and collective courage) in the widespread disregard for Soviet rule when singing the songs of Estonia at the song fest and on subsequent occasions. However, I think Theroux was correct in assessing the Estonian people as orderly and highly regulated – whether it be in their adherence to the old town plan in Tallinn, or their admiration of the choral arts throughout the country.

While working in Estonia I was intrigued by the similarities I saw in this country regarding orderliness and what I observed in Finland (a country located just to the North of Estonia) and Switzerland. In more recent years, I have observed a similar commitment to order in Singapore. Clean streets and social courtesies are abundant in each of these countries. As I note later in this book, the messiness of democratic rule that began when Estonia declared its independence must have been (and perhaps still is) difficult for the Estonians to accept. The pull toward order that the Soviet Union successfully imposed for many years must have been strong—and in some Estonian quarters might still be strong.

The lingering desire in Estonia for order and restraint was countered during the 1990s by the perspectives and actions taken by some country men and women. “Outliers” like Tiit tried for many years to keep alive an alternative to authoritarianism. Tiit fought against authoritarian regimes in both his own country and in Central America (regardless of the prevalent ideology). Such courageous and idealistic anti-authoritarians often find themselves unappreciated by both the old order and the new order of leadership in a changing world. They often grow tired of always being on the outside looking in. They view the world in which they live with disdain and disillusionment. Still, we found several Estonians, like Tiit, who continue their oppositional stance. As one of these courageous warriors declared: "I was in the opposition in the last regime, and I'm in the opposition now!"

East versus West: Rationality vs. Passivity

In my Estonian interviews, I heard a strong concern voiced about and critique sounded regarding the authoritarian tradition in their country. These expressions came from those who were hoping that Estonia would use the Soviet collapse as an opportunity to move toward more democratic ideals and less hierarchy in their political and social systems. This idealistic dream of a truly equitable and nonhierarchical system is rooted, perhaps, in the collective residual memory of a social system that existed in some pre-Christian European communities: Old Europe).

These remarkable partnership-dominated (and pre-patriarchal) communities were described several decades ago by one of our guides, Rianne Eisler (1995) Given what she noted in *Chalice and the Blade* about the nature of partnership-based communities in Old Europe, the ghost of Old Europe might have lingered in the social unconscious of many Estonians during the early 1990s. My colleague, Ants Parktal (2021) has proposed that the trauma residing in the history of Estonian occupation resides in the social unconscious of his fellow countrymen. At the very least, the desire for greater equality and participation by all citizens was viewed by some Estonians as a movement from an Eastern to a more Western mode of thinking—and often from a masculine (blade) to a more feminist (chalice) perspective. Rightly or wrongly, the East (and Russification in particular) was often portrayed by Estonians as irrational, primitive, unconscious, authoritarian—and masculine. By contrast, the West (Western Europe and North America) was

perceived as more rational, civilized, conscious, and nonauthoritarian – though still masculine in its closed-minded “rationality.”

A more nuanced Estonian rationality was to be found in abundance. There is a long, esteemed history regarding the major universities that have flourished in Estonia – notable the University of Tartu. In existence since 1632, this university has served as home for many major researchers and is still rated among the finest universities in the world. In the hallowed halls of this university, the liberal arts stand alongside the sciences. Springtime songs sung by male and female choruses across a ravine on the Tartu campus play out alongside the formulation of theoretical models in physics and creation of new taxonomies in many fields.

There is the thoughtful and knowledgeable appreciation of the arts that is found everywhere in Estonia. Rarely do we find the arts flourishing as much in other countries. Along with this unique artistic heritage was profound hatred among many Estonians for the flamboyant architecture of the Eastern Orthodox churches that came to Estonia from Russia. As I walked through the towns of Estonia with my Estonian guides, they would point to these ornate (and often very large) structures with disgust and detailed critique. The simple, clean lines of native Estonian buildings were preferred. There were the very practical buildings of the Hanseatic league (of which the Estonian city of Tallinn was a member). I was able to appreciate the carefully laid out plan for Tallinn with each social unit of the city being provided with its own location and church.

Here is where I found the irony of Estonian freedom. The yearning for a more Western perspective was matched by a subtle form of authoritarianism that was manifest in the daily actions taken by the Estonians. While there was a dream of equity and reform in Estonia when I was working there, a propensity for authoritarianism was evident in the passivity of many Estonian men and women I interviewed or observed in action (or inaction).

As an “impatient” American, I was surprised to discover how willing Estonians were to listen to speeches that droned on and on for several hours, whether in person or on television. The “talking head” was apparently widely found and tolerated in most of the Eastern European countries before and after collapse of the Soviet Union. This willingness to listen, be persuaded by, and follow the directions of a single leader (whether from the old regime or the new one) seemed to be a lingering ghost of Soviet rule. The ghost might reside at an even deeper level in the Estonian psyche. It might reside in the rule of many other repressive and occupying regimes prior to the Soviet invasion.

There was a search for and designation of wise leader in Estonia, based on the assumption that somehow a great person will lead citizens of this embattled country out of their troubles. In a previous essay on authoritarianism (Bergquist, 2020b), I wrote about the pull toward the wise leader (as well as courageous leader and visionary leader) as identified by Wilfred Bion (1961). There seemed to be a hunger in Estonia for new heroes: visionaries, wise leaders, warriors. The

new leaders, in reality, may have been merely the old leaders, or their descendants, in new clothing (much as we find today in the Putin-led Russian government).

Turning to the old leaders probably appealed to an authoritarian need for structure and continuity—that was dominant in Estonia (and other Eastern European countries) during the early 1990s. While the Estonians were provided with a new image upon which can be projected new societal needs, these needs were often only met with a return to old structures. As Bion and other object relations theorist have noted, when there are high levels of anxiety in an individual or group, there must be structures and procedures (“containers”) that can hold this anxiety – so that it can be “metabolized” (converted from anxiety into acceptance and, hopefully, action) (Bergquist, 2020a).

I appreciated the willingness of Estonians to listen to other people, for this has certainly been a failing of Americans for many years. Many years ago, Adolph Hitler taught us about deception and the power of a Big Lie. Richardson (2024f, p. 156) offers the following historical account:

In his autobiography, *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler wrote that people were more likely to believe a giant lie than a little one, because they were willing to tell small lies in their own lives but "would be ashamed to resort to large-scale falsehoods." Since they could not conceive of telling "colossal untruths, they would not believe that others could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously." He went on: "Even though the facts which prove this to be so may be brought clearly to their minds, they will still doubt and waver and will continue to think that there may be some other explanation."

As my colleague, Kevin Weitz, and I have spelled out in our book, *The Crises of Expertise and Belief*, the extent of “alternative truths” and Big Lies is abundant in mid-21st Century America (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). As Hitler noted, we are unwilling to admit to the acceptance of “colossal untruths” –for this admission would leave us facing a deeply troubling truth about ourselves: we are anxious, insecure and gullible. We produce “bubbles of belief” that protect us from reality and contain our anxiety.

What is the daily manifestation of this bubble of belief? First, those of us residing in the United States have often been tolerate of nothing more than a ten-second sound bite. A longer exposition that provides multiple perspectives on an issue is set aside – especially if one of these perspectives challenges our own belief system. There is a substantial minority of Americans who passively ingest distorting dogma that comes from ill-equipped and ill-informed “experts” (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). Second, if we speak up, it is likely to be a one-sided conversation. We are anxious to express our own opinion rather than truly listen to someone else’s opinion.

Have our colleagues and friends in Estonia moved beyond those of us living in the United States? Have the Estonians moved beyond an escape for freedom to at least a skepticism regarding all purported “truths”? Have they moved to Perry’s stage of multiplicity, while many of us

Americans have regressed to a primitive state of denial and dualism? Are rabbit holes leading to Serenity more likely to be found in American societies than in countries such as Estonia that was saturated for many years with the propaganda of Soviet rabbit holes. One might even suggest that the Estonians had spent time down in a rabbit hole of Soviet communism and found it ultimately to be uninhabitable.

If the Estonians had moved beyond a passive acceptance of Big Lies, they had not in the early 1990s moved beyond this passivity that I found troubling as an American. While spending time and conducting interview in Estonia, I was concerned that there was little evidence of much interaction between the speaker and listener. There was little in the way of any collaborative discovery among the citizens--which is a critical way of knowing in any learning-oriented society (Belenky and others, 1986). Today, I am even more concerned about this lack of interaction among speakers and listeners in American life. Passivity is found in abundance at political rallies and in the Cable TV dominated living rooms of American homes. Our own American passivity might be leading us into rabbit holes.

In Estonia, it was never quite clear whether passive listeners were really taking in what was being said by the speakers or just showing deference to authoritarian leaders and structures. Does true freedom require interaction among peers, or is this just a now-outmoded American bias? Is dialogue required for any community to discover something that rings of truth and credibility (Gergen and Gergen, 2004). Is this just a naïve vestige of old fashion American town hall meetings that were observed and admired many years ago by Alexis de Tocqueville (1835/2000). Do we have our own historical ghosts brought over by immigrants to the American shores? Were the nonhierarchical or periodical hierarchies of the original American inhabitants (the aboriginal Indians) overwhelmed by these ghosts (Graber and Wengrow (2021)? Did the Europeans bring over infectious authoritarian perspectives along with infectious diseases?

Distorted Identification

There is much more to be said about the nature of authoritarianism. As Edward Shils (1954) suggested, authoritarianism is quite complex. He reminds his readers that political movements and authoritarian regimes are never made up of people with specific personalities. Rather, they are constituted of people with many different motives, aspirations, and personal characteristics – and are driven not only by internal psychological predilections (trait-based determinants) but also the challenging VUCA-Plus environment in which they live (state-based determinants) (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024).

These differences are particularly important to bear in mind when examining Estonian society, for many Russians were exported to Estonia after World War II – and they come to Estonia from a quite different society and divergent life experiences. By the early 1990s, they considered Estonia to be home--though they were still loyal to Russia. Furthermore, these often-forced

immigrants brought Russian culture to Estonia, including the Russian language (which was the official government-imposed language to be spoken in Estonia). This complex interweaving of cultures might account for some of the contradictions and sources of ambivalence I noted among Estonians during the early 1990s—and might also account for variance in attitudes about authority.

I suspect, however, that the ambivalence and contradictions I witnessed went beyond the competing perspectives of diverse constituencies. I believe that there were many intra-psychic contradictions at play—some of which I have just identified in turning to the work of Wilfred Bion. There was profound irrationality swirling around Estonia at every level during the early 1990. The container for diffuse anxiety, that I identified earlier, was not consistently present. Even with a wish at some level for the old Soviet structure and security, there was the reality of a collapsing Soviet system.

Identifying with the Aggressor

Nothing was making much sense. Uncertainty reigned supreme. Conditions were ripe for an even deeper ambivalence regarding the Russian “aggressors.” This was not just because Estonians might have ultimately preferred Russian occupation over complete chaos. Furthermore, the native Estonians may have historically preferred Russian occupation over German occupation. This was a difficult choice they had to make— who is the best “occupier”?

It actually goes much deeper than this. There may have been a psychological process in place that is known as *identification with the aggressor*. This very disturbing process has been described by Victor Frankl (2006) and others who have tried to make sense of the experiences of concentration camp survivors. Under conditions of high stress and anxiety (such as existed in concentration camps), victims learn to identify with the person who is oppressing them and are grateful when they are no longer being oppressed. The former victims then replicate the aggression with other people (A. Freud, 2018). The concept of identification with the aggressor seems to be applicable in trying to understand why people who were battered by their parents tend to batter their own children. It is just as applicable in trying to understand why some concentration camp inmates were recruited for the secret police in some European countries during the Second World War.

When we apply this concept of identification with the aggressor to the citizens of Estonia, we find its mundane manifestations in the passivity I mentioned above. We also find its softer form in the uncritical allegiance to the leader that was found not just in Estonia but also in most other countries with an authoritarian legacy. This process will become harsher under conditions of profound stress and anxiety – such as that brought about by the invasion and occupation by a foreign country (in this case, Russia). The victims (occupants of the invaded country) may begin to identify with the aggressors (invaders). At the very least, the victims will often begin to mimic the behavior of the occupiers— replicating the form of leadership and governance imposed by the

occupiers. The speech mannerisms of the leader are replicated by citizens, as are the words being conveyed by the leader and the occupying country's media.

It can soon move beyond mimicry. Members of the occupied country will soon begin working with the occupiers and may even join with the enforcing agency of the occupiers (as occurred in the concentration camps during the Second World War). We find this play out in the dramatic, fictionalized portrait of a German-occupied United State in Phillip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (Dick, 2007) – which inspired a cable TV series with the same name. In this hypothetical enactment, much of the enforcement of the Nazi-regime was being carried out by American citizens. In Dick's account they often had been enforcers of the old American regime – led by J. Edgar Hoover the long-term director of the American FBI.

This harsh version of identification with the aggressor is an extreme form of what psychodynamic therapists such as Melanie Klein call *projective identification*. One reassigns one's own unique strengths and potentials to the leader and, as a result, diminishes or even destroys one's own sense of self-worth and one's own distinctive identity. The leader's persona is assumed by all those who are under this person's power. The old realities are confiscated, and the leader's new "truth" becomes normative as the dominant social construction of reality. The identity of the aggressor thus becomes the identity of those who have been oppressed by the aggressor. This hard authoritarianism might have been operating in Estonia during the early 1990s – and perhaps is still operating in Estonia. This very ugly hard authoritarianism is certainly operating in many other societies today – especially those in which there is profound personal and collective stress and uncertainty.

Identifying with Consumption

It is not only the aggressor to which we are often pulled when living under conditions of societal stress. We are also pulled to a much less harsh, but ultimately just as alienating, form of identification. We are absorbed into the world of goods and services. We come to identify ourselves with what we own and turn to authoritarian rule if this rule promises that the goods and services will continue to arrive at our front door. This is soft authoritarianism – and is represented in Erich Fromm's disturbing analysis of consumer-oriented American culture (Fromm, 1955). It is also represented in a critique offered by my colleague, Xiaoyun (Sharon) Ma, in her observations about contemporary Chinese culture (Ma, 2019). We lose ourselves while shopping. Our sense of self shrinks via marketing to the size of a touted box of cereal or new, miracle cleaning fluid. The economy of a country is bursting at the seams but not the ultimate happiness or welfare of its citizens.

What about Estonia? Was soft authoritarianism prevalent in the 1990s version of Estonia and is it still present? As Berne Weiss and I noted in our assessment of life in Estonia and Hungary

(Bergquist and Weiss, 1994), this type of soft authoritarianism seemed to be manifested in the Estonian and Hungarian valuing of very concrete and highly tangible goods and services.

Given the elusive character of truth during the Soviet era, men and women in Estonia and Hungary seemed to rely on the goods and services that they could see, feel, and taste. They looked for the purchase of products manufactured in the West. They were lured to these products by the radio and television broadcasting that emanated from non-Soviet countries (despite Soviet attempts to block this communication). Freedom now meant that goods could actually be delivered and consumed rather than just promised via the latest five-year Soviet plan.

What about contemporary Estonian life? I suggest that this soft authoritarianism still exists –and might have grown even stronger. I arrive at this conclusion not by observing actual consumer behavior in Estonia, but by noting that this form of authoritarianism seems to be prevalent throughout Europe, North America, and Asia. Apparently, it is even prevalent big time in China (Ma, 2019). Obviously, I might be wrong specifically about Estonia; however, I wish to justify my conclusion by turning once again to the analysis of social systems offered by Erich Fromm. As early as 1960, Fromm noted this pull toward the valuing of goods and services as a mode of subtle authoritarianism.

Specifically, as I have noted, he was focusing on this marketing orientation in *The Sane Society* (Fromm, 1955). Fromm turns to the theme of alienation when describing the impact of a marketing orientation on the human psyche – as he had done before in describing the alienation associated with Nazi rule in Germany (Fromm, 1941). His focus, however, is now on the United States rather than Germany. He portrays a self-alienation of modern American man that results from “man’s physical energy . . . becoming a commodity, hence man has become a thing.” (Fromm, 1955, p. 255). Fromm is referring to the primary interest of workers in earning wages so that they can purchase goods and services.

The product of their work is no longer primary – rather consumption is primary. Workers are nothing more than intermediaries (“things”) between the workplace (production of goods) and marketplace (consumption of goods). In this orientation toward consumption, contemporary members of a society can escape from freedom. They are told how to be successful workers and what to purchase (via marketing). Difficult choices no longer are required. The agony of freedom is exchanged for a much more “blissful” life that is devoid of major challenges or any purpose other than consumption. We escape VUCA-Plus by creating a distorting world of Serenity. Goods and services are marketed that promise a serene world of stability, certainty, simplicity, clarity, calm and consistency (Bergquist, 2024b). It only takes a hot bath, clean clothes, a good deodorant and glass of fine wine from Bordeaux. Everything will be fine . . .

We are promised a life filled with tangible benefits rather than realized dreams. We are successfully convinced that meaning is to be found in the tangible consumption of goods and

services. At the very least, we are told (via massive marketing campaigns) that success in life (or at least happiness) is achieved when we are in possession of the best that money can buy.

Perhaps this is one of the collective myths that we should add to Gross' (1980) list of collective myths. It is a matter of what money can buy. We are told, as Gross suggests, that there is an open market for the exchange of ideas in our society, that great leaders will look after our collective interests, and that the "little people" will ultimately rise up if there is injustice. We are also told (and are convinced) that there is no reason to rise up, for the great leader is ensuring that there is a free market for the exchange of goods and services. They got the money. They can buy us what we most want in life.

Even if ideas are unlikely to be shared freely in a soft authoritarian society, there is always the new pair of shoes and vacation in Spain that await us. Furthermore, we have learned to embrace consumption at an early age. Beginning during the last decades of the 20th Century, our teenagers found meaning and camaraderie in hanging out together at shopping malls. Today, they are hanging around their mobile devices and exchanging information about what to purchase. It is now, during the second and third decades of the 21st Century, that we find the youth of our society (and even s folks who are a bit older) learning to virtually bond with one another on the Internet. In the midst of this bonding, they can consume via the tap of a finger on the mobile device.

Is it possible that Estonians are immune to this digital pull? As members of a now prosperous European community, are citizens of this country different in any important way from those living in other prospering countries around the world? Have their teenagers embraced a different orientation? I don't think this is the case – remember that Sype was invented in Estonia. However, I might be wrong and invite an assessment by my Estonian colleagues.

Escape into Nationalism

Many pathways can be found when one wishes to escape from freedom. It is not just a matter of identification with an aggressor or identification with a commodity. It is also a matter of identifying with a specific nation and culture. Consequently, we can look to another fundamental mode of escape from freedom. The threat of freedom can be ameliorated by turning to external sources of threat. Other countries become the enemy and loyalty to one's own country becomes the coin of the land. Nationalism flourishes. It is one of the tracks of thought that has been well worn by history – so it is easy to slip back into it.

As with individuals who assume familiar roles within their families, so, too, groups of people and nations seem to fall into characteristic modes. Think of the American "rugged individualist" and the Chinese orientation toward the collective. In Eastern Europe, nationalism seems to be the homeostasis to which group thinking repeatedly returns. Perhaps this has been useful

historically, creating a group identity within which individuals could create a cultural continuity. However, recent historical events now raise new challenges. Nationalism seems to be flying in the face of a flat world (Friedman, 2007) in which national boundaries are readily crossed. Thomas Friedman might have been focusing too much on a somewhat distant future. As I noted earlier, the curved and dangerous world represented by David Smick (2008) might be operative—especially in the criminal underground that is becoming increasingly international and massively funded. Furthermore, a virulent nationalism is still quite powerful and is on the rise in virtually all parts of the world—including the United States.

Is the world really becoming flat or is it a world in which enemies stand intimately close to one another, ready to defend their turf (both physical and virtual) at any cost? Are global crises (such as virus outbreaks) a cause for countries to come together or do they only cause greater anxiety and a regression to nationalism and authoritarian rule? The question becomes: What do we need to learn about nationalism if we are to build a world in the future that is less dangerous and destructive of the human spirit—and true freedom?

Nationalism and Xenophobia

Nationalism, in some of its manifestations, belongs with anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and other nonrational habits of thinking. People can explain troublesome and complex social events, such as economic depressions through these often habitual, fast modes of thought (Kahneman, 2011). Quick, manageable explanations reduce levels of anxiety (Bergquist, 2020b). But these habits of thinking are not only about simplistic explanations. Nationalism, at least, is also about one's identity, about linking one's sense of self with something larger than oneself. It includes membership, but it also includes a sense of birthright, homeland, ancestral ties.

One is not free to choose the ethnic group into which one is born. And within our birth-group there are certain characteristics that are also beyond choice: skin color, mother tongue, how the rest of the world relates to our ethnic group. These are some of the limits of individual freedom. Then there is the profound experience of feeling gripped by the primeval demands of one's ethnic identity. Perhaps when an ethnic group is smothered and receives minimal recognition and acceptance from its neighbors, then the craving for recognition gets distorted and becomes the central ingredient in the pursuit of identity. For some, ethnic or national identity seems to be a compulsion.

The great experiment in social planning that subsumed the cultures and nations of Eastern Europe after World War II was a bit like a freeze-drying process. The cultural life that existed on limited rations below the surface needed only this thing called freedom to revive during the early 1990s. The revival of freedom signaled not only the ability to travel once again but also renews nationalism, xenophobia, street crime, and economic insecurity. Revived with nationalism were the historical wounds that scarred the region. With the intensity of siblings, each of the nations of

Eastern Europe chronicled the wrongs inflicted on it by its neighbors over the centuries. International hatred was alive and well!

In the wake of socialism's collapse, dissolution of the Soviet Union, and cold war's end, the rise of nationalism was hardly surprising—much to the chagrin of political progressives and centrists. No one objects to expressions of love for one's country or a positive national identity. Those are essential ingredients of self-esteem. Concerns arose during the 1990s because the baggage that typically accompanies such patriotism includes xenophobia, aggressive posturing toward neighboring countries, and an updating of the catalogue of historical wrongs.

The possible outcome of such a dynamic is a quasi-amicable divorce, such as the one that occurred late in the 20th Century between the Czechs and the Slovaks. An alternative outcome is descent into barbarism, such as the genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina (and many countries in Africa and more recently in the Mid-East). Once a process of nationalism is set in motion, it often takes its own course. People who have been denied any expression of national pride may well be carried to extremes when the prohibition is lifted. The paradox here is that freedom is the element that allows the revival of dormant passions. Once revived, the passion of nationalism has been known to drown out the rational, slow thinking (Kahneman, 2011) that is essential for freedom.

Nationalism and Identity

National identity and autonomy were extremely important in Estonia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The citizens of this country were concerned about recognition by other countries and about the establishment of a clear and distinctive national identity. Self-esteem for men and women in this country was directly linked to national recognition. During my interviews, Estonians talked about the frequent invasion of their country. They talked with deep emotions about other people's lack of respect for their country's boundaries, their deep cultural roots, and their intellectual resources. Estonians that I interviewed felt like they were on the outside, looking in, when being considered on the world stage. These concerns have continued to be voiced by Estonians during the first three decades of the 21st Century, as they have established their place in the European community. Russian invasion lingers as threat and fear. Second class citizenship is still a source of frustration.

The lingering concern for recognition in Estonia may be quite legitimate, given its long history of being overlooked and dismissed as a legitimate country, Estonia and its Baltic neighbors, Latvia and Lithuania are indeed located on the "outskirts" of Western Europe. Citizens of the Baltic states view their country as isolated and peripheral to major European events. I offer the following example from the 1990s of this overlooking of major affairs in the Baltic states by the rest of the world (or at least the American press).

In 1991, over half a million citizens of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of an egregious German-Russian (Ribbentrop/Molotov) agreement that gave these three countries to Russia in 1942. These citizens formed an unbroken human chain across the three countries. This was a major event, both symbolically and in terms of the enormous effort and devotion it required. Yet virtually no one in the West heard much about this event, even though communications with the West by this time were vastly improved. The invasion of Crimea was covered extensively in the American press – would this also be the case today if Estonia were invaded once again by the Russians?

I personally witnessed the impact of ignorance and overlook on one of my colleagues from Estonia who was a successful physician. During the late 1990s, she decided to attend an international health care conference held at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. I accompanied her as she was checking in to the conference. The conference planners thoughtfully assigned participants to rooms at nearby hotels by nationality and first language (so that participants could easily communicate with one another in the evenings and at breakfast). Unfortunately, my colleague was assigned to the Russian group – since Estonia was once a part of the Russian-dominated Soviet Union.

My colleague was upset – quite angry – and was about to leave the conference and return to Estonia. I talked to those assigning the rooms and provided a brief history regarding animosity among many Estonians about the Russian occupation of their country. Subsequently, my colleague was reassigned to rooms in a hotel that was populated by a group of English-speaking physicians from several Western European countries. She and I talked for a long time about how this ignorance of history and politics is to be found even among educated conference planners. The lingering sense of being ignored and being considered unimportant on the world stage was (and I suspect still is) a major concern in Estonia.

While Estonians have been aggravated about this situation, they don't seem to have done much about it. Their inaction might contribute to isolation and ignorance. At a fundamental level, the Estonians with whom I met during the 1990s, wanted most of all to be left alone. Unlike my colleague, Berne Weiss, who met a highly extraverted culture in Hungary, I met a culture in Estonia that was highly introverted (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994). The "Estonian dream" has long been to own and live on a farm or own a boat and live off the abundant stock of fish in the North Sea. This life would give them the opportunity to devote most of their attention to their family and a few neighbors who live at a reasonable distance from their farm or seaside cottage.

As Leili, a seventy-year-old former work camp inmate, observed, "Estonians are inclined to live inside themselves [and] always hold themselves back." This introversion is coupled with the unique culture of Estonia that creates a pull toward isolation and a defense of national boundaries. The Estonian culture is very old, and Estonians are particularly concerned that their deep cultural heritage and language may be lost or at least ignored. This is particularly the case

if Estonia is occupied once again by outsiders (such as Putin and his Russian forces) who insist on imposing their own culture and language on the Estonian people.

It is also important to note that the isolation of Estonia and outside ignorance regarding its history and heritage might be exacerbated by the challenge of language. Estonians embrace a language that is spoken by very few other people in the world. During my interviews, the question of language was often posed: how do we get people to understand us if they can't speak our language? Do we abandon our own distinctive language and always speak their language in order to communicate – such as the Estonians I was interviewing were now doing when speaking to me in English?

This concern about language was quite legitimate, given that Estonians were required to speak Russian during the Soviet era. This was very offensive to all Native Estonians. Alternatively, they could speak English – especially if they were to interact with their neighbors in Latvia and Lithuania. In what much of the world refers to generically as the Baltics, these three countries have languages that are quite different from each other. National identity was (and still seems to be) very important to Estonians because of their distinctive language, as well as their rich history and heritage (as conveyed through such venues as their music, dance, dress and architecture).

The Future of Authoritarianism and Nationalism in Estonia

It is becoming increasingly clear in Eastern Europe that the Iron Curtain was set up and sustained as much by the West as by the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact countries. As seems to have been the case with many other aspects of twentieth-century world economics and politics, the Iron Curtain appears to have been a tacit collusion between two major power blocks. The West benefited from the loss of competition from countries such as Hungary and Estonia that have had periods of economic prosperity and that embrace a strong work ethic.

The Soviet Union benefited from the presence of these economic resources to counteract the less ambitious men and women who came from republics without a strong work ethic. Both countries in the West (Western Europe and North America) and the East (Soviet Union) were interested in a universal community and the elimination of national identities. In accord with Fukuyama (2006), both power blocks wanted to eliminate “history” and find themselves creating and enforcing a unified narrative and perspective on the operation of all social systems. There would no longer be contentious politics. There would now be unity of thought and action. These two blocks would only disagree on who dictates the terms of this universality. Countries such as Estonia and Hungary were caught in the middle of this disagreement.

Europeanism or Nationalism

The tension between East and West was apparent in the psyche and perspectives of the Estonians whom I interviewed during the early 1990s. Many of the Estonians (and Hungarians) were initially hesitant to leap into another identity-diffusing scheme, such as the European Community (later evolving into the European Union: EU). Citizens of both these countries had to struggle during the 1990s with the issue of membership in the western European community.

Because they have just recovered their individual national identity, citizens of both countries may have been hesitant to sacrifice it in favor of a broader European identity. Among the Estonians I interviewed there was a lingering question: Are we now Estonians or Europeans? Where will be our primary allegiance: to Estonia or the EU? The EU raised the possibility of a meta-identity as "European," which either threatened (and provoked) nationalism in Estonia or created a real alternative. Estonians had the opportunity as citizens of this country to no longer be locked out of Europe. The tension was being played out between the rationalists and the nationalists.

The rationalists won out. The hesitation fell away during years following the Soviet collapse. Concerns about the loss of national identity took a back seat to the prospects of protection and economic benefits. Currently, both Estonia and Hungary are members of the European Union. In both countries, however, there is still ambivalence about the trade-offs between nationalism and Europeanism. The same ambivalence is to be found in virtually every other member of the European Union. With the immigration issue becoming a point of major contention and with Brexit disrupting the finances and coherence of the EU, we have witnessed a Europe-wide shift in favor of nationalism. At the same time, with the invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the threat of Russian recapturing of former Soviet satellites, there is an equally strong pull toward firm alliances with other European countries (especially though membership in NATO).

This two-fold (and contradictory) shift represents a major source of irony in contemporary European politics and culture. On the one hand, European countries have been engaged for the past three decades in an elaborate dance to lower the barriers between nations. They have successfully laid to rest centuries of inter-nation antagonism—and find that they feel safer working with rather than fighting against their long-term European rivals. At the same time, the leaders and common citizens of these Western (and now Eastern) European countries have rediscovered or reinvented nationalism—especially with the threat of massive migration from the troubled Mid-East. Right-wing and xenophobic politics are to be found in all European countries. Some people seem to covet the right to express ill will toward their neighbors. After forty years of being in a superimposed alliance with historical adversaries, like being bound to a chain gang, people are venting their frustration in nationalistic rhetoric.

The Russian Question

The Estonian community is certainly not immune to this nationalist and often racist pull. For Estonians, however, this pull is more complex than is the cases in most other European countries (especially those in Western Europe). As in many other Eastern European countries, Estonia was filled with those from other countries who were assigned to work in Estonia by the Soviet regime. In particular, there was the large Russian population in Estonia – primarily located in Tallinn. What was to be done with these men, women and children? Are they Estonian citizens or should they be considered unwanted interlopers (and even invaders)?

These former Soviet citizens often did not migrate to Estonia on their own free will. They were coerced, complying with the Soviet master plan of workforce reassignments. For many of these migrants, Estonia had become home by the time of Estonian independence. Their children were fully enculturated (though often still taught to speak Russian and learn about Russian history). At least 500,000 “Russiophones” lived in Estonia following the Soviet collapse – this in a country with not much more than one million residents.

The issue of citizenship and political participation on the part of the Russian population in Estonia was complex and subject to major controversy. In the midst of this controversy, we see the interplay I described earlier between nationalism and distorted identification, on the one hand, and thoughtful, compassionate rationality, on the other hand. Both were operating in this re-established country following the Soviet collapse-- and came to the foreground in Estonian politics of the early 1990s. The issue was citizenship. Should those who came from Russia (and other former Soviet countries) be granted citizenship?

As in many other countries around the world, there was an excluded population (the “other”) that had no political power. While in some countries, such as Israel, the “other” population is the original occupant of the land, for Estonians (as well as many other Eastern Europeans) the “other” are people who “invaded” their homeland. Nationalism can flourish when this narrative of invasion is conveyed on a consistent and persuasive basis. The narrative can become one of the dominant myths identified by Gross (1980). However, it is a narrative that is specific to Estonia and other Eastern European countries.

Politics and Policy

For Estonians, the boiling point came in 1993, when a law was passed that regulated the status of noncitizens (mostly Russians) in their country. Russians in Estonia declared that the new law was discriminatory. Their outrage was shared by leaders of many other Western countries (including the United States and other members of the European Union). A Nationalities Roundtable was established with some outside funding. Thoughtful, compassionate deliberations were intended to overturn irrational, xenophobic nationalism.

Unfortunately, the roundtable had little impact. It was irrational political pressure that led to overturning of the law. It seems that political pressure has often won the day in Estonia – and many other Eastern European countries that have re-invented themselves after the Soviet collapse. While democracy is solidly established in Estonia, there is a great deal of volatility in the Estonian political process with the creation and dissolution of many political parties and shifting alliances among the parties that do exist. In part, this volatility resulted initially from the successful engagement of many young, inexperienced citizens in Estonian politics. Leadership was provided by 30 something women and men. While these young leaders brought in radical and often refreshing ideas about the environment and social justice, they also came to governmental services with little political acumen.

A flourishing economy might also have played a part: chaos is always a bit more tolerable if a country's businesses are flourishing and if politics is at least temporarily secondary to economic prosperity. It is to the Estonian people that we must look for the source of many technological innovations – including the invention of Skype. Since the 1990s, Estonia has become a mighty-economic midget, often being rated among the top 20 countries in the world regarding economic strength.

I might even suggest that this prosperity reinforces the commodity-base identification of self that I introduced previously (in alignment with the critical observations offered by Erich Fromm). A commodity-based and market orientation might prevail over a political orientation. If the young people are bringing new, Western Europe-oriented business practices and a technological focus to Estonia, then they may also bring in Western European ideas about politics. Perhaps these young entrepreneurs and technological wiz-kids are more qualified to run their country than are the old-timers who controlled life in Estonia during the Soviet era and immediate post-Soviet era.

Putting all of this together, we should not be surprised that the Estonian political process has been compared to the game of “musical chairs.” Repeatedly, political inexperience gives way to old-time political knowledge and there is a frequent return to established political practices. Expedience and frequent realignment of societal values and principles prevail: “What do I have to do and what laws do we have to pass for me to stay in office?” It is little wonder, therefore, that an unpopular law regarding citizen status was overturned – not because it was a bad idea but because it risked the loss of political power by the government officials who passed this law. It seems that democracy is often quite messy, Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why authoritarian rule can sometimes seem quite attractive.

With a rescinding of the restrictive law, Russians living in Estonia could now vote – though they have tended to remain a minority political force in Estonia even up to the present time. The one change in recent years has been the refocusing of much xenophobic attention on the threatened “invasion” of the homeland by displaced refugees from the Middle East. The Russians now look pretty good when compared to those “other” people who come from a culture that is completely

unknown to Estonians. At least Estonians know about the customs (and language) of their Russian compatriots. Better the “known” than the “unknown.”

What is the Future for Estonians?

We can step back a bit and reflect on what we now know and what we think we know about the future of authoritarian rule and nationalism in the country of Estonia (and by extension in many other 21st Century countries). First, it is important to note that nationalists are unabashedly boosters, as anyone who has ever been a sports fan can fully appreciate. The commitment contains an element of loyalty in the face of humility—for Estonians know what it means to be on the outside looking in. For the citizens of Estonia this means an ongoing search for and honoring of pride and valor—which exists alongside a pervasive sense of doubt and fear.

As is the case in many other countries (including the United States), the nationalists in Estonia tend to be less educated and less "cosmopolitan" than those with less ardent nationalistic proclivities. This lack of education and a silo perspective in many countries carries a lot of baggage, including irrational fears of conspiratorial forces such as "International Jewry." For many years, in the United States there was David Rockefeller's fabled Tri-lateral Commission. More recently we find QAnon and the governmental “deep state” (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). These conspiracy-prone citizens are often not very articulate in expressing an emotional attachment to their country. They rely on their leader to be the articulate and persuasive spokesman (another example of projective identification and the diminution of self). Power in this instance comes not from individual competence or knowledge, but from blind obedience and collective action: the irrational herd overwhelms the individual proponent of rational discourse (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024).

While it is tempting to strike a pessimistic pose regarding the future of authoritarianism in Estonia and many other 21st Century countries (including the United States), there is some reason to hope for democratic success. As Hannah Arendt (1966/1948) noted, authoritarianism and nationalism are incompatible with more entrepreneurial and internationally oriented middle-class values. Arendt's insights were affirmed by Serge, the purported Russian arms dealer in Estonia whom I interviewed in 1991.

Both Arendt and Serge suggest that the Soviets feared the emergence of a middle class precisely because of the competing international perspective that the middle class could offer. If Arendt and Serge are accurate, then we should expect a decline in nationalism with strengthening of the middle class in Estonia. While economic prosperity in Estonia might have helped to produce a messy political process, it also helped to ensure that this messy democratic process was not going to be replaced by less messy authoritarian rule (as has occurred in Russia and many other countries). I suspect that the intellectually gifted and technological savvy of many Ukrainians have similarly made the easy invasion of their country quite difficult (even impossible). Strong nationalism need not always be aligned with ignorance and distortion of reality.

Still, it is difficult to remain positive about democracy and the decline of nationalism in the near future. Given the threat of massive immigration caused by political upheaval in other parts of the world, nationalism and authoritarianism might prevail in the near future. This threat is coupled with and exacerbated by current health emergencies and the virus-influenced temporary (or long-term) collapse of European (and world-wide) economies.

If we turn again specifically to Estonia, there is further reason for concern. What about the seeming passivity and ultimate pessimism of Estonians – given that they are living in a country that has been invaded many times over the past two centuries? My own observations previously in this book regarding this psychological condition in Estonia have been echoed in much more poetic terms by Alexander Theroux (2011, p. 14):

An Estonian as a [peddler] of positivism is in all instances a walking oxymoron. His recollections are far too extensive, his memory too long, his wounds too recent to put a tingle of optimism in his besieged and beleaguered heart.

Theroux (2011, p. 14) moves beyond this portrayal of pessimism to the core issue of freedom:

During an occupation, far more than a country is captured – a national soul is possessed. Brutalized. Mortified. Hurt. Made Inflexible. Freedom itself, the very idea of it, becomes victim, as well. More than self is lost, a soul harmed. There is the loss of the sense of adventure.

Under such conditions, is it likely that freedom will remain a victim of lingering pessimism? Will there always be pervasive fear of yet another invasion by Russia or eventually by yet another superpower? A remarkable social observer and futurist, Fred Polak (1973) observed many years ago that a society without a clear and compelling sense of its own future is either in decline or will never thrive if newly created or re-created.

Polak extensively documented the history of many societies and carefully analyzed the state of future images in each society. A society will hold together and thrive while there is something toward which citizens of this society can strive – an envisioned frontier that is compelling to which people can collectively commit. Sacrifice on behalf of a greater good is prevalent. Individual aspirations are secondary to collective aspirations and goals.

Polak asserted that a society will decline in power and capacity without this shared image of the future. We see this loss of vision and decline in Germany of the 1920s and 1930s. Two visions were in disarray: the national vision of a “New Germany” and the global vision of the “World War” (not the first world war) being “the last war.” Residing in the midst of this disarray, the observant and pained novelist, Thomas Mann, “could imagine decency, but that was hardly a virtue in a time that had grown sinister. He could imagine humanism, but that made no difference in a time that exalted the will of the crowd. He could image a frail intelligence, but that meant

little in a time that honored brute strength.” (Tóibín, 2020, p. 381) For Mann and many other Germans (and Europeans in general) the vision of a new world (governed by the rules and values of the League of Nations) was dead.

What about Estonia? In reflecting on his own country’s history an Estonian colleague talked about parental aspirations for his own son. I am paraphrasing and recalling a conversation from almost 30 years ag. Yet what he said still haunts me--especially when thinking about the aspirations I have for my own children and grandchildren. He said:

I don’t have any aspirations or hopes regarding my son’s future or the future of this country. The Estonian future has always been in the hands of powerful people from outside our country over whom we have no control. How can I think about the future for my son, when he will have little to say about the status of his future!

If there is no future for Estonia, then what will be the fate of this country? Are those living in Estonia left with only short-term hopes--that might often be aligned with the immediate consumption of goods and services? Are Estonians vulnerable to the soft form of authoritarianism that Erich Fromm described? Are they also vulnerable to a more virulent form of authoritarianism that is activated by a search for national identity and perhaps even continuing identification with aggressive forces?

Conclusions

What then are the implications of predictions I have made (and other observers of Estonia have made) regarding life in this European country during the coming 10 to 20 years? Is nationalism on the rise or on the decline? Does this mean the rise or decline of authoritarianism in its various forms? What about identification with commodities and the market orientation I previously identified? Will soft authoritarianism that is sprinkled with some xenophobic hard authoritarianism prevail in Estonia (and other European and North American societies)? What about the enduring relationship between Estonia and Western societies? Is Estonia truly free of the Eastern influences that were accelerated during the period of Russian occupation?

More generally, the question remains open regarding the future of democracy and nationalism in most European countries (and many countries elsewhere in the world). The path of the EU and NATO in Europe is hardly clear at this moment, even after years of political and psychological preparation. This is especially the case given the volatility of politics in the United States.

For Estonians, the many sources of ambivalence are great. VUCA-Plus is in full operation. As one of the Estonians I interviewed during the early 1990s noted: "If I had the experience of a hundred years of democracy coupled with consistent national autonomy and identity [as is found in many Western European and American countries], then I could be a cosmopolitan and an

internationalist, too." Which will be the outcome in Estonia? Will we find cosmopolitans or nationalists? Consumers or reformers? Those who embrace true freedom or those who seek to escape the profound challenge of freedom?

Stay tuned . . .

Section Two

The Ingredients of True Freedom

Chapter Six

Balance: Ensuring Both Personal Rights and Collective Responsibilities

In examining the nature of true freedom, I first realize that the journey to true freedom is quite challenging. As Walter Lippmann noted in *A Preface to Morals*: “Most men, after a little freedom, have preferred authority with the consoling assurances and the economy of effort which it brings.” Yet, I believe that it is possible to engage this journey in a successful manner. My optimism is guided by three independent though related dictums.

First, I propose that true freedom requires balancing a concern for individual personal rights with a concern for collective, shared responsibility. Second, I believe that true freedom requires a society in which there is a convergence of interests among all sectors of this society. Third, true freedom requires the construction of a shared vision of the future so that members of a society may determine a sustained course of action that ensures both personal rights and collective responsibilities. It is a pathway into the future that is founded on a societal harmony of interests. I consider the first of these notions in this chapter and the other two in subsequent chapters.

The Conflicting R’s: Rights and Responsibilities

As I address the challenge of achieving true freedom, it is appropriate to turn as I have previously to Erich Fromm's social-psychological analysis. Fromm believed that the affirmation of others and the union of the individual with others is critical to true freedom. This affirmation requires a concern for collective responsibility, not just individual rights. He writes eloquently in *Escape from Freedom* about the basis of true (or positive, to use his term) freedom in what he calls the "spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality" (Fromm, 1941, p. 258).

Fromm describes spontaneous activity in terms of the relationship between the individual and the society of which they are a member. He uses the term “negative freedom” which is equivalent to an escape from freedom rather than a desire to find freedom. For Fromm (1941, pp. 260-261) negative freedom concerns an imbalance between rights and responsibilities:

We have said that negative freedom by itself makes the individual an isolated being, whose relationship to the world is distant and distrustful and whose self is weak and constantly threatened. Spontaneous activity is the one way in which man can overcome the terror of aloneness without sacrificing the integrity of his self; for in the spontaneous realization of the self, man unites himself anew with the world – with man, nature, and himself. Love is the foremost component of such spontaneity; not love as the dissolution

of the self in another person, not love as the possession of another person, but love as spontaneous affirmation of others [collective responsibility], as the union of the individual with others on the basis of the preservation of the individual self.

I would suggest that Fromm's terror of aloneness relates to the terror associated with Otto's and Jung's numinous and with the existential anxiety and pervasive angst associated with VUCA-Plus. When sitting in isolation, we deeply fear that which is different from us – that which is the "other" (Oshry, 2018) – and that which is beyond the boundaries of our personal control.

In suggesting an alternative to Nazi authoritarianism, when attempting to make sense of a world gone mad in *Escape from Freedom* (1941), Fromm proposes – as did Teilhard de Chardin (1955) – that the basis of freedom must be the sharing of responsibility and commitment. It is the expression of love, according to Fromm, that balances off the need for individual rights (as a vehicle for one to overcome one's existential anxiety) with the societal need for collective responsibility.

Tension, Love and Grace

The polarity between individual rights and collective responsibility, according to Fromm, provides a dynamic and highly productive tension in society. It is a tension that is ultimately resolved through human love, a mature blending of rights and responsibilities in relationship with other people. Love as an organizing feature of society helps us overcome the inherent insecurities and even terror that I suggest we associate with immediate confrontation of VUCA-Plus and that Fromm suggested we associate with mortality. Under conditions of true freedom, this transcendent awareness, according to Fromm, leads to the creation and maintenance of shared commitments with other people.

More than a decade later, in his analysis of American culture, Fromm (1955, p. 31) comes to the same conclusion. Love is the overarching, central feature of true, liberating freedom:

There is only one passion which satisfies man's need to unite himself with the world, and to acquire at the same time a sense of integrity and individuality, and this is love. Love is union with somebody, or something, outside oneself, under the condition of retaining the separateness and integrity of one's own self. It is an experience of sharing, of communion, which permits the full un- folding of one's own inner activity. The experience of love does away with the necessity of illusions.

Fromm assumes a classic humanistic perspective when he speaks of love as the basis for a blending of rights and responsibilities and, consequently, as a basis for a new freedom. Other writers introduce a more transcendent and spiritual element. They speak of the "grace" that is required of true freedom (May, 2007, p. 139). Grace, in turn, comes from a divine presence or from a shared commitment to community and to some all-embracing and sustaining sense of collective purpose. This shared purpose is coupled with a recognition of divine worth inherent in the distinctive, individual person ("personal grace"). There is a need for consecration and covenant in such a community of grace.

There must be a sense of trust and, ultimately, faith in one's ability to collaborate with others to create a sustainable and worthy future that nourishes both the individual and collective soul. We can sustain this future, in part, because we need no longer act alone but can rely instead on the support of other people in the community. We need this support not only because we can't do it alone but also because there will never be completion but only progress. There will never be contentment but only a continuing challenge. True freedom is always challenging and sometimes anxiety-provoking and even painful – especially under conditions of VUCA-Plus. This dynamic stance of genuine freedom is in need of continuing community support (May, 1988).

Individualism and Habits of the Societal Heart

At the heart of the dialogue that Fromm introduced is a basic question about the relationship between freedom and responsibility. This is a relationship that is often strained in a society that emphasizes individualism – such as that found in the United States. For instance, we see a clear emphasis on individualism and an accompanying emphasis on individual rights (at least among those who were wealthy and powerful) in the highly influential writings and practices of Andrew Carnegie. As one of the wealthiest men in late 19th Century America, Carnegie wrote about the “Gospel of Wealth”. Richardson (2024a) offers us an account of Carnegie’s vision of a prosperous America:

In June 1889, steel magnate Andrew Carnegie published what became known as the "Gospel of Wealth" in the popular magazine *North American Review*. Carnegie explained that "great inequality... [and]...the concentration of business, industrial and commercial, in the hands of a few" were "not only beneficial, but essential to...future progress." And, Carnegie asked, "What is the proper mode of administering wealth after the laws upon which civilization is founded have thrown it into the hands of the few?"

Rather than paying higher wages or contributing to a social safety net-which would "encourage the slothful, the drunken, the unworthy," Carnegie wrote- the man of fortune should "consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds, which he is called upon to administer... in the manner which, in his judgment, is best calculated to produce the most beneficial results for the community-the man of wealth thus becoming the mere trustee and agent for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves."

At this point, Carnegie is offering what we now call a “trickle down” (or supply side) perspective on the functioning of a macro-economic system such as exists in the United State:

"[T]his wealth, passing through the hands of the few, can be made a much more potent force for the elevation of our race than if distributed in small sums to the people themselves," Carnegie wrote. "Even the poorest can be made to see this, and to agree that great sums gathered by some of their fellow-citizens and spent for public purposes, from which the masses reap the principal benefit, are more valuable to them than if scattered among themselves in trifling amounts through the course of many years."

Yet, we find that this trickle downward doesn't seem to work very well. Rather there is gushing upward of money to a few at the top of the economic food chain. Any sense of collective responsibility seems to have dried up by the late 19th Century – especially with the emergence of a powerful industrial sector of society.

In reflecting on the American culture in *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah and his colleagues (1985) speak of the personal emptiness that lies at the end of the successful quest for total autonomy. Perhaps, it was through the accumulation of wealth and the conspicuous consumption of the “Gilded Age” in late 19th Century life in American (and many other countries) that an attempt was made to someone fill this emptiness. Perhaps the pursuit of happiness through consumption that Fromm highlighted in mid-20th Century America can be traced back to an earlier era. Might Fromm's critical analysis be equally as applicable to Andrew Carnegie and his Gospel of Wealth?

Like Robert Bellah, Carol Gilligan (1982) describes the inadequacies of individual rights when they are not integrated with collective responsibility. She draws the parallels between the individual developmental process toward maturation, which includes a concern for both rights and responsibilities, and the social developmental process toward a free and just society. In studying the development of a personal sense of morality, Gilligan proposes that American society has tended to emphasize individual rights at the expense of collective responsibilities for the past two centuries. In part, according to Gilligan (and many other social observers) this is because American society has been dominated by an emphasis on distinctiveness and separation in contrast to an emphasis on connectedness and similarities between people. This emphasis, in turn, has been reinforced by the American economic and political systems. Psychology, economics and political analyses must inherently be drawn into any discussion regarding personal rights and collective responsibilities.

True Freedom in Eastern Europe

During our interviews in Hungary and Estonia, Berne Weiss and I learned of people's concern for balancing personal rights and collective responsibilities. In America and many Western European countries, there is an overemphasis on individual rights and an inadequate emphasis on collective responsibilities—as noted by Carol Gilligan. The Hungarians and Estonians we interviewed generally seemed to begin with a rather "natural" concern for collective responsibility. They had greater difficulty in recognizing the nature of and means for supporting individual rights—although they all were well aware of the horrible consequences of living in a society where these individual rights were ignored or violated.

Several of our interviewees indicated that freedom means responsibility. Professor Brichacek of the Czech Republic—one of the remarkable people that Berne Weiss interviewed—was most explicit:

Freedom means for me responsibility- responsibility to my inner voice, responsibility to my friends, responsibility for the future generation. . . . Freedom is to [take] this responsibility just according to your own will, just according to your own values ... just

according to your own best ideas. Freedom means to me to realize my responsibility by means that I find to be appropriate.

Dr. Brichacek was articulate about the dimensions of this responsibility. When he is free, he can be responsible to his friends, to the future generation, to the cosmos, and perhaps most importantly, to his inner voice. His perspective is not unlike that offered by Erich Fromm.

An Estonian reformer that I interviewed similarly declared, "Freedom is . . . a willingness to give up something, to make choices." Yet for this Czech professor and this Estonian reformer, there was very little sense of the meaning of freedom with regard to their own individual rights. If they are each to be guided by their inner voice in deciding what must be given up, then how are their rights assured? How are they to be protected if they are to act upon their inner voice and to sacrifice in a way that yields a social benefit? They must be provided with some personal security, as long as their actions don't infringe upon the rights of other people. If an Estonian, Hungarian (or citizen of the Czech Republic) are to be responsible to their friends and future generations, then how can this person be assured that he or she will have the right and ability to act upon this sense of responsibility as a neighbor and citizen?

What will prevent people in authority from blocking responsible citizens from meeting their responsibilities? What will prevent leaders from distorting or manipulating the sense of responsibility? These questions can only be answered if sufficient attention is given to that half of the equation concerned with individual rights. This is one area in which Americans and American society might serve as an appropriate model. Beginning with the Bill of Rights, Americans have certainly given considerable attention to protecting individual rights, including the right to act upon one's sense of responsibility. How do we find the appropriate balance between rights and responsibility in our own society as well as in other societies operating in our 21st Century world? I would suggest that the balancing act is becoming more difficult given the new and greater challenges associated with VUCA-Plus.

The Two R's and VUCA-Plus in America

The challenges faced in achieving true freedom following collapse of the Soviet Union have not been easy to meet in the former Soviet satellite countries – whether we are talking about the last decade of the 20th Century or the first three decades of the 21st Century. As I have just suggested, the task has become more complicated in recent years. This is because we are living in a VUCA-Plus world that is becoming increasingly volatile, uncertain and complex. It is filled with ambiguity, turbulence and contradiction. If this is an accurate portrayal of most 21st Century societies, then I would suggest that VUCA-Plus is making any balance between personal rights and collective responsibility that much more difficult.

Hunkering Down or Lending a Hand

On the one hand, we are threatened at a personal level by all the elements of VUCA-Plus and wish to hunker down. We are preoccupied with defending our own home, our own livelihood and our own community and nation. This is often at the expense of other people, other

communities and other nations. Our legitimate concern about personal rights devolves into siloed individualism, isolation and alienation from the world in which we live.

On the other hand, we are threatened collectively and experience a shared angst regarding the world in which we live. At times, we regress under the threat of VUCA-Plus to a more primitive reliance on our leaders and institutions. Collective responsibility devolves into authoritarian rule. At other times, we see the value of working together to resolve the many challenges associated with VUCA-Plus. We know that we can't "go it alone." We rely on the good graces of other people in our community and our nation.

As now-Vice President Harris has noted, there have been contrasting views regarding collective responsibility. There is a long history in many communities of inter-racial tension and social class polarization. However, Harris recollects that she grew up in a community where people looked out for each other. For Kamala Harris, "the true measure of the strength of a leader is not based on who you beat down. It's based on who you life up." (Richardson, 2024f).

With potential increases in difficulty regarding the balancing of rights and responsibilities comes the need for new tools—or the reintroduction of old, proven tools (that have been neglected). These are tools that can be engaged in a constructive dialogue that addresses the nature of this societal balance. I offer several ideas and one powerful tool that might be of assistance when introducing this dialogue in many different forums.

The Balancing Act

As human beings, we are not inclined to balance major priorities—such as personal rights and collective responsibilities. To do this balancing, we need to consider both the upside and downside of each option. We prefer not to consider the negative sides—for they create collective stress. We would rather isolate (censor) the inconvenient truth and demonize those who are conveying this truth. Clearly, the challenge of achieving true freedom is great if it requires the balancing of rights and responsibilities.

Such a balance will only be achieved through constructive dialogue. In order to successfully convene this dialogue regarding future policies, we must take several factors about the human psyche into consideration. As psychologists, we might have something important to say about the process of collective policy formulation. We have learned (and perhaps have always known), that mind and heart must always dance together—especially when it comes to the exceptional challenge posed by the creation and maintenance of true freedom.

Thinking in Systems: The Outcomes Can Surprise Us

While we, *homo sapiens*, are among the brightest members of the animal kingdom, there are some major limits in our capacity to think clearly and systematically about the challenging conditions we face. First, we are inclined to view our complex world in single terms. It is hard for us to take multiple, interacting variables into account at the same time. Many years ago, members of the M.I.T. community created a powerful modeling tool called system dynamics that enables us to take multiple variables into consideration at the same time (Meadows, 2008). Modeling tools being used by their colleagues at Harvard and other universities and research centers similarly enable multi-variable analyses.

Nuclear Effect

What are the insights to be gained from these analyses? Two particularly relevant insights are generated as they relate to the interplay of rights and responsibilities. First, there is the matter of rapid expansion in the forces operating on each side of this societal dilemma. Something often called the *Power Law* is operating. As in the case of many systemic phenomena (such as birth rates, global warming and nuclear explosions), the spread of passion regarding each side is exponential. The power law dynamic might be labeled a *Nuclear Effect* given its parallel to the exponential power of nuclear explosions. This parallel has often been drawn by members of the Santa Fe Institute (who are often those involved in both the nuclear research done at Los Alamos located near Santa Fe, New Mexico and in the more recent study of complex social systems).

As concerns for individual rights increase (as a result of some societal crisis, such as a pandemic or economic collapse) so do concerns regarding collective responsibility tend to increase. Gregory Bateson (1972) provided this accelerating process with a quite formidable title: complimentary schizogenesis. As a cultural anthropologist, Bateson shows how this process plays out in many societies. Members of a specific society find that their autonomy and individual benefits are being threatened, so they demand judicial reforms or even take up arms to defend their rights. They declare that their freedom is being restricted or even annihilated.

A counter group arises that pushes against those demanding autonomy and individual benefits. The counter group demands enforcement of existing laws that protect those lacking power (economic or political). This counter group might even demand new, more protective legislation or increased funding for programs protecting the under-served. They go to war (or at least lead protests) against the graven individualists. Banners arise declaring that "freedom for only a few is no freedom at all!"

One day we look out at our world, and nothing appears to be amiss. The next day we find that our world has changed forever and that the warring factions are weaponizing for their attack on one another. Freedom of any type is in deep jeopardy. As I found in Estonia, it is hard to think of true freedom when in the midst of an internal revolution.

Delay Effect

The second insight concerns delay. System dynamic theorists suggest that delays in any complex system often have a greater impact on the way this system operates than does any of the system's other properties (such as the nature and size of entities operating inside the system). Delays can occur in the movement of entities inside a system, as well as the movement of information about these entities. Change and improvement doesn't happen overnight. It takes time – and time is precious under conditions of major societal stress and VUVA-induced angst.

Delay creates polarities. Mobilization of opposing parties is quick and dramatic because the underlying concerns have been festering for quite a while (the delay factor). Things are festering. The wounds are covered over rather than healed. When everything does break open, the delayed and stored up energy comes immediately and forcibly to the fore. All “hell” breaks loose. The *Delay Effect* might be just as important as the *Nuclear Effect* – and will often complement this effect. This is especially the case when it comes to a major societal dilemma such as the balance between rights and responsibilities.

Counter Intuition

A third important insight can be offered. The results generated by system-based analyses are often counter-intuitive. That is to say, the models often come up with outcomes that are quite different from what was anticipated. We are doing what is intuitively and humanely “the right thing”. We are advocating for those who are underserved in our society. However, the outcomes of our caring actions end up being of little value – and the opposition has grown stronger. Furthermore, those who are under-served may grow dependent on the government. They might even resent the “patronizing” and often repressive control being exerted by government on their life.

A quite different strategy might have to be deployed. We act in a counter-intuitive fashion. We help to pass laws that open up free enterprise and motivate individual initiatives. However, we soon find that the “big guys” have used these entrepreneurial openings to squish any new ventures. We have failed once again – and must look for yet another counter-intuitive strategy. As the system dynamics theorists declare: “don't just do something, stand there [and reflect more deeply on what is actually occurring].”

Complexity and Chaos

There is a second set of systemic insights that are equally disruptive of the usual way we think about and reason through challenging issues – such as we find in a VUCA-Plus World. These insights come from the emerging interdisciplinary field of study that is often labeled *Complexity Theory*. This field focuses on systems that are not just complicated (many parts), but also complex (many interdependent parts) (Miller and Page, 2007).

Many 21st Century systems exist in this state of complexity – and these systems usually operate in a turbulent environment (such as I described earlier in this book). These complex systems often

are quite tippy--readily shifting from rapid change or cyclical change to a state of chaos. And it is in the midst of this chaos that we are likely to find swirling polarization and a counter protective push toward stability and authoritarianism (the fourth white water condition of stagnation).

Butterfly Effect

While there are many other troubling and unanticipated insights emerging from this field, the one that has received the most public attention is the *Butterfly Effect*. First offered by Edward Lorenz in his meteorological research, this effect concerns our inability to offer valid predictions regarding the outcome of complex events given that a single (often quite small) event somewhere in the world (the fluttering of a butterfly's wings) can have a profound, widespread impact.

It is because complex systems contain many interdependent parts that one small part can have a major impact on the entire system. It takes only one abuse of individual rights to trigger a demand for major legislative reform. It takes only one fumbling of a new social initiative to provoke a wide-spread demand for defunding of all "welfare" programs (that are inherently "ineffective"). Complex systems are indeed trigger happy. They readily tip into the multiple conditions of white water and end up in the unpredictable conditions of chaos or in the highly predictable and deadly conditions of stagnation and authoritarianism.

Slow Thinking

Jay Forrester, the original architect of System Dynamics, wishes to reiterate a dictum I have already pronounced. Forrester often declared: "don't just do something—stand there!" One of Forrester's esteemed students and colleagues, Donella Meadows (2008, p. 171) has put it this way: "[There is a broad-based and compelling tendency] to define a problem not by the systems' actual behavior, but by the lack of our favorite solution." Meadows (2008, pp.171-172) goes on to describe a typical decision-making process:

Listen to any discussion in your family or a committee meeting at work or among the pundits in the media, and watch people leap to solutions, usually solutions in "predict, control or impose your will", without having paid attention to what the system is doing and why it's doing it.

Forrester, Meadows, and their colleagues strongly suggest that we need to reflect on our assumptions before taking any action. This is quite a challenge when VUCA-Plus confronts us everywhere and when levels of collective angst are high. However, we do have the modeling tools to engage in this systemic consideration. But what do we do with the often counter-intuitive outcomes of these considerations? I would suggest that we must slow down our thinking when doing this work.

We need not travel far (just to a nearby building at M.I.T.) to find a complementary perspective on human decision making. I have already cited the work of MIT's Daniel Kahneman. He suggests that we are especially inclined to think fast in an environment that is filled with anxiety.

We must instead engage in counter-intuitive processes. We must slow down our thinking so that we might better understand the problem and identify often untested underlying assumptions embedded in the problem. Like Forrester and Meadows, Kahneman urges us to stop for a few minutes (or a few days) before deciding and acting – especially when we are anxious or when there seems to be social pressure to quickly arrive at a decision.

As a sidebar, I can point to a story issued soon after the death of Steve Dalkowski, a baseball legend. Some say that he threw the fastest pitch ever recorded in modern baseball history. Supposedly, he was able to fire a baseball at close to 110 miles per hour (though he was playing before the device recording the official speed was invented). While Dalkowski could pitch hard and fast, he was not very accurate. His errant pitches over the backstop were noteworthy, as was his strike-to-walk ratio (more of the latter than the former). Dalkowski was portrayed (as “Nuke” LaLoosh) by Tim Robbins in the movie, *Bull Durham*, with his fastball flying everywhere.

Tragically, Dalkowski was defeated by not only his lack of control as a pitcher, but also his lack of control as an alcoholic. Nevertheless, for a short period of time, he was a good pitcher and almost made it to the major leagues. What was the secret? He slowed down his pitch and found more accuracy in throwing the ball over the plate. As they say in baseball, he gained some “command” of his pitches – he learned how to “pitch” rather than just “throw”. I would suggest that the same principle applies to 21st Century problem-solving. I offer the *Dalkowski Theorem*. We must slow down our thinking if we want to be accurate – otherwise we will never make it to the major leagues! We need to thoughtfully pitch rather than simply throw hard (or solve fast) – otherwise we will remain a “bush leaguer”.

Heuristics

Now back to Cambridge. We join Kahneman and his behavioral economics colleagues. They write about the frequent use of *Heuristics* (simple, readily applied rules) that enable fast thinking to occur. Many heuristics serve us well in addressing daily-problems and making decisions about mundane and often reoccurring matters. However, they often get us in trouble when we face unique and multi-tiered problems – such as formulating policies regarding rights and responsibilities.

The *Dalkowski Theorem* is ignored. We are inclined to “throw hard” and engage a simple values-based heuristic about saving the life of a single person: “Your failure to pass this new health care legislation is endangering the life of my mother!” The opposition’s concerns about the proposed health care legislation are immediately rejected, even their quite benign concerns. “Your opposition is nothing more than a Nazified decision to ‘let them bleed!’” We have torpedoed the discussion, demonized the opposition and sped up the response being formulated by our “opponent.” All of us are throwing hard and fast rather than engaging in slow, thoughtfully pitching.

If we sit back and slow down our thinking, then our opposition is likely to declare that we are indifferent and “inhuman” because we don’t act quickly and wish to consider both sides of the issue. We have the much easier option to fast think and throw fast. We can quickly declare that

those proposing the new legislation are nothing more than “bleeding heart” liberals and irrational visionaries. Our oppositional colleagues have become our enemies. The Nuclear Effect is fully in effect and complementary schizmogeneration is flourishing.

Regression and the Search for a Silver Bullet

What then is the solution? How does thoughtful, systemic thinking and decision-making operate to help us effectively consider health care legislation—and more generally balance rights and responsibilities. Let’s cut immediately to the chase: there probably is not a silver bullet available to resolve the rights/responsibility dilemma. We might need to slow down our thinking and challenge our humane, short-term perspective on preserving personal rights or ensuring collective responsibility with a broad-based application of slow and systemic thinking and dialogue. However, good intentions might not be enough. We need to do a better job of thinking in a systemic manner, as Forrester and Meadows propose, but this might also not be enough.

Managing the Anxiety

For a moment we need to stand still rather than do something—especially as we face VUCA-Plus realities. Our slow thinking might be leading us to the difficult and anxiety-provoking conclusion that our policy must change. This recognition, in turn, creates more anxiety and pushes us back to fast thinking. Our rational system of thought and problem-solving will easily collapse. The baseball once again might fly over the backstop. Hell breaks loose everywhere in the world. Like Dalkowski, we (collectively) seek out something that will numb the pain of failure.

The movement to slow, systemic thinking will not be easy. In many ways, the outcomes of our attempts over the past three decades (in Eastern Europe and elsewhere in the world) could have been predicted. As I have noted, there have often been strong pulls back to authoritarian perspectives and practices. We know that VUCA Plus issues are usually not handled in a thoughtful manner. These issues tend to be heavily laden with anxiety—and this anxiety impacts on the way we think about and feel about the source of the anxiety. Anxiety must be metabolized (transformed) in a way that contains and reduces the anxiety (Bergquist, 2020).

Typically, the metabolism only takes place by regressing to a lower level of thought and feeling. We turn “primitive” in our assessment of the lurking force or entity that wishes to do us harm. We look for evil forces and enemies that usually come with mythic force—making these forces “numinous” in scope and intensity. For instance, Christakis (2020, p. 21) notes that bats are often the ultimate culprits in the transmission of viruses (for some reason pathogens move easily between bats and humans). They are perfect conveyors of evil, having often been representative in many societies of profound villainy and horror (Dracula?). We envision bat-like, shadowy viruses lurking in our closets, ready to bite us in the neck and turn us into flesh-eating zombies or (worse yet) into political opponents. Bats become the “Other” that soon expands in size and magnitude. Mythic imagery complements and intensifies the actual threat posed by bats.

Managing the Thinking

In seeking to metabolize our anxiety, we not only identify (and/or create) evil forces and figures, but also seek to find safe refuge from this evil. We look to a leader who can fight against or flee from this evil. This leader will offer simple ways in which we can reduce our anxiety (Bergquist, 2020a). These ways often include identification of the enemy of evil who “caused” the underlying problem and/or blocked its solution. The leader also provides a simple portrayal of the problem itself. “It is a bat-problem!”

The “slow thinking” that is required to sort through the VUCA-Plus labyrinth has not been widely engaged in the United States during the 21st Century. We keep finding “bats.” The United States is not alone. An encouraging report card is hard to find in other countries. Anxiety-provoked regression in thought, feelings and actions pervaded the world. Authoritarianism emerged and reigned supreme in many societies. Leaders were being obeyed who had no business being in this role (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). Stupidity filled the cracks and crevices of constructive deliberations regarding rights and responsibilities—as well as most other matters regarding true freedom.

Truth and reality can be quite elusive. It is easy to regress individually and collectively when anxiety is saturating our thoughts and actions. As I have already mentioned, we have tools that can aid our slow, systemic analysis of pandemic problems—despite the challenges we face in confronting these problems. I am about to introduce a process that can help us do a better job in making balanced decisions based on this analysis.

Polarity Management

We must leave the universities of Cambridge Massachusetts so that I might further refine a perspective I have offered at several points in this book. I turn to a process that might be one of the best ways in which to find true freedom through the balancing of rights and responsibilities. Specifically, I turn once again to the work of Barry Johnson (1996), the “dean” of *polarity management*. Johnson’s perspectives and his related tools can guide our actions in the future. Johnson suggests that polarity management can be used in handling everyday dilemmas. It can also be of great value in addressing major societal challenges associated with the condition of contradiction in a VUCA-Plus environment. Polarity management is of great value in settings where two or more legitimate but opposing forces reside. Specifically, polarity management can help us gain a purchase on the interplay between rights and responsibilities. Along with systemic perspectives and slow thinking, polarity management provides important guidance in the search for true freedom.

Both/And Rather Than Either/Or

Many of those involved already in the deliberation regarding individual rights and collective responsibilities have framed the policy as an either/or option. I will frame our analysis around these two polar-opposite stances as a both/and. I begin by identifying some of the benefits and

disadvantages associated with each perspective. The benefits in both cases yield both short-term (tactical) and long-term (strategic) outcomes.

**BENEFITS:
FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS**

Motivation to Achieve
Freedom to Innovate
Absence of Arbitrary External Control
Ability to Protect Personal/Family
Interests/Property

**BENEFITS:
FOCUS ON COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY**

Motivation to Cooperate
Support for Innovation
Absence of Arbitrary Internal Control
Ability to Collectively Protect Both
Personal and Community
Interests/Property

The disadvantages I offer relate to what we don't know and what might be an unexpected and devastating outcome.

**DISADVANTAGES:
INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS**

Abuse of Unregulated Personal Power
Infringement on the Rights of Those
Without Power
Uncontrolled Accumulation of Individual
Wealth
Lost Sense of Caring for Other People and
the Greater Good

**DISADVANTAGES:
COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY**

Abuse of Overwhelming Collective Power
Infringement on the Creativity and
Initiative of Individual Citizens
Uncontrolled Growth of Government
Lost Sense of Personal Aspiration and
Opportunity

Following are the typical actions steps taken to maintain and defend each of these societal positions:

**ACTION STEPS:
INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS**

Emphasize personal achievement
(advertising/public figures)

Reward personal innovation and creativity

Enact public policies and regulations that protect individual rights

Enact laws that Protect Personal/Family Interests/Property

**ACTION STEPS:
COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY**

Emphasize Cooperate attitude
(advertising/public figures)

Support and fund collective innovation

Enact public policies and regulations that protect against inhumane and destructive acts

Enact laws that Protect Community Interests/Property

Following are the early warning signs that typically indicate that this societal policy is not working well or creating unintended problems (I will have more to say about this analysis a bit later):

**WARNING SIGNS ABOUT
INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS**

Abuse of Unregulated Personal Power

Infringement on the Rights of Those Without Power

Uncontrolled Accumulation of Individual Wealth

Lost Sense of Caring for Other People and the Greater Good

**WARNING SIGNS ABOUT
COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY**

Abuse of Overwhelming Collective Power

Infringement on the Creativity and Initiative of Individual Citizens

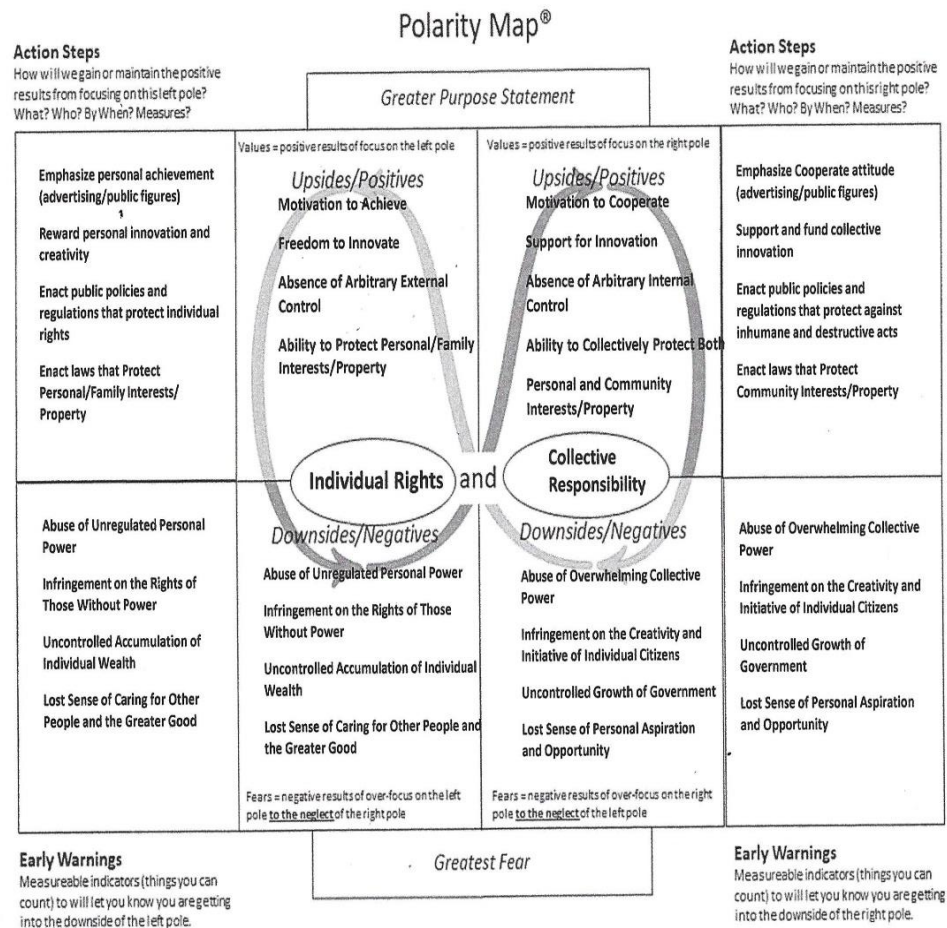
Uncontrolled Growth of Government

Lost Sense of Personal Aspiration and Opportunity

These initial summary statements regarding the pull between two societal perspectives can be framed as a polarity. A typical process of oscillation tends to occur. We linger briefly on the advantages inherent in one of the options. Then we begin to recognize some of the disadvantages associated with this option. We are pulled to the second option. Yet, as we linger on this second option, we discover that this perspective also has its flaws and disadvantages. We are led back to the first policy – and must again face the disadvantages inherent in this first option.

The Polarity Graph

Here is what the polarity-based dynamics of our policy deliberations might look like if mapped on a polarity graph:



The swing has begun from left top to left bottom to right top, to right bottom, back again to left top. We are whipped back and forth. As concern (and even anxiety) increases regarding each

perspective, the vacillation also increases in both intensity and rapidity. This is what the dynamics of polarization is all about. There is inadequate time and attention given to each option. We swing back and forth. This is the dance of polarity dysfunction.

A Polarity Analysis

With this preliminary framing and charting completed, we turn to what happens when we try to *maximize* the benefits of either side at the expense of the other side. In the case of supporting individual rights, the maximization of support for personal initiatives and ambitions would tend to delay but ultimately accelerate the acquisition of personal wealth and power, ultimately leading to the formation of an unregulated and often abusive oligarchy (composed of the super-wealthy). This is what Fromm described as negative freedom.

Furthermore, we now know that an emphasis on personal rights does not inevitably produce increased desire to achieve or innovate. The “have-nots” are much more likely to fall into a state of despair and lethargy – alienated from the society in which they now live. We will soon witness societal disruption and even revolution as the power and wealth chasm grows wider. At some point, we might find some social reform (or at least increases in charitable contributions) but would probably find that it is too little and too late.

Conversely, if we completely override a concern about personal rights and fully adopt the collective responsibility perspective, then we are likely to witness repressive and intrusive regulations that applied indiscriminately to the lives of those living in this highly controlled society. It might be even more destructive if those living in a society know little about individual rights (as seems to have been the case with the Estonians I interviewed). There is a yearning for something different – for some corrective. Yet, this alternative option is not well known, nor has it often been engaged in a society where a repressive form of collective responsibility has been in force for many years.

At the very least, there would be deeply felt (though often ill-defined) concern within a short period of time regarding the ultimate “heartlessness” of the collective responsibility perspective. Those advocating collective responsibility might have the best of intentions, but the outcomes can be counter-intuitive with citizens feeling just as alienated from the sources of power as they would be in a world dominated by personal rights. We would inevitably find that projections about the potential number of people who would be served by new public policies and priorities become just this: numbers without a focus on the individual, distinctive needs of each citizen. Local neighborhoods (often ethnically or culturally based) are torn down in favor of high-rise towers. Dehumanizing “stone cities” replace “distinctive neighborhood enclaves”.

Stone Cities and Dithering

I witnessed this in Estonia when working there during the 1990s. As I have already noted, I agreed with Robert Sommer that an alienating Soviet architectural plan had produced these cities of stone. Families had been assigned to small apartments located in tall, anonymous concrete structures. They were often being moved from another country to work in the factories of Estonia

under the Soviet Master Plan. It is indeed ironic that so-called “Russian Vodka” was actually produced in Estonia for many years under the master plan. Life in the Tallinn Estonia high-rises was truly disheartening to witness.

The men and women I interviewed spoke of the “stone hearts” that were bred in these “stone cities.” As I have already mentioned, similarities between Tallinn high rise communities and the urban “development” projects of metropolitan New York were readily apparent. When I drive by high rises in the Bronx, I wonder if similar “stone hearts” are to be found among the residents of these buildings. Was Robert Moses’ dream of “clearing slums” to produce a better New York just another example of collective responsibility and centralized hubris run amuck? Do the stone cities really offer better life than the old, broken-down tenements and ethnic neighborhoods of early and mid-20th Century New York? Isn’t there a third option?

Social planners in the Soviet Union and urban reformers in the United States might soon feel – or at least should feel – disappointed. They might even feel deeply ashamed or wounded, given the impersonal, bureaucratic and even “inhumane” decisions being made. If we are religious and view ourselves as culpable, then we might ask our deity for forgiveness. Other members of our society would be inclined to launch a vitriolic attack against those of us who enacted these grotesque policies. As a result, our societies are likely to return to a focus on distinctive personal rights – though only after many stone cities have been built and local neighborhoods destroyed in favor of “urban renewal.” We swing back and forth, leaving behind the debris of disrupted lives and disillusioned citizenry. True freedom is nowhere to be found. There is nothing but dithering and frozen polarization.

Optimization

Barry Johnson warns that we must not try to maximize the appeal of any one side; rather we must carefully *optimize* the degree to which we are inclined toward one side or the other as well as the duration of our stay with consideration and enactment of this side. How serious are we about focusing on this one side and how long are we going to sustain this focus? Under the best of conditions, we are living with what Erich Fromm describes as a dynamic and highly productive tension. Can we live with and in this tension?

Optimizing also means that we must find a reasonable and perhaps flexible set-point as we act in favor of one side or another. Finding these acceptable optimum responses and repeatedly redefining them is the key to polarity management. This strategy is aligned with the suggestion made by many thoughtful social commentators that a balance must be struck – and integration must be found regarding personal rights and collective responsibilities (e.g. Lodge, 1995).

The fundamental recommendation to be made in managing this particular polarity is to remain in the positive domain of each perspective long enough to identify all (or at least most) of the key benefits and potential actions to be taken that maximize these benefits. Thinking must slow down. A systemic analysis must be engaged. Time should be devoted to and attention directed in a slow and systemic manner toward identification of potential ways in which the two perspectives can be brought together on behalf of an integrated response to the challenges of 21st Century life.

High Stakes

This polarity management recommendation is not easily enacted – especially when the stakes are high (as they certainly are regarding many contemporary societal issues). As Johnson and others engaged in polarity management have noted, effective management of polarities requires a constant process of vigilance, negotiation, and adjustments. The second option regarding collective responsibility seems to be aligned with this recommendation of dynamic vigilance. Caring public policy can easily become nothing more than numbers and the imposition of clumsy regulations.

Similarly, those espousing personal rights must be open to adjustments. Citizens cannot operate in splendid isolation, looking at and interacting with the world through their own personal silos. They must let in the world – with all its needs (and demands). In agreement with the polarity management experts, those advocating either perspective must continuously seek and refine a dynamic, flexible balance between consideration and compassion in seeking to eventually find a balance between rights and responsibilities. Each side’s beneficial contributions can be enjoyed without engendering serious negative consequences. We must accompany this balance with some immediate, tangible correctives.

Alarm Systems

Johnson has one more important point to make regarding the management of polarities. He identifies the value inherent in setting up an alarm system as a safeguard against overshooting either side of the polarity. It would be prudent to build in an alarm system that warns us when we may be trying to maximize one side and are on the verge of triggering negative reactions.

The Alarms of Personal Rights

As I already noted, the alarm signal for those advocating personal rights might be a growing abuse of unregulated personal power. And infringement on the rights of those without power. How do we know if abuse and/or infringement are occurring? What is the metric for measuring abuse? This is not easily measured. We have the newspaper (and now Internet accounts) of this abuse, but these reports are inevitably biased and truth “isn’t what it used to be” (if it ever was).

An imprecise measure is the number of lawsuits being enacted against those with wealth and power – and the percentage of these lawsuits that are settled in favor of the plaintiff (when compared to percentages when the defendant is not wealthy or powerful). There is also the more indirect measure centering on the actual taxes being paid by those at various economic levels. We might declare it abuse and infringement if the wealthy are paying much less in taxes than the middle class. If nothing else, an alarm should be ready-and-waiting if there are many accounts being offered from many different constituencies regarding abuse.

A somewhat easier and more creditable metric can be used when considering accumulation of individual wealth. One need only look at the income gap. If it is widening, then there is cause for

concern. The term “accumulation” is particularly important here. It is not just a matter of income gap. It is also a matter of a very small number of people holding great wealth. The super-wealthy possess power as well as wealth. They signal the flaw in any consideration of personal rights as being a recipe for the “democratization” of wealth. When wealth is centralized, then power is centralized, and true freedom is absent.

It is the fourth signal that I have already identified which is most elusive and perhaps ultimately of greatest importance. The signal might be apparent at a deep, psychological level. There would be a growing sense of helplessness and hopelessness – resulting from (and contributing to) an isolationist stance regarding societal welfare. Do many members of a society lose any sense of caring for other members of their society? Do they only worry about their immediate family or perhaps their neighbors (their “enclave”)? Is a “stone heart” just as likely to be found in a siloed personal rights-dominated society as in the high-rise communities that Soviet planners and Robert Moses created in Tallinn and the Bronx?

Is it inevitable that tribalism is afoot in the land when the rights perspective prevails? Do people lose their capacity (or motivation) to care about the welfare of those less fortunate than themselves if individual rights are emphasized? Is “trickle-down” economics nothing more than an occasional drip from the accumulated largess of those sitting in the corporate towers? How do we know that a decline regarding concern for other people is occurring? At some level we all “know” when inequity and indifference is abundant. Do we really need a financial signal or tangible signs of social discontent (such as demonstrations or increases in violent crime) to know that an exclusive focus on personal rights isn’t working? Does this shift in attitude need to be measurable?

The Alarms of Collective Responsibility

The alarm system for safeguards against collective responsibility run amuck is to be found, as I have already mentioned, in the abuse of overwhelming collective power (using assigned to the state) and infringement on the creativity and initiative of individual citizens. As in the case of the signals for those advocating personal rights, the responsibility signals are not easily measured and are often misunderstood or ignored. We can look at such inadequate measures as the number of new laws and regulations that have been passed during the past year restricting citizen behavior, as well as the number of patents being offered for new inventions. If the rules are growing and the patents are declining, then the alarm might be triggered.

As in the case of financial signals for those advocating personal rights, there is a tangible metric that can serve as an alarm for those advocating collective responsibility. This alarm is the size of government (at all levels). Financially, we can calculate the percentage of the national wealth (GNP) that is to be found in governmental agencies. The number of government employees can also be measured, as can the ratio of funds housed in governmental agencies and those housed in non-government organizations (NGOs) that provide human services.

At what level can we consider a society to be government-dominated. It is something more than the government owning and operating businesses (such as health care and banking) that could

be owned privately. It is about the underlying assumption that government can do this work better and more equitably than private enterprise. When is this assumption regarding government effectiveness no longer questioned? On the other side, when is private enterprise as being more effective no longer questioned? Alarm bells should go off on both sides if the critics have been silenced and the oppositional voices are no longer heard.

As a side note, I wish to briefly convey a personal story related to the oppositional voice. For several years, I served on the Board of Trustees of a private college in North Carolina (St. Andrews). I was flying to a graduation ceremony at the college on a small plane where my co-passenger was George McGovern, who had recently lost the national USA presidential election by a large margin to Ronald Reagan. This esteemed, but recently discarded, leader asked me why he was invited by Republican board members to be the graduation speaker at this conservative college. I proudly noted that the board had invited him to be the speaker because the “minority” voice (in this case liberalism) is most needed precisely at a point when a new “majority” (in this case conservatism) has won the day. I consider this to be a moment of true freedom. I was honored (as a liberal) to be a member of this thoughtful Board of Trustees.

Back to the alarms. There might be disillusionment among those hoping for an improved life under the auspices of a strong government based on collective responsibility. Major social unrest might arise among those populations receiving the least care and witnessing what seems to be cavalier societal disregard for their actual (distinctive) welfare. Control of policies might become more centralized and embedded in vested social and economic interests among those granted political power. Quite tragically, it has often been the most liberal governments that have generated the highest levels of corruption and scandal. Greed is not exclusive to those with great wealth. “Robber barons” come in many different shapes and sizes.

This disillusionment need not be confined to the failure of government officials to deliver on their political promises. As I have already mentioned, we might find a lost sense of personal aspirations and opportunities. While declarations that “welfare moms” are pumping out babies to keep government money coming in are largely mythic, there is an unintended consequence of governmental support that hints at growing dependency and accompanying loss of vision. It is a systemic, “chicken-and-egg” dynamic – a “poverty cycle.” No jobs are available nor are adequate education and training available to those living in poverty. As a result, these men, women and families must rely on government support.

With this support comes confirmation by the government that these victims of poverty are simply incapable of making a living (the assumption of personal inadequacy) or will never find a fulfilling (or even unfulfilling) job (the assumption of a life without opportunity). No need for education or training if people in a state of poverty are inadequate or afforded no opportunity. The cycle of poverty is sustained and intensified (think system dynamics). As those identifying and describing the cycle of poverty have noted, the psychology of poverty (hopelessness and helplessness) might be even more difficult to overcome than the cycle. True freedom is nowhere

to be found in either the psychology or cycle of poverty. Alarm signals should be sounded for those advocating a pure form of collective responsibility.

Conclusions

Hopefully, with the safeguards in place and the alarm signals clearly articulated, we can address the negative consequences of each option in a constructive manner. As a result, we might even be in a place to formulate an integrative policy regarding the handling of complex societal problems. We and our Estonian colleagues might be able to move toward true freedom in our respective societies. Optimally, this formulation could be thought through in a slow manner with broader, often counter-intuitive and systemic dynamics taken into consideration. Johnson's polarity management would be joined with the wisdom of Forrester's systems thinking and Kahneman's slow thinking.

It is at this moment that we can pause and offer our gratitude to makers of analytic tools such as I have engaged in this book. Rights and responsibilities must be balanced and integrated if true freedom is to be achieved. We soon must move beyond this analysis. We must bid farewell to our sole reliance on slow, systemic thinking and turn to planning and design.

We must consider the nature of a society that must be created if rights and responsibilities are balanced and if we are to realize true freedom. We must invite citizens from Estonia and other countries in the world to join us in this adventurous enterprise. With this transition in mind, I move in the next chapter to the quality of shared concerns and priorities (a "harmony" of interests) in a society of true freedom. The third chapter in this section of the book concerns ways in which this harmony of interest can be projected forward through formulation of and engagement with a compelling vision of a society's future.

Chapter Seven

Harmony: Finding a Convergence of Interests

How does a society achieve true freedom? Obviously, many perspectives have been offered over several centuries. These perspectives are offered by political theorists, economic theorists, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, psychoanalysts and a whole host of philosophers. I first offered a fundamentally political perspective in Chapter Six. I wrote about the balance between individual rights and collective responsibility--offering several tools (especially polarity management) that can help a society achieve this balance.

In this chapter, I provide a more economic and commerce-based perspective, suggesting that true freedom might reside in something called the “harmony of interests.” As in the case of the first perspective, I offer not only a description of harmony of interest, but also some ideas regarding how this perspective might be successfully engaged in 21st Century America.

Adam Smith and the Harmony of Laissez-Faire

This harmony of interest perspective is often attributed to the initial observations made by Adam Smith (2003), the father of modern economics. In addressing the emerging challenges of an emerging commercial economy, Smith recognized that new principles and perspectives (“mercantalism”) must be in place to regulate emerging 17th Century enterprises that were operating in different ways from those of previous European societies. It was not just a matter of new goods and services being produced in the European communities being analyzed by Smith. It was an even more fundamental shift in the way goods and services were being produced and exchanged.

Market and Social Exchange

To bring a contemporary perspective to the observations made and conclusions reached by Smith, I will be turning to a framework offered recently by behavioral economists (e.g. Kahneman, 2011). We can identify the shift observed by Smith to be one in which a *social exchange* mentality has shifted to a *market exchange* mentality among Smith’s emerging commercial enterprises. Goods and services were purchased and being paid for rather than being offered informally in exchange for other goods and services.

If someone living in one of Smith’s European communities wanted to purchase a loaf of bread or new chair, then they would have to provide the purveyor of the bread or chair with money that had been earned (as wages) by the purchaser of the bread or chair. While the loaf of bread usually was produced (baked) locally, the chair might have been built (manufactured) quite a few miles away at a factory that produced many chairs of the same design (mass production).

By contrast, the pre-17th Century enterprises operated in a premodern manner. *Social exchange* operated in premodern societies. Everyone in the premodern community knew one another. They

provided goods and services through a process that was embedded deeply in a shared set of values and a multi-generational foundation of trust. Commercial enterprises were based on local, informal exchange of goods and services on demand--often engaged through bartering processes (Bergquist, 1993).

Specialization and Interdependence

For Smith, it was not only a matter of shift from social to market exchange. There was also a shift to more specialized functions. The purveyor of bread often produced only baked goods. The manufacturer of chairs often specialized in chairs (and other pieces of furniture). By contrast, the premodern farmer grew many different crops and tended many different animals that soon became the basic ingredients for diverse meals prepared in the farmer's kitchen. A meat stew was being prepared while the bread was baked in the oven. A pot of baked beans was warming on the wood-burning stove to be served a bit later with the newly baked bread. The chairs were either home-built or acquired from a local all-purpose craftsman in exchange for grain or perhaps some of the baked bread.

A premodern economy required diversity in the operation of a viable farm—especially important given the unpredictable character of Mother nature. A modern economy was based, instead, on specialization and economy of scale. Diversity and scale were especially important given the increasingly complex world of modern commerce and market exchange. In a premodern society, one learned how to do many things well as a viable means of survival. In a modern society, one learned to do one thing very well and to repeatedly engage this one enterprise as a viable means of economic security (and ultimately survival).

With the increased specialization of production and services in modern society, Smith proposed that members of a society were becoming increasingly dependent on one another. They would “naturally” trade with one another to get what they need and want. Both party to an exchange of products or services must “gain” from this exchange. There must, in other words, be a “harmony of interests” among the parties involved in all market exchanges.

This harmony, in turn, requires that all parties operate in a rational manner dictated by their balanced self-interests. This “laissez-faire” perspective often leads to a call for minimal government interferences and to the assumption that true freedom requires maximum freedom for each member of society. I would suggest that this perspective, taken in isolation, leads to a societal imbalance with individual rights taking precedence (with destructive outcomes) over collective responsibility.

The Anvil of Anonymous

Then along came a keen social and economic observer of the mid-19th Century who is only known as “Anonymous” (1849). This anonymous author offered a detailed description and set of numbers and statistics regarding commercial operations (especially agricultural and manufacturing) in the United States. With this description and these numbers serving as a foundation, Anonymous wrote of an anvil provided by the government in mid-century America.

This anvil was to protect the harmony of interest between those wielding the plow (agriculture) and those running the looms (manufacturing) in mid-19th century America.

Specialization and Consumption

Beginning with the observation of modern-day specialization offered by Adam Smith, Anonymous noted that there is diversification of functions in modern American society, leading to interdependency. Farmers can produce their own cloth and clothing, but it is far more efficient in terms of time taken (labor) and cost of materials, for the cloth to be produced by those working in a mill. Similarly, a mill worker can grow their own crops, but it requires much less labor (and the quality is likely to be higher) if the knowledgeable farmer grows the crops. (Anonymous, 1849, vol II, p. 9)

Anonymous identifies this as “a natural tendency to have the producer of iron and cloth, and hats, to take his place by the side of the producer of food and wool.” (Anonymous, 1849, vol II, p. 11) Compelled by the move to specialization: “The first and great desire of man is that of association with his fellowman, and it is so, because he feels that improvement of his condition, physical, moral, mental and political is its uniform accompaniment.” (Anonymous, 1849, vol II, p. 10)

At an even deeper level, we learn from Anonymous that the link between profit and consumption is critical: “Every producer is a consumer to the whole extent of his production, and by enabling these poor people to produce more, the planter [farmer] makes a market on the land for the products of the land, to the extent of the whole excess of production. The more there is produced, the more *must* be consumed.” (Anonymous, 1849, vol II, pp. 2-3). Thus, we find the foundation of a move away from the premodern emphasis on consuming that which is produced. There is now a new “modern” emphasis on increasing consumption (via marketing) so that more can be produced (Bergquist, 1993).

Protection and Integration

The compelling desire to associate with other people resides at the heart of a harmony of interests. It operates as if it were natural law (according to Smith and Anonymous). However, this desire can be quite fragile. Natural law is often elusive as it operates in human society. Its dictates often are ignored in the face of demands for profit in modern commerce. Protection is needed:

Throughout the country [USA], there is a want of combination. Men are perpetually flung from each other, scattering themselves over large surfaces, and wasting the labour that if saved would make them rich. This inability to combine their exertions is the result of artificial causes; and the adoption of the protective system has been produced by an instinctive effort to obtain by its aid that which, had these causes not existed, would have come naturally and without effort. (Anonymous, 1849, vol II, p. 10)

Protection requires a valuing of all forms of labor (Anonymous, 1849, vol II, p. 24). As Anonymous notes: “To induce man to labour, he must feel confident of obtaining an equivalent; and the larger that equivalent, the stronger will be the inducement to exertion.” (Anonymous,

1849, vol II, p. 25). It is not surprising that Anonymous identifies a lack of full response given the history of slavery in the United States, and the wage slavery to be found in various enterprises in 19th Century America (such as the New England mills) (Sun and Bergquist, 2021). There is a profound lack of equivalence for all forms of labor (especially manual labor) at this point in American history.

The lack of an equivalent inducement is even more challenging as those doing labor (individually and collectively) begin to ask for something more than just wages. Concerns about job security and workplace safety begin to emerge later in the 19th Century. These were expanded requirements of “equivalent” reward for the labor being offered. Harmony of interest is not easily attained or maintained without this expanded equivalence. Protection is required.

With this larger requirement as a sign of the valuing and protection of labor comes the need for what is often identified as “integrative” services in an organization (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967). Someone must ensure that labor is being protected. This is quite a challenge. Someone or some unit of the organization must ensure that the interests of those profiting from ownership and management of the organization or community are integrated with and balanced off by the interests of those doing labor in the organization. What about job security, fair wages and a nontoxic work environment? Who ensures that these interests are honored?

The Expanding Role of HRD

In contemporary organizations protective integration is engaged typically through a human resources development (HRD) department. This unit of the organization typically manages and monitors equitable hiring and promotion practices. HRD folks are often labeled (sometimes resentfully) as “policy police.” The role of HRD has expanded over the years. This department provides or contracts for employee training and development. HRD offers new employee orientation and retirement planning HRD oversees the so-called “employee life cycle”.

The scope of practice for HRD grows even wider. Those in this department often assume responsibility for administration of compensation plans (including profit-sharing) and health care plans (Including employee assistance programs). The protective, integrative services of HRD might also include policy enforcement (regarding such matters as equitable and nondiscriminatory treatment of employees and prevention of harassment). I have consulted with many organizations where members of the human resources department are primarily playing this contentious role of “policy police” (often to the detriment of the more positive roles they are asked to play).

Other integrative functions are served by the mid-level managers of the organization, as well as by those providing such diverse services as inhouse employee communications, coordination of volunteer community services, and support for non-work-related activities (such as company celebrations, recreational activities, and special interest groups). I recently worked with a high tech organization that surveyed its employees only to find that they were most interested in receiving instruction in wood working! Training and development might take on this broader role of supporting “hobbies” The bar continues to rise for HRD and the expectations expand in

size and scope. We increasingly find that workplace “wellness” and the creation of high morale and high productivity work environments are being promoting – with organizations vying to be identified as “the best place to work.” HRD departments often are tasked with finding ways to achieve this overriding (and overwhelming) goal.

Concerns about quality of interpersonal relations in the workplace and meaningfulness of work are being added to the traditional list of employee interests (such as the forementioned concerns about job security, fair wages, and nonhazardous work environments) (Bergquist, 1993). With governments in many societies requiring that traditional employee interests are being honored in organizations, we are finding that the often undesired role of HR as policy police is becoming that much more prevalent. HRD personnel no longer formulate equitable policies. They now are in the business primarily of ensuring that government-dictated policies are being enforced.

Expanding Integrative Function

We find that it is not just HRD that is expanding in size and scope. There is generally a tendency for the percentage of integrative services to expand significantly as compared to the percent of direct services being provided. There are many integrative functions that expand in an organization (as well as a community) as it grows in size and age (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967; Bergquist, 1993). Direct services would include production of goods and delivery of services to customers or citizens, while integrative (indirect) services include all forms of management as well as operations needed for coordination of direct services and those I have already identified as required for the protection of employee interests.

We find that large organizations (such as IBM) and large metropolitan regions (such as New York City) operate with a particularly high percentage of integrative services. This often means that large organizations must dominate and control the sector in which they are operating (usually through monopolies). Large cities become dependent on (and must ultimately control) outside resources. Even in the mid-19th Century, Anonymous observed that cities such as New York and Philadelphia “are built up out of the spoils of the farmer and planter.” (Anonymous, 1849, vol II, p. 103).

In sum, the challenge of providing protection as a means to establish and maintain harmony of interest requires the attention and energy of a large percent of those working in management systems and, more recently, HRD systems. Providing “integration”, these members of an organization serve as a buffer between those owning the business or serving in a leadership position and those doing labor in this organization. While managers are hired to do the bidding of ownership, they also (under the best of circumstances) are expected to support and protect from abuse those whom they supervise.

Thus, in modern organizations, the harmony of interest is often assigned (with considerable contradiction and tension) to the mid-managers and others providing integrative services (such as HRD practitioners). This integration is strained as the organization grows larger and older. Those at the top of the large and aging organization have less direct contact with those at lower levels of the organization. As a result, those in the C Suite are less likely to fully appreciate the

interests held by those providing the direct services of their organization. Protective services must be installed and expanded--especially in these large and old organizations--and in large and aging communities.

Invitation to the Table

There is an even greater challenge, as the organization not only grows larger and older but also as the interests of those employed in the organization become more diverse. Greater integration and protection are needed because of the inevitable friction that exists among the various members of the organization who are sitting at the table where diverse interests are being addressed. As far back as the mid-19th Century, Anonymous observed that: "The discords so frequently existing between the employer and the employed, the capitalist and the labourer, the banker and his customers, may all, as I think, be traced to one and the same cause, and if that can be removed, harmony and good feeling may be restored and maintained." (Anonymous, 1849, vol II, p. 1).

This cause has to do primarily with the profit motive and the equitable distribution of revenues. Anonymous is optimistic that the profit-related discords can be resolved, believing that the inherent natural proclivity toward interdependence provides the glue leading to a harmony of interests. Through recognition of interdependency, harmony of interests can be found among those sitting at the table. This optimism might not always be warranted, given the enduring push toward profitability, along with the expanded list of interests that I have already identified.

Furthermore, there are several fundamental questions that has not yet been addressed. Is everyone invited to the table? Especially, who is invited to the table? Only representatives of the labor union? Only those who are causing ("good") trouble? Only those from HR who are serving as policy police? What about those not invited to the table? Where is the harmony for them? Those not at the table have often been ignored by those observing the workplace in America during the past two centuries.

Following the lead of better-known observers, such as Charles Dickens, Anonymous often writes in glowing terms of the quality of work, the thriving of those working in the mills, and the accompanying financial success of the mid-19th Century New England mill owner. (Anonymous, 1849, vol II, p. 6). Yet the working conditions of those running the looms was horrendous. The Mill Girls and others working in the mills found few invitations to the table. They had little to say regarding their own working conditions or even the conditions of their residency in the nearby dormitories (Sun and Bergquist, 2021).

Furthermore, the amount these Mill Girls paid for meals and lodging in the dormitories was often less than the amount they earned working in the mill. Thus, their debt grew, leaving them with no freedom to leave their exhausting and unhealthy job in the New England mills. Rosalind Sun and I found these same conditions operating in other countries and at other times in history. We conveyed tales of women for whom there was nothing in their life other than the daily drudgery of work and nothing to look forward to but increasing debt. For these women there was only

wage slavery – as is often case in production facilities found throughout the world during the past two centuries (Chomsky, 2008).

Diversity of Products/Services and Invitation to the Table

While Anonymous was often quite optimistic, this social observer was well aware of ways that the natural laws of interdependence can fall short. Cautionary notes were offered by Anonymous. The role played by protection speaks to this need for caution. Furthermore, the challenge of harmony is extended by Anonymous well beyond United States boundaries. Anonymous notes “the ruin of the people of Ireland” (Anonymous, 1849, vol. II, p. 18). This “ruin” was related to the potato famine that devastated Ireland through the mid-19th Century. The famine in Ireland led to the immigration of many Irish to North America – and to work in the New England mills that Anonymous extolls.

The leaders of Ireland were not invited to the table of 19th Century international commerce. They did not benefit from the diversity of production that Anonymous identifies as critical to a harmony of interest. The Irish people were relying on one product (potatoes) based in agriculture. They had no thriving industry as an effective exchange mechanism. Instead, we find the exchange many miles away (in New England mills). This exchange was far from being equitable and of mutual interest for those Irish immigrants working in the mills (Sun and Bergquist, 2021).

As Anonymous noted, the leaders of a country should “put not too many eggs in one basket.” (Anonymous, 1849, vol II, p. 58). A diversified basket, in turn, requires collaboration among entities within a country and between countries. To bring about this diversification, Anonymous focuses on societal structures that are themselves quite diverse. They range from transportation systems and public policies that influence migration patterns to quality of land for raising crops and quality of machinery for producing goods, Anonymous’ harmony of interest requires diversification of enterprise – and this diversification ultimately requires diversity at the table.

There was no harmony of interest between the Irish people and those sitting at the international market exchange. Harmony of interest was absent among those Mill girls who were running the looms in New England and those (like the Cabots and Lowells who owned the mills. We might (with Anonymous) similarly identify the absence of harmony among powerful European colonizers and those citizens of other countries (such as India and most of Africa), who were subject to the powerful control of these European leaders of commerce and politics.

Anonymous writes of the “ruin” of manufacturing in India, (Anonymous, 1849, vol II, p. 19) as well as in the West Indies and even Canada (all under British control). (Anonymous, 1849, vol II, p. 20). Even mid-19th Century Russia and Germany do not escape Anonymous’ assessment of dysfunction and lack of harmony (Anonymous, 1849, vol II, p. 89). England is constantly to be found in Anonymous’ critical analysis (especially in comparisons drawn with apparently harmony of interest in the United States). Anonymous notes that “colonization is urged on all hands, and All unit in the effort to force emigration in the direction need to raise up “colonies of customers.”

This colonization strategy was not only shown by Anonymous to be unrealistic, but also to be a source of the disharmony that existed between the colonists and those subject to colonial rule. Anonymous was obviously not acquainted with the Behavioral Economists' concern expressed in the 21st Century regarding who is invited to the table. Nor was Anonymous aware of the late 19th Century critique offered by Marx and most other liberal social observers regarding the alienating absence of power among those in the working class. However, this keen observer was fully aware of the destructive impact of an unfair distribution of economic power and control between 19th Century nations.

Lingering Influence

While the identity of Anonymous was never determined, the perspectives offered by this person continued to gain some purchase in American society. Harmony of interest informed the policies formulated by two American presidents who were related to one another: Theodore Roosevelt and Franklyn Roosevelt. For both leaders, government was to play an important corrective and protective force in sustaining a harmony of interest. Smith's laissez-faire perspective was to be tempered by selective, but critical, governmental regulations. Without this protection, massive monopolies (such as Standard Oil) would trample any real harmony of interest among all members of a modern society.

What would be the natural harmonizing tendencies of today? What would harmony of interest look like in the third decade of the 21st Century – or even the last half of the 20th Century? Are Anonymous' farmers and those who still manufacture iron (or other commodities) still in need of one another and do they still, as a result, find a "harmony of interest" in working together and consuming each other's labor and products?

During his own presidency in the 1980s, Jimmie Carter seems to think that the challenge of finding a harmony of interest was still alive and well (or not so well). Heather Cox Richardson (2024g, p. 245) offers the following account:

In his Farewell Address on January 4, 1981, President Jimmy Carter noted that the undermining of faith in the government's ability to deal with problems meant that Americans were turning increasingly to "single-issue groups and special interest organizations to ensure that whatever else happens, our own personal views and our own private interests are protected." This, he warned, distorts the nation's purpose because "the national interest is not always the sum of all our single or special interests. We are all Americans together, and we must not forget that the common good is our common interest and our individual responsibility."

A president who had added solar panels to the White House, he urged Americans to protect "our most precious possessions: the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land which sustains us," and to advance the basic human rights that had, after all, "invented America." "Our common vision of a free and just society," he said, "is our greatest source of cohesion at home and strength abroad, greater even than the bounty of our material blessings."

Carter urged Americans to remember these words: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

And yet here we are.

And where are we right now in the middle of the 21st Century? Is there much harmony of interests? How do we know if there is harmony when not all of the voices of our society are often being heard (other than via some shouting at a political rally? What about these voices? What about invitations to new people at the table – those who are still not invited to the table?

It is understandable that invitations to the table are not widely issued. When there is diversity at the table, it is much harder to find a shared set of values and perspectives that provide the foundation for a harmony of interests. Given the collapse of a grand narrative (that brings a single unified voice to the table), there are now many narratives to be brought to the table. Furthermore, there is increased diversity in the populations of many countries (such as those in Europe and North America) as a result of either voluntary or imposed migration?

It should also be noted that the premodern is still dominant in many societies. And with this premodern status comes the strong hold of tribalism and strong family ties. While this allows for a mutuality of interests within these small, isolated cultural islands, it also makes the building of a broader base of mutuality much more difficult. We are fully aware of this challenge as we seek to address the complex issues facing warring tribes in Africa and the Mid-East. It is hard to build countries when the fundamental identity of its citizens is invested in their extended family and tribe.

This challenge might be even greater and broader. As Malcom Gladwell (2002) has noted, we human beings typically can only really get to know and relate to about 150 people at any one time. Everyone else is in some sense an alien with whom it is hard to share a mutuality of interests. This suggests that in some ways we are all still living in a tribal and family based premodern world. We only want to believe that we have moved beyond the premodern. Some of us probably yearn nostalgically for a fanciful premodern life.

Even though we might all be a bit tribally oriented, nations such as Afghanistan and many African countries are particularly likely to find it hard to establish a strong national identity given the familial and tribal dominance in their societies. Countries have often been created artificially, with national boundaries being established in an arbitrary manner – this is notably the case with Iraq. Furthermore, these arbitrary (faux) countries which have often been created by colonial powers are likely to find the identification of a mutuality of interests difficult to establish. Where is this harmony of interest to be found in a war-torn Sudan or Rwanda with a long history of brutal inter-tribal genocide.

Perhaps there is something to learn from what has occurred in Eastern Europe as its citizens move past the artificial imposition of a new, very large state structure (the Soviet Union) on their own lives. While European societies have long moved past a premodern status, they still have

important remnants of premodern boundaries and loyalties. In my own work in Estonia, I found that initial concerns were soon put to rest regarding the boundaries that existed between Estonian farms prior to the Soviet confiscation of the farms. While the new Secretary of Agriculture in Estonia shared with me her fears that the old boundaries could not be identified and restored, she told me several months later that the location of these boundaries were still vividly in the memory of her Estonian colleagues: "This corner of Mikk's farm begins at this large stone and extends out to that old oak tree by the pond . . ." The old world of local loyalties and shared interests remained intact. What then about a broader mutuality post-Soviet occupation?

Harmony, Morality and the Inner Voice

In the study I conducted with my colleague, Berne Weiss, during our work in Eastern Europe during the years when the Soviet Union was collapsing (Bergquist, and Weiss, 1994), considerable attention was given to the ways in which the citizens of two countries (Estonia and Hungary) were addressing the challenges associated with their new-found freedom. At the heart of their confrontation with this new freedom was the choice between escaping from the burdens associated with this new freedom and finding liberation in the range of options now available. In the midst of this choice between escape and liberation was the question of mutuality. Can liberated citizens of Estonia or Hungary move forward together with shared interests, or is the new freedom to be engaged (as in many Western societies) through individual actions? Must the imposed collectivism of the Soviet regime be replaced by the individualism of the Western world or is there another option – a mutuality of interests?

My colleague, Berne Weiss, became intrigued with this question of mutuality – and in particular with the notion of an inner voice as central to the notion of mutuality in the midst of new-found freedom. Her interviews with Vaclav Brichacek, Jiii Hoskovec, and MirekJuno in Prague were particularly insightful in this regard. She found that freedom becomes a function of the individual "listening to the inner voice," as Professor Brichacek described it. A mutuality of interests can only be established if there is a shared version of the truth. The question then becomes: who owns the truth? Weiss' three interviewees all indicated that each individual does have access to the truth internally, regardless of the press, the state's relationship with the press, or the degree of information technology at his or her disposal. With this foundation of shared truth comes the opportunity for finding mutual interests.

Moral Man and Immoral Society

In returning to the insights offered by Berne Weiss and her Hungarian colleagues, I am reminded of the analysis offered by the theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, who wrote about moral man living and acting in an immoral society. For Niebuhr, individual citizens maintain the morality of their society – the "inner voice" identified by Brichacek. The collective will compromise, distort and neglect. It is the individual, person who holds firm with the fundamental values of their society. Collectively, the voice of individual morality must be assembled – as Anonymous suggests – to protect the interests of all citizens. Cutting right to the chase in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*,

Niebuhr immediately offered his basic premise on the first page of his introduction (Niebuhr, 1932, p. xxvii):

Individual men may be moral in the sense that they are able to consider interests other than their own in determining problems of conduct, and are capable, on occasion, of preferring the advantages of others to their own. They are endowed by nature with a measure of sympathy and consideration for their kind, the breadth of which may be extended by an astute social pedagogy. Their rational faculty prompts them to a sense of justice which educational discipline may refine and purge of egoistic elements until they are able to view a social situation, in which their own interests are involved, with a fair measure of objectivity. But all these achievements are more difficult, if not impossible, for human societies and social groups. In every human group there is less reason to guide and to check impulse, less capacity for self-transcendence, less ability to comprehend the needs of others and therefore more unrestrained egoism than the individuals, who compose the group, reveal in their personal relationships.

At this point, Niebuhr echoes the concerns offered a century earlier by Anonymous, while adding the more psychological perspective to be found in mid-20th Century America:

The inferiority of the morality of groups to that of individuals is due in part to the difficulty of establishing a rational social force which is powerful enough to cope with the natural impulses by which society achieves its cohesion; but in part it is merely the revelation of a collective egoism, compounded of the egoistic impulses of individuals, which achieve a more vivid expression and a more cumulative effect when they are united in a common impulse than when they express themselves separately and discreetly.

Elsewhere, Niebuhr puts it this way: "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary. . . . The perils of uncontrolled power are perennial reminders of the virtues of a democratic society; particularly if a society should become inclined to impatience with the dangers of freedom and should be tempted to choose the advantages of coerced unity at the price of freedom." (Niebuhr, 1986, pp. 160-161) It is the individual moral person (with the inner voice) who can conceive of justice (and mutuality of interests) and holds a vision of true freedom, but it is the assembled morality of the society via democracy that must ensure (protect) this justice and "the dangers of freedom".

I offer another quote from Reinhold Niebuhr (1932, p. 33) that brings the connection between protection (harmony of interest) and true freedom. He is once again echoing Anonymous' cautionary notes regarding rampant laissez-faire commerce that had been extolled by Adam Smith:

When economic power desires to be left alone it uses the philosophy of laissez faire to discourage political restraint upon economic freedom. When it wants to make use of the police power of the state to subdue rebellions and discontent in the ranks of its helots, it

justifies the use of political coercion and the resulting suppression of liberties by insisting that peace is more precious than freedom and that its only desire is social peace.

The challenge thus becomes how this privately held morality is brought together in a collective (mutual) demand that the society (via Democracy) embrace and engage this moral stance. We find such a process operating in the work done by people of morality such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and Nelson Mandela. Even closer to home for me (as a resident of Maine) is Margaret Chase Smith, who was not only the first woman in the US Senate but was also the first member of the senate to speak out against her fellow senator, Joseph McCarthy, who was a hate and fear monger of the 1950s. For Smith and the other “heroes” I have identified, the acts of morality-based courage (to coin the term used by John Kennedy) not only modeled what other citizens could emulate, but also brought about a collective (mutual) perspective on the moral stance to be taken and resultant actions to be engaged.

Truth and the Inner Voice

In the age of information, it is important not to confuse information with truth. Even more importantly, if a society is to achieve and sustain a harmony of interests, then this harmony must be based on a shared sense of what is real and what is the impact of one another’s behavior on the overall harmony of one’s society. Harmony requires truth. Information is ephemeral: events accumulate, cast ever-changing perspectives on motivations, intentions, meanings.

If truth is not about accurate information, what is it? And again, what is the relationship of truth to freedom and harmony? If truth is about each individual inner voice, then perhaps the whole is like a mosaic, no one piece of which contains the whole but each piece of which contributes to making the whole complete. The key question then becomes, can harmony be found in a mosaic. If Adam Smith is correct in asserting that harmony of interest requires rationality, then there must be some shared, reason-based criteria of truth.

Obviously, the mosaic yields diversity – which is an inherent strength in building a sustainable society with true freedom. Some of the inner voices in a mosaic speak of complex meta values; some inner voices are askers of questions, some are seekers of power or wealth, some are harmonizers with the natural world; some inner voices are musical notes, some poetry, some color; some are passionate with love, some are passionate with hate; some feel called to commit genocide and build museums to house the relics of extinct cultures. Collectively, they constitute the range of possible ways of being human. Can harmony of interest arise from this human condition?

Between the choir of inner voices and the norms established in a society is the mediating role of the state. This is where Anonymous joins the conversation, suggesting the need for protection if harmony of interest is to be sustained. How the state can discourage such a private relationship is all too evident, and the Communist societies are cases in point. Mirek Juno said that having lived in a Communist society, seeing people capitulate to ideology, gave him some understanding of how the Germans became Nazis. Obviously, most states don't offer much encouragement to the individual to attend to the inner voice, the belief being that doing so would be antithetical to

the continued exercise of the power of the state. Individual thinking has always led to questioning authority – and disrupting at least one form of societal harmony.

The Collaborative Voice and Reform

However, one possible inner voice, one that perhaps is dismissed because it doesn't fit the prevailing image of individualistic thinking, offers a different perspective on societal harmony. This is a voice that strives toward relationship, the builder of the web, also the compromiser. Two people in Hungary, who were dissidents, told a story about a doctor who decided that his mission in life was to bring the values and experiences of scouting (relationship with nature, culture, personal relationships, and so on) into the Pioneer youth movement of the communist system. So, he joined the Communist party and became an important person in the Pioneer movement. His position also gave him advantages in his career, but the couple who knew him saw his motivation as essentially related to a true calling.

Those who want to make a positive contribution within a basically corrupt system, who find some way to enter and avoid being corrupted, are probably in the most difficult place in which to continue to listen to their inner voice. In some ways, the lonely hero has an easier time. Another academic is a good example of the other sort, the one who enters the system and bides his time. This man spoke of his notion of creating his inner secret police, being in synch with how they functioned so that he could learn patience and still not be corrupt. He wasn't a party member, but he was able to travel and to publish at least some of what he wrote. He enjoys considerable respect among his colleagues.

The inner voice speaks to the essence of freedom for the individual, the manifestation of freedom for the individual. If the individual's inner voice is a din of obsessions or fears, he or she is hardly free. Our collective state of freedom is influenced by the extent to which our actions are constrained by our context. Neither in America nor in Eastern Europe is the mother of three small children free to spend her time self-indulgently. If we assume responsibilities freely (having three small children may or may not be a freely assumed responsibility), then presumably we also freely assume the constraints and limitations the responsibilities impose.

In the American ideal, shaped over a couple of centuries of looking across a vast stretch of land populated by civilizations that the Euro-Christian didn't know how to understand or respect, freedom came to be associated with an unlimited horizon. A harmony of interests, as extolled by Anonymous, allowed for and even encouraged the expansion of enterprise in both size and location. Compare that to the Eastern European penchant for responsibility. Perhaps, Anonymous offered a biased perspective when casting many European societies (and other societies in the world) as examples of failed harmony.

We might find not only that Anonymous ignored the abuse of labor in American mills (and in American cotton fields), but also the unique challenge of finding harmony of interests in countries where there is an emphasis on collective responsibility. Perhaps, this harmony is hard to achieve without the driving force of personal interests. Adam Smith might have been at least partially

correct in declaring that self-interests are built into the human psyche. But doesn't this mean we are inviting all self-interests to the table?

Personal Interests and Harmony

An interesting perspective on personal interests and a shared harmony of interests comes from the unique perspective offered by George Saunders (2007) and his hypothetical vantage point in the Bardo (a form of limbo that exists between death and transitions to an afterlife in heaven or hell). He writes about the tragic death of Willie Lincoln, the cherished son of Abraham Lincoln. Both Willie and Abraham have died and linger in the Bardo. Other occupants of the Bardo at one point enter the body of Abraham Lincoln and experience all of his sorrow and deep caring attitude about not only his dead son but also the many dead and wounded produced by Lincoln's civil war.

The many people who entered Abraham's body were inspired to push him back to where his son now resides in the Bardo. The remarkable outcome is that hope emerged regarding the power of collective action (Saunders, 2007, pp. 252-253):

Perhaps all of us, working as one, might. . . . What a pleasure it was, being in there. Together. United in common purpose. In there together, yet also within one another, thereby receiving glimpses of one another's minds. . . . How good it felt, doing this together!

Furthermore, those who joined in the struggle to return Abraham to his son found that their own past memories of engaging in good and pleasurable acts surged forth (Saunders, 2007, pp. 254-255):

We had not always been so solitary. Why back in that previous place--- . . . Suddenly, I *remembered*: the showing up at church, the sending of flowers . . . the sound of coins falling into the canvas bag crudely labeled Our Poor; a group of us on our knees weeding the churchyard at dusk . . . The happy mob of us children gathered about a tremendous vat of boiling chocolate, and dear Miss Bent, stirring it, making food noises as us, as if we were kittens. . . . My God, what a thing! To find oneself thus expanded. . . . How had we forgotten? All of these happy occasions?

Thus, from the perspective of George Saunders, the sharing of a common purpose can produce benefits related to personal interests. When we collaborate with other people on behalf of a common good, then we are likely to recollect other times when we worked with others, shared the joy of collaboration—and found that personal joy was resurrected in the midst of collective joy.

While this insight provided by Saunders in his portrayal of the Bardo offers us an opportunity to acknowledge the personal benefits arising from collective action on behalf of the common good. It is also important to follow Saunder's narrative to the end of this chapter regarding Lincoln in the Bardo. The Bardo community was not successful in altering the direction of Abraham Lincoln. They did not stick around for a very long time. Saunder identified several important factors that

lead to the dismantling of the collective action and a return to lives of desperation, despair and disbelief. For some of the Bardo residents it was a matter of returning to a care-free life in which the realities of death were dismissed with frivolity. Sustained commitment isn't fun. It is hard work. The joys associated with shared work doesn't defer the recognition of death.

For other Bardo residents it was a matter of self-absorption. There was a compelling return to the normal state of shame and helplessness. There was the never-to-be achieved search for forgiveness of self. When we are accustomed to being helpless and hopeless then it is frightening to consider finding agency and hope. This is a variant on the escape from freedom – and perhaps often is the primary reason for this escape.

In Saunder's portrayal we find a more mundane portrayal regarding the abandonment of Abraham Lincoln's body in the Bardo. Many of the folks who had entered his body were doing so because everyone else was entering (the "band wagon" effect). When other Bardo residents left then the excitement was gone and there were other places to be. There was a lack of willpower. People were indifferent and returned to their usual way of being. Their personal rut was a source of comfort (if not pleasure).

Finally, there was ignorance. Not everyone in the Bardo knew that Abraham Lincoln had entered their world. Or if they did know of Lincoln living with them in Limbo, they had not made the connection between his death and the death of his son (or death of many other people during the civil war). Ignorance can be a preferred strategy when one is living in a strange land (such as the Bardo) or in a land filled with VUCA-Plus challenges.

Freedom as an Internal State

Saunders has shown us that shared commitment can create an internal state of joy and self-worth. We might also find that the experience of freedom comes with a shifting sense of self. Perhaps the concept of freedom resonates for people all over the world because of its potential impact on one's own psyche. Some qualities of freedom are universal; some are socio-culturally determined. The writings of Vaclav Havel demonstrate most clearly how freedom is an internal state of being, distinct from one's relationship to society. Limits and responsibilities come with the social context. The West has long claimed the patent and proprietary rights to individual freedom. The European culture that transplanted itself to the "New World" was formed by refugees and exiles, slaves and adventurers. The concept of self that informs this culture includes a sense of infinite possibilities – within the context of a rational harmony of interests.

The great expanse of land that opened the way for expanded horizons also contributed to releasing individuals from the constraints of fixed social expectations. Generations of people in the United States have lived their lives at the end of a journey from their families and points of origin. The inner voice claims greater authority in a setting where the social milieu is diluted by miles of open space and discontinuity between generations.

Yet, the harmony of interests by all accounts has not been sustained in the United States. Polarization exists alongside silo perspectives. The center does not hold and interests no longer

(if they ever did) intersect. Not everyone is invited to the table and wage slavery still exists inside (as well as outside) the American boundaries. What must be done to re-introduce (or introduce for the first time) an actual harmony of interests that involves all members of the American society. And how would such a state contribute to the emergence and maintenance of true freedom?

Communities of Coherence and Grace

I propose that a lasting harmony of interests requires that our society provides both inclusion and privilege on the part of all members of our society. Inclusion means that all members of society are invited to the table. The initial power associated with the introduction of Bardo residents into the body of Abraham Lincoln was based on this inclusiveness. Everyone (both white and black) entered Lincoln's body and gained a more in-depth appreciation of one another (for these residents had also entered one another's bodies).

We find a similar process operating in the real life those living at the time of Lincoln. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe had portrayed the African American characters in this book as caring human beings. The White readers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* could "enter" (identify with) these black men, women and children. From this identification there emerged a shared commitment and cause. A harmony of interest was found in the struggle to end slavery and establish a more equitable union (in which both rights and responsibilities were enshrined).

Privilege means that all members of our society are afforded the opportunity be heard, understood and appreciated by everyone else sitting at the table. Those entering Lincoln's body could enter one another's body without asking for permission. Everyone has the opportunity to "know" any of the other residents (as well as Lincoln) at a quite intimate level. We find this same kind of "free-for-all" operating in the chaotic but creative sessions of those writing the Syd Caesar show on TV (Brooks, 2021). Everyone's ideas were taken seriously – even if vehemently rejected – by Syd or the other writers. We also witness the granting of full privilege to all those involved in Open Space meetings (which I shall describe later in this book). The granting (or assumption) of privilege indeed opens a pathway to new ideas and a doorway to social equality.

Sense of Coherence

For inclusion and privilege to be engaged, a social structure and culture must be established that is based in a secular sense of coherence. There is more here. This sense of coherence ultimately requires a spiritual sense of grace. This is a very tall order – but there are means to bring about these favorable conditions that have been identified by several notable observers of the American community.

One of the observers is Robert Bellah. Together with several colleagues (Bellah, et al., 1985) Bellah revisited the analysis of American communities offered more than a century ago by Alexis de Tocqueville. Bellah and his associates based their analysis, in part, on a review of American communities that have veered far from the image of coherent American communities offered by

de Tocqueville. Bellah believes that such communities cannot endure. The story to be told about these communities must contain many elements. As Bellah notes (1985, pp. 281-282):

... that is not the whole story. It could not be the whole story, for the culture of separation, if it ever became completely dominant, would collapse of its own incoherence. Or, even more likely, well before that happened, an authoritarian state would emerge to provide the coherence the culture no longer could. If we are not entirely a mass of interchangeable fragments within an aggregate, if we are in part qualitatively distinct members of a whole, it is because there are still operating among us, with whatever difficulties, traditions that tell us about the nature of the world, about the nature of society, and about who we are as people. Primarily biblical and republican, these traditions are . . . important . . . and significant to some degree for almost all [members of a society]. Somehow families, churches, a variety of cultural associations, and, even if only in the interstices, schools and universities, do manage to communicate a form of life, a *paideia*, in the sense of growing up in a morally and intellectually intelligible world.

At a fundamental level, Bellah and his colleagues seem to be suggesting that the “glue” holding a community together and providing it with guidance is found in a wide diversity of institutions that exist within a community. This theme of diversity aligns with Anonymous’ harmony of interests that must exist among all elements of a society. I suggest that the glue of coherence also seems to be found in what Eliade (1959) identified many years ago as both the sacred and profane domains of life. The profane is to be found in the secular institutions of a community (Anonymous’ economically based harmony of interests), while the sacred is to be found in its spiritual institutions (what might be labeled a sacred harmony of interests). In alignment with Bellah, I propose that coherence and a sustained harmony of interests requires attention to both the secular and sacred visions held by members of a community.

Ingredients of Harmony and Coherence

What then are the ingredients of a sustainable community? What creates a culture of coherence? What would the secular and sacred visions look like and how do they help to create a culture in the community that invites all its members to the table? Even before examining Bellah’s response to these questions, I turn to Emile Durkheim (1933) whose own analysis regarding social structures is aligned with the proposition regarding specialization and the harmony of interests offered by Anonymous. Durkheim suggested that specialization (or as he labeled it “division of labor”) is to be found at all levels of society –beginning in the home and extending out to all aspects of society. For Durkheim, specialization came into existence as people began to cluster in communities. With greater density, there was an increased tendency for social conflict to emerge. Specialization, according to Durkheim, helped to minimize this conflict.

With the specialization, however, came the need for balancing specialization with integration. Durkheim proposed that in a premodern society there is a “mechanical solidarity” brought about by shared values and perspectives associated with the very confined world in which members of this society dwelled. This solidarity often was founded in an even deeper commitment to specific

traditions that seems to be more sacred than secular. I am reminded of the emphasis on tradition to be found in the Jewish community portrayed by Bock and Harnick in *Fiddler on the Roof* (based on stories written by Sholem Aleichem) With the emergence of modern societies, the integration had to be engaged through more formal, secular structures—as Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) proposed many years later. Anonymous anticipated this secular move: government was often required to provide the “protection” and integration. According to Anonymous, management structures were secular requirements for integration of the large, emerging organizations (especially corporations).

What about families, as the smallest unit of society? Integration was to be found in the sacred covenant that exists among members of the family. As Erich Fromm suggested, one might even consider all forms of integration in need of “love” and devotion—the “inner voice” identified by Prague’s Professor Brichacek. I return to an insight offered by Erich Fromm (1941) that was echoed by Teilhard de Chardin (1955). The basis of true freedom must be founded on shared responsibility and commitment.

It is the expression of love, according to Fromm, that balances off the need for individual rights (as a vehicle for one to overcome one's existential anxiety) with the societal need for collective responsibility. Does love or at least an often-sacred devotion to those with whom one is sharing a home provide the foundation for a more widely extended societal commitment to Anonymous’ harmony of interests? Does harmony of interest collapse when the familial devotion and societal commitment cease to be prevalent? Does the fiddler fall off the roof when traditions are challenged? Is the coherence provided by tradition in jeopardy when members of the family leave home and marry an outsider?

Preserving Coherence

I devote the remainder of this chapter to reflection on and an attempt to answer these critical questions regarding coherence. I turn first to insights offered by Bellah and his colleagues in seeking to answer these questions. Bellah identifies multiple dimensions of integration and coherence. At the most obvious level, coherence is embedded in the secular and sacred traditions of a community—as Tevye declares in *Fiddler on the Roof*. The community has a history that contains memories of collective action and recognition of shared contribution (as well as memories of separation and abuse). This history serves as a form of collective generativity (Bergquist and Quehl, 2019) with each member of the community learning about that which deserves the greatest among of care—and about which, as a result, the community focuses its caring actions (Erikson, 1963).

Bellah and his colleagues (1985, p. 282) have provides their own frame for this caring ingredient of coherence:

. . . we have never been, and still are not, a collection of private individuals who, except for a conscious contract to create a minimal government, have nothing in common. Our lives make sense in a thousand ways, most of which we are unaware of because of traditions that are centuries, if not millennia, old. It is these traditions that help us to know

that it does make a difference who we are and how we treat one another. Even the mass media, with their tendency to homogenize feelings and sensations, cannot entirely avoid transmitting such qualitative distinctions, in however muted a form.

Building on the frame offered by Bellah, I offer both a secular and sacred vision of community. I accompany these visions with a list of ingredients to be found in a coherent community. We begin with the secular vision and its ingredients.

A Secular Vision of Coherence

The secular domain contains the civic virtues of those residing in a community. This notion of civic virtue is incorporated in the term, *Paideia*, that Bellah references. *Paideia* is a vision of community that was first articulated in [ancient Greece](#). As Bellah notes (in our previous quote) this vision refers to the socialization of children through [education](#) and the modeling of exemplary behavior, so that the children might become ideal members of their community (the [Polis](#)).

Civic Virtue Above the Line

What Bellah fails to mention is that this vision resides in the upper class of Greece. A socio-economic Line was drawn in these ancient times (as it is in many contemporary societies). An education was offered in Greece to the upper-class children. This education provided for the refinement of the aristocratic children's taste in all sciences and the arts (literature, art, theater, etc.). As a "liberal" and "liberating" tool of learning, this form of education was provided alongside the acquisition of more practical tools of government as well as the physical tools of athletics and competition. In essence, the youthful upper-class males (and only the males) were "molded" to the ideal of [Kalos Kagathos](#)— which in Greek refers to the "beautiful and good."

In its Ancient Grecian form, *Paideia* certainly does not provide a secular vision of community that is inclusive. Not everyone is invited to the table of education. This aristocratic vision of civic virtue, however, is aligned with Bellah's vision of coherence.

Undoubtedly, the satisfaction of work well done, indeed "the pursuit of excellence." is a permanent and positive human motive. Where its reward is the approbation of one's fellows more than the accumulation of great private wealth. it can contribute to what the founders of our republic called civic virtue. Indeed, in a revived social ecology, it would be a primary form of civic virtue. (Bellah et al., 1985 p. 288)

Bellah and his colleagues (Bellah et al., 1985 p. 288) venture even further. They describe how finding satisfaction in work has a ripple effect throughout the community in which this perspective on work is prominent:

And from it would flow a number of positive consequences. For one thing, the split between private and public work and family, that has grown for over a century, might begin to be mended. If the ethos of work were less brutally competitive and more ecologically harmonious, it would be more consonant with the ethos of private life and,

particularly, of family life. A less frantic concern about advancement and a reduction of working hours for both men and women would make it easier for women to be full participants in the workplace without abandoning family life. By the same token, men would be freed to take an equal role at home and in child care. In this way what seemed at first to be a change only in the nature of work would turn out to have major consequences for family life as well.

The continuing exposition of civic virtue by Bellah (Bellah, et. al., 1985, p. 289) brings us directly back to the fundamental notions of harmony and coherence:

Another consequence of the change in the meaning of work from private aggrandizement to public contribution would be to weaken the motive to keep the complexity of our society invisible. It would become part of the ethos of work to be aware of our intricate connectedness and interdependence. There would be no fear of social catastrophe or hope of inordinate reward motivating us to exaggerate our own independence. And with such a change, we might begin to be better able to understand why, though we are all, as human beings, morally deserving of equal respect, some of us begin with familial or cultural advantages or disadvantages that others do not have. Or perhaps, since we would not conceive of life so much in terms of a race in which all the prizes go to the swiftest, we might begin to make moral sense of the fact that there are real cultural differences among us, that we do not all want the same thing, and that it is not a moral defect to find other things in life of interest besides consuming ambition. In short, a restored social ecology might allow us to mitigate the harm that has been done to disadvantaged groups without blaming the victims or trying to turn them into carbon copies of middle-class high achievers.

It seems that the inculcation of civic virtues in youth who live above the socio-economic Line may be necessary. However, this exclusive ownership of the compass by those who are wealthy is insufficient if a secular vision of coherence is to be viable. Harmony and coherence ultimately require that all members of the community are invited to the table. A social ecology of inclusion (and privilege) must be established. This requires additional ingredients. A coherent community with harmony of interests requires the presence of rocks, pebbles and sand. . . .

Community Capital

What is needed to move beyond civic virtue in building a secular vision of a harmonious and coherent communities that is viable? To answer this question, we turn to insights offered by Ron Kitchens and his associates (Kitchens, Gross and Smith, 2008) in their exploration of “community capital.” This capital comes from multiple sources – rocks, pebbles and sand. Community capital is generated in part from institutions in a community that support broad-based communal participation and economic security for all members of the community. These institutions are often the source of employment for its citizen. They provide the rocks for a community.

In a coherent community, the leaders of these organizations treat their employees in a thoughtful manner. The mode of humane management enacted by these leaders yields a sense of purpose,

participation, and commitment – and creates the harmony of interests that Anonymous described almost two centuries ago. As Bea Boccalandro (2021) has recently noted, “to have work feel good, we need it to do good.” Employees are invited to the table. Community capital exists at this first level through the sense that investments are being made by many stakeholders (Estes, 1996). This being the case, then rewards for this investment should accrue to all these stakeholders.

Kitchens proposes that there is a second source of capital in a coherent community. Community capital is generated by the services and events being offered in this community. These services and events are inclusive and attractive to all members of the community if the community is coherent. Regardless of their status in the workplace, all members of the community are invited to events occurring outside the workplace. One finds both the employers and employees at local concerts or at meetings of the city council. Socio-economic lines might still exist, but they are easily crossed without repercussion. Community engagement should be just as democratic and broad-based as democracy inside the workplace. This engagement provides the pebbles for a community.

There is a third source of community capital. Kitchens suggests that this is the specific quality of interactions that take place among those living in a coherent community. These interactions are respectful and inviting for all community members – they are harmonious. They provide the sand that embraces and encases the rocks and pebbles. The quality of interaction at the table is particularly important and diversity of perspective is welcomed (not just tolerated). Privilege is prevalent, with all members of the community being allowed (even invited) to enter and receive services from the institutions, to participate in the events and to engage in the many diverse relationships that are to be found when all members of the coherent community are interacting with one another. This is what civic virtue is ultimately about and how a coherent community can be created and maintained.

Ron Kitchens provides a brief story of how these three levels of community capital come together. He invites people to watch as he fills a bowl with rocks (representing the first type of community capital). He asks if the bowl can contain anything else. The obvious answer is “No.” Kitchens then adds some pebbles to the bowl (representing the second type of community capital). They settle in among the rocks. The bowl can contain more than the rocks. It can accommodate pebbles.

Kitchens goes one step further. He adds sand to the bowl (representing the third type of community capital). Kitchens demonstrates that a community can be filled to the brim with rocks, pebbles and sand. All three forms of community capital can (and should) exist in what Anonymous has identified as a society’s harmony of interest. Kitchens’ full bowl is what Bellah and his colleagues have identified as a community of coherence. Kitchen provides a compelling secular vision of harmony and coherence. Rocks, pebbles and sand are essential ingredients in any secular vision of a viable, coherent community. Thank you, Ron Kitchens, Anonymous and Robert Bellah.

American Social Security: A Governmental Story of Harmony and Secular Coherence

With all of these visionary statements about harmony and coherence, I wish to offer two real-life narratives concerning the engagement of a harmony of interest – and the appearance of secular coherence in the United States. One of these narrative occurs at the level of governance and at the national level, while the second narrative is about the engagement of harmony and coherence at the level of one organization operating in the State of Maine. The first narrative takes place during the early 1930s, when the United States was in the midst of a major depression, while the second narrative takes place in 2020, as Americans face the equally as great challenge of coping with the COVID-19 virus. Both narratives have featured players as well as a supporting cast.

Protecting the Five Freedoms

I begin with the declaration made in 1941 by then President, Franklyn D. Roosevelt, regarding what he identified as the four (and later expanded to five) freedoms. I start at this point because Roosevelt is articulating a vision that I believe is directly aligned with my own more modest and less finely phrased proposal that true freedom only comes when there is a mutuality of interests – as well as a balance between individual rights and collective responsibilities coupled with a compelling vision of the future.

Roosevelt proposes that true freedom requires a freedom from fear, freedom from financial dependence, , freedom from financial obligations, freedom from our own wants – and freedom to use our time as we wish. All of these freedoms require collaboration among citizens based on a harmony of interests. A level of what Bellah identified as coherence is also requires if members of a society are to seek freedom not just for themselves, but also for all other members of their community.

For Roosevelt to offer these freedoms with some degree of justification, he must have established a track record of engaging government to provide when Anonymous identifies as the protection of a mutuality of interests. He can thank one person, in particular, for helping him build a credible record of political and legislative achievements during the 1930s. The person most responsible for the provision of this protection (labeled “social security”) was Frances Perkins. She was not only the first woman to serve in the U.S. cabinet, but also was the longest serving member of any cabinet (1933-1945).

Perkins was a primary architect (along with Francis Townsend and several visionary members of Congress) of the Social Security Act of 1935. This act produced not only the now widely recognized protection of older Americans, but established unemployment insurance, assistance for homeless, dependent and neglected children (tragically prevalent during the depression), funds for maternal and child welfare, and public health services (Richardson, 2021).

Individualisms and the Role of Government

The wide-ranging social security enactments envisioned by Perkins were swimming against the current of individual rights that had been dominant in previous administrations. The current of individualism saturated most of American culture during the late 19th and early 20th Century. It took not only the Great Depression to shake up an anti-governmental socio-economic policy, but also the diligent and skillful work of Francis Perkins. She pushed hard to get the eventually overwhelming support for the Social Security Act (371 to 33 in the House of Representatives and 77 to 6 in the US Senate). As Richardson (2021) has noted:

[Perkins] brought to the position a vision of government very different from that of the Republicans who had run it in the 1920s. While men like President Herbert Hoover had harped on the idea of a “rugged individualism” in which men worked their way up, providing for their families on their own, Perkins recognized that people in communities had always supported each other. The vision of a hardworking man supporting his wife and children was more myth than reality.

In this insightful analysis, we find the need for governmental reform. There is also the challenging of deeply embedded assumptions (myths) regarding the need only for personal initiatives (on the part of the male head-of-household). As Anonymous pointed out almost a century earlier, men and their families need “protection” if their own interests are to be honored. Perkins had faith that underlying these individualistic assumptions regarding no need for protection, was the even more deeply held commitment to a coherent and caring community. It is a community of coherence that had been identified in the 19th Century by de Tocqueville (and reinterpreted in the 1960s by Bellah and colleagues). Perkins seems to believe, like Berne Weiss’ Professor Brichacek, that there is an “inner voice” that can still be heard midst all the declarations regarding “rugged individualism” and the prevalent declaration that the male head-of-household should serve the primary role of leader and bearer of financial burdens.

I turn again to Richardson’s (2021) account:

When asked to describe the origins of the Social Security Act, Perkins mused that its roots came from the very beginning of the nation. When Alexis de Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America* in 1835, she noted, he thought Americans were uniquely “so generous, so kind, so charitably disposed.” “Well, I don’t know anything about the times in which De Tocqueville visited America,” she said, but “I do know that at the time I came into the field of social work, these feelings were real.”

I would suggest that de Tocqueville was essentially correct among American culture; however, we do need to add Anonymous’ correction regarding protection of mutual interests. Perkins, Roosevelt and the US Congress were aware, like Anonymous, of the need to reinforce American generosity with carefully crafted, but strongly enacted social security for all American citizens. Secular coherence requires that government not sit on the sidelines, while a small number of powerful actors sit without opposition at the table. Government is not needed to provide the

rocks, pebbles and sand, but it is needed to ensure that these ingredients of coherence are not washed away by the strong current of individualism.

American Roots: An Organizational Story of Harmony and Secular Coherence

It is timely as I am beginning to prepare this book not only that Heather Cox Richardson writes about Francis Perkins and the Social Security Act of 1935, but also that *Downeast* (a magazine about Maine) published an article (Slade, 2020) concerning a new “mill” in Maine, called *American Roots*. It is this second narrative that provides us with an example of secular coherence operating at the level of an individual organization.

We find that a couple of visionary entrepreneurs can establish a mutuality of interests with those employed in their company. It can be done. The operations of American Roots exemplify Anonymous’s harmony of interest—as the owners of this company have asked all of its employees to help meet the unique challenges that the COVID-19 virus posed at that time to this company (and virtually all other companies in the United States).

The American Roots Business

I first offer a bit of background information. In its original form, American Roots produced more than four million pounds of cotton per year for many years—beginning in 1866. The fourth floor of the old mill was newly occupied in 2014 by Ben and Whitney Waxman, who now make hoodies, T-shirts and fleece vests. They have hired a staff of about two dozen people to produce these products. The Waxman’s founded their company to prove that the production of high quality union-made and American-made clothing is feasible. The inspiring story of Ben and Whitney’s business centers on coping with the Covid-19 virus. However, I will focus on those aspects of their story that align with and provide concrete expression of several points regarding harmony and secular coherence.

There is, first, a founding story. It begins with Ben’s belief that:

. . . capitalism could be a force for good, if companies were created to benefit communities instead of shareholders. [Ben] dreamed of building a business where every employee was unionized and received a living wage, paid vacation time, unlimited sick leave, and access to health insurance. He'd ensure that executives never earned more than a few times the median worker pay - unlike at many big American companies, where an executive might make thousands of times the median pay of workers. (At American Roots, Ben says “ I am the CEO, but I will never make half a million when a worker only makes \$30,000 - it'll never, ever, ever happen.”) (Slade, 2020, p. 94)

This vision and commitment on Ben Waxman’s part is directly aligned with the spirit and vision of Anonymous’ harmony of interest and is founded on Ben’s own history as a “union man” and political organizer.

There is another part of the American Roots narrative that touches directly on the themes of privilege and inclusion that reside at the heart of any harmony of interests. This part of the story concerns a specific day when a decision had to be made about how the organization would respond to shifting market conditions following the outbreak of Covid-19 (Slade, 2020, p. 95):

On Monday morning, the Waxmans gathered their workers one more time. Ninety percent of them had come to the U.S. from abroad, most fairly recently. Ben told 18 of them he would have to lay them off, at least temporarily. Then he raised the prospect of reopening. He and Whitney would do everything they could to create a safe environment, he said, but there would still be risks. He asked the room, "If we convert the factory to produce PPE, will you come back to work?" Every single hand went up. Khalid Al Kinani, a worker who had fled Baghdad years before, announced to the group, "This is our duty as new Americans."

This is a remarkable example of what happens when workers feel included in their community (or at least in their organization).

Broadened Participation and Agility

With the open communication to their employees regarding the status of their company, Ben and Whitney Waxman embraced the challenge of potentially rethinking their entire product line. This willingness to be agile and open is only possible because there was the deep-seated commitment to certain charter-based principles: (1) assigning priority to the welfare of their employees (value) and (2) showing that American-made products can be of high quality and American businesses can compete on an international market (vision). Ben and Whitney had identified the unique competencies residing inside their company. Most importantly, Ben and Whitney looked outside their organization for opportunities. This is where Ben and Whitney found their breakthrough (Slade, 2020, p. 95):

During the week that followed, Ben and Whitney considered making surgical gowns, surgical booties, masks, and more. "We were open to anything," Whitney says. Then Ben heard from his friend James Morin, COO of Gorham-based Flowfold, a small manufacturer of sporty wallets, bags, and backpacks. Maine Health had just instituted new safety protocols that increased demand for protective equipment. Morin had worked with them to develop a face shield, and the design was approved, but he lacked the staff to fulfill the 10,000-unit order. Could American Roots do it? The Waxmans were determined to try.

I provide more of Slade's (2020, p. 95) narration:

Following state guidelines, they had the factory deep cleaned and retooled, and they fitted out a huge adjacent room to create "Factory 2," which would allow for more space between sewing tables. Workers from Portland's International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees \ Local 114 volunteered their time to hang 7,000 square feet of heavy plastic sheeting from the ceilings, to isolate workstations.

When a broader sense of investment is engaged, we are likely to find, as did the Waxmans, that voluntary support will be offered by members of other organizations in one's community (such as those enrolled in a local union). A broader harmony of interest is established through engagement of people outside the strict confines of the organization.

At this point, with assistance provided by members of the local Maine community, American Roots was ready to begin operating once again – with critical support being offered by their own employees. This informed assistance was possible because those working for the Waxmans were sitting at the table. They had access to all important information regarding the company's operations. Privilege (access to information) accompanies inclusion (sitting at the table) at American Roots:

A small group of American Roots employees spent a few days doing time trials to determine how many people would be needed to fulfill the face-shield order." (Slade, 2020, p. 95).

Almost immediately, the results of harmonious collaboration began to pay off. Orders came in and employees could be rehired because of the agile reconceptualization of American Root's product line (Slade, 2020, p. 95):

Almost as soon as they'd sent out their first batch, other orders came flooding in: fire departments, nursing homes, hospitals. Then, a 50,000-unit contract from the New Jersey State Police. By mid-April, American Roots had hired back those it had laid off and added a dozen new positions besides.

Before bringing this brief tale of success to a close, it is important to note yet one additional way in which collaboration with a community beyond that of the organization can be of great benefit. This segment of the story begins with a major source of frustration for the Waxmans. This frustration concerned the lack of formal institutional support for their organization during the Covid-19 crisis. Their company could contribute much to their local community and there would be costs associated with the demise of their company. Yet, no formal financial investment was forthcoming from outside.

It was only the informal help offered by members of their local community that kept American Roots afloat. A harmony of interests prevailed in this community. As has been the case with many small American business owners, Ben and Whitney Waxman found little governmental support during the Covid crisis. But they did something about this state of isolation (Slade, 2020, p. 96):

Frustrated by the lack of coordination at the federal level, the Waxmans submitted an op-ed to the *Washington Post*. The piece ran in mid-April and was widely shared on social media. It described their pivot from manufacturing garments to PPE, and it both rallied small businesses to rise to pandemic-era challenges and made clear that those businesses could benefit from national leadership more focused on getting PPE produced and delivered where it's needed. From the moment the op-ed hit, Ben says, "the phone rang nonstop, all day, seven days a week, from 6:30 in the morning to 11 at night." American

Roots filled orders from unions, public works departments, Reporters Without Borders, schools, and more. By July, more than 100 people were working in the factory. And the protocols – distancing, mask-wearing, and hand-sanitizing – seemed to be working.

Finding True North

What does this brief case study teach us? We know that a community of secular coherence and, more specifically, an organization of coherence can still be successful in America. This harmony of interests requires that founders and leaders be fully committed to the welfare of their organization’s employees. Its employees are included and privileged at the table where problem-solving and decision-making processes of the organization are engaged. Investment and benefits are more broadly conceived as boundaries are broken between the organization and the caring community in which it is located.

All of this meant that there might yet be a day when American Roots can return to its founding business (Slade, 2020, p. 110):

Along one wall of the factory, with windows overlooking the Presumpscot [River], piles and piles of pre-cut hoodies await stitching. They've sat untouched since March. A few weeks back, a silkscreen artist came in to customize a few of them with a mermaid motif for 2 special orders. To anyone exhausted with mask wearing and elbow bumping and fear, the army-green sweatshirts are a reminder that there was a time before COVID and there will be a time after. Those brand-new, American-made, union-made, hand-screened hoodies seem like a promise that, someday, American Roots will get back to doing what it was built to do.

It is now 2024. What has happened? We can turn to a 2024 statement provided on the American Roots website: <https://americanrootswear.com/>

And so the quest began [actually it began a second time after COVID]: to make quality apparel and products right here in the United States, including every step from fiber harvesting to dyeing to the last stitch sewn at the factory in Maine. The products were designed to be fit for labor, leisure, and any adventuring in between.

They are back in their business of producing something other than COVID-related protection devices:

Fleece was the first hill to conquer, and with the help of their partner Polartec, American Roots was producing fleece products completely made in America, with a forward thinking sustainable edge. Beyond this, using Ben and Whitney's ever-growing network of American companies, Unions, and institutions, customizing products for these groups became American Roots' specialty very early on.

Once again, we find a collaborative relationship – this time with Polartec (“their partner”). They diversify their offerings but remain committed to their fundamental mission of producing “quality apparel”:

Now, the company works in fleece, cottons, lightweight jersey, and other fabrics, constantly focusing on the next design challenge and meeting the needs of their customer base.

An important lesson is embedded in this continuing part of the story about American Roots. When there is a clear founding mission and articulation of shared interests, then an organization can retain its “true north” even when it must shift directions for a short period of time. Change can be interwoven with continuity.

When there is a compelling sense of purpose for those working in an organization and when they are involved in plotting the direction for their organization, then a sustained commitment to the long-term welfare of the company is retained—even when it must shift directions. Under conditions of a guiding True North, those who own and lead the company will ensure that the breadth of shared interests in the company (both inside and outside the organization) is secure. These owners and leaders are then more likely to find support coming from multiple sources. Ultimately, this is what secular coherence is all about.

A Sacred Vision of Coherence

I propose that Harmony of Interests requires more than just secular coherence if it is to be sustained over a lengthy period of time in any society. While Adam Smith’s and Anonymous’ economic (and political) perspectives are of great value, they are not sufficient. A dose of de Tocqueville’s generosity of spirit is required – perhaps even a major injection. A sacred coherence is an essential ingredient. Fortunately, as Francis Perkins of the Social Security Act noted, the sacred domain is to be found in all communities – at least in de Tocqueville’s America.

Is there any justification for this more outlandish claim that the sacred is to be found in all communities (and by extension in all societies) – not just those in the United States. I would offer the following perspective as a way of providing this claim with some credibility. Specifically, by anthropological standards, we are living only a few minutes past the hunter/gatherer era in our evolution – and hunter/gatherers lived and worked in a world that was saturated with spiritual forces and entities (Eliade, 1959). Many forms of animism were embraced by the hunter/gatherers that were founded on the belief that these forces and entities are embedded in the physical environment traversed by these people. In contemporary societies the spiritual and sacred are embedded in the meaning which people assign to their work – those endeavors that are filled with Soul and Spirit (Moore, 1992).

The Sacred and Spiritual are also found in the contemporary sanctuaries we create (whether workshops, carnivals, or retreat sites). These are special sites where learning and re-creation can occur (Bergquist, 2017). In many traditional societies (such as was found in Hawaii) one can retreat temporarily to a sanctuary – so that forgiveness can be found (before returning to society). This forgiveness might be granted by other people (a profound source of inclusion) or by oneself (a way to discover or renew personal privilege). The Spiritual and Sacred are also to be found in ceremonies we perform (whether a wedding, funeral or birthday party) and processions we enact

(whether a church service, parade or New Orleans Second Line). The animism of our ancient ancestors is still alive – it just takes somewhat different form.

Community of Meaning and Memory

All of this suggests that a sacred vision of coherence can be founded on the belief that everything in the life of a community has meaning and purpose. Therefore, all elements of community life should be appreciated, celebrated and remembered. A community of memory can be founded on this sense of meaning and purpose. This community of memory becomes the primary forum for collective appreciation and celebration. Bellah and his colleagues (1985, p. 282) put it this way:

The communities of memory of which we have spoken are concerned in a variety of ways to give a qualitative meaning to the living of life, to time and space, to persons and groups. Religious communities, for example, do not experience time in the way the mass media present it—as a continuous flow of qualitatively meaningless sensations. The day, the week, the season, the year are punctuated by an alternation of the sacred and the profane. Prayer breaks into our daily life at the beginning of a meal, at the end of the day, at common worship, reminding us that our utilitarian pursuits are not the whole of life. that a fulfilled life is one in which God and neighbor are remembered first.

At this point, Bellah brings the secular and the sacred together:

Many of our religious traditions recognize the significance of silence as a way of breaking the incessant flow of sensations and opening our hearts to the wholeness of being. And . . . tradition, too, has ways of giving form to time, reminding us on particular dates of the great events of our past, or of the heroes who helped to teach us what we are as a free people. Even our private family life takes on a shared rhythm with a Thanksgiving dinner or a Fourth of July picnic.

As Bellah notes, the assignment of meaning concerns the relationship between a community and its deeply felt commitment to interpersonal relationships and group relationships. Ultimately, sacred coherence is based on the overarching relationship between community and some divine (sacred) entity. From this perspective, harmony might be said to be angelic when properly tuned.

The I-Thou of Coherence

We find a guide in our exploration of the sacred. He is Martin Buber, a prominent Jewish theologian. Guidance is to be found in an overarching visionary perspective on relationships and its associated spiritual tradition that is offered by Buber in *I-Thou* (1958). Buber's *I-Thou* relationship is formed on behalf of some greater devotion or cause. There is a third element involved in a sacred relationship between two or more people, or a gathering of people in a community. This third element can be the honoring of God, achieving the Ultimate Good, or building the Shining City on the Hill – a city of harmony.

I-Thou is closely related to the concept of *Agape* (a form of love to be found in the Greek lexicon), As Reinhold Niebuhr (1986, p. 150) notes, *Agape* moves beyond the Greek concept of *Philia*, which

is a form of mutual love between two people. *Agape* requires the third level—just as secular mutuality of interest ultimately requires not just a trusting and equitable relationship between two people or institutions, but also a protective societal structure. The binding, relational “glue” of *I/Thou* and *Agape* is to be found in that which transcends those individuals who are engaged in the relationship. In many cultures, there is a dedication of all members of society to a specific set of values (a harmony of interests) and ways of finding meaning in their world. This dedication blends the secular and the sacred. This is where *I/Thou* and *Agape* dwell. This is where we find covenant and charters.

A *I/Thou* covenant points to a shared commitment that extends beyond the interests or even welfare of either party. A community or institution-based charter of harmony points to outcomes that go well beyond personal or institutional interests (Bergquist, 2003). Ron Kitchen’s rocks, pebbles and sand are all acknowledged by those committing to the charter. This charter represents a commitment on the part of those working in an organization (such as American Roots) and citizens of a community to a larger sacred vision of coherence. I will have much more to say about charters later in this book.

It is a vision that provides guidance regarding the future of this community and/or this organization. It is when an institution, community (or entire nation) has a clear and compelling image of its own future that this institution, community or nation is more likely to endure (Polak, 1973). As in the case of charters, I will have much more to say about planning for the future later in this book. At this point, suffice it to say that a sacred *I-Thou* relationship and a culture of *Agape* ultimately expand the social ecology of harmony. The love of something beyond ourselves enables us to love (or at least respect and include) those with whom we affiliate and work. *I-Thou* resides at the heart of a coherent community.

Other spiritual traditions move us even further toward a sense of transcendence and unity. For instance, many schools of Buddhist philosophy and practice move us (individually and collectively) to a higher transcendent plane. Similar perspectives are to be found in other religious and philosophical traditions to be found in many Asian countries. It is interesting to note that many of these ancient perspectives are complemented by the radical conclusions to be reached by those studying quantum mechanics. All physical life (including human being) is constituted not of individual entities, but rather of a single universal consciousness and flow of energy. Our individual identity is merely (and ultimately) an illusion. Thus, it is essential (and inevitable) that we find common cause and commitment with other human manifestations as we co-create and share this one reality.

What are the implications to be drawn from these diverse spiritual traditions? I propose that these implications lead us to new ways (and back to some very old ways) when considering the nature of harmonious and coherent community. While religions and other sacred traditions in many cultures have helped to produce the spirit of capitalism and individualism (Weber, 1958), they have also provided us with reasons and guidelines for framing, supporting and expanding on the secular civic virtue that Bellah and his colleagues have described. Specifically, when being guided

by a sacred vision, we reference the concept of Grace as it was introduced by the noted theologian, Paul Tillich (1948).

Grace, Love and Collective Memory

Tillich speaks about the structure of grace in the shared history of a society. If we reintroduce our consideration of harmonious and coherent communities, then the structure of grace can be considered the history embedded in the collective memory. It is a history that includes not just the community's successes, but also its suffering and abuse. Tillich believes that Grace only comes with the act of acceptance and reform – such as was found in the Truth and Reconciliation actions taken in South Africa following this country's release from Apartheid. It has also been represented in the *Satyagraha* (civic disobedience) enacted by Gandhi in India (and later emulated in the actions taken by Martin Luther King in the United States).

It is in the collective memory of acceptance, forgiveness and reform that we are likely to find Tillich's grace – as well as the "clean pain" identified by Resmaa Menakem (2017). The pain of all members of the community, according to Menakem can be "metabolized" and made clean. This requires the recognition, understanding, appreciation, commemoration and (finally) search for forgiveness and redemption regarding the full history of this community. We can return to the insights offered by Reinhold Niebuhr who states that forgiveness is the final manifestation of love. Forgiveness and love transcend the search for justice in any society. As Niebuhr (1932, p. 266) notes: "love must strive for something purer than justice if it would attain justice."

Forgiveness and love seem to be critical to any engagement in "clean pain" and any search for Tillian's grace. Such was the case in South Africa and India. Hopefully, this will soon be case in the USA regarding race relations and economic inequality. Can harmony of interests ever be found in the United States or elsewhere in the world? Is forgiveness possible and can love be found in a world of polarization and lingering trauma? Can harmony be found without coming to terms with the history of abuse in one's society?

Conclusions

I believe that an ongoing process should be engaged within and should help to build or restore Robert Bellah's community of coherence and ultimately ensure a harmony of interest. In alignment with Robert Bellah and his colleagues, I propose that two ingredients are essential to building and sustaining this community of coherence. The first is a shared sense of spiritual unity and a transcendent set of sacred values and purposes. This ingredient is one to which Bellah and his colleagues repeatedly turn. An abiding belief is to be found in the community regarding human progress and a sense of greater purpose in life.

The second ingredient returns us to the wisdom offered by Paul Tillich. It brings together the insights of Bellah and Menakem. New learning and reform must be established in a grace-filled community of memory. As Menakem observes, without the metabolizing of pain (to make it "clean"), all members of a community, whether they be those who are abused, those who do the abusing, or those who allow for the abuse, will be stuck in "dirty" pain. It is the enduring,

unmetabolized and unforgiven pain that leads inevitably to polarization, isolation and creation of further collective trauma in the community. It seems that we must be vigilant in bringing grace, history and clear pain to our search for a harmony of interests. Thank you, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr and Resmaa Menakem for helping us identify the requirement and conditions of love, forgiveness, grace and clean pain.

Chapter Eight

Vision: Creating A Shared Image of the Future

In creating the conditions for "true freedom," it is essential that a society not only provide "freedom from" (Fromm's negative freedom) but also provide "freedom to" (Fromm's positive freedom). Positive freedom to do something, in turn, is sustained only if a society has defined or is in the process of continually defining and redefining a clear and exhilarating image of its own purpose and, in particular, its own future.

According to Fromm (1941, p. 256):

Looked at superficially, people appear to function well enough in economic and social life; yet it would be dangerous to overlook the deep-seated unhappiness behind that comforting veneer. If life loses its meaning because it is not lived, man becomes desperate. People do not die quietly from physical starvation; they do not die quietly from psychic starvation either. If we look only at the economic needs as far as the "normal" person is concerned, if we do not see the unconscious suffering of the average automatized person, then we fail to see the danger that threatens our culture from its human basis: the readiness to accept any ideology and any leader, if only he promises excitement and offers a political structure and symbols which allegedly give meaning and order to an individual's life.

Fundamentally, as Fromm put it in the midst of World War II, "the despair of the human automaton is fertile soil for the political purposes of Fascism." (Fromm, 1941, p. 256)

Arendt's Vision of the Future

Hannah Arendt (1966/1948) comes to a similar conclusion as she describes the conditions leading to the rise of totalitarianism in mid-20th Century Europe. She speaks of the loss of a sense of purpose or defining image of the future during the years immediately following World War I. The world had been changed profoundly by the war. Europeans (and perhaps many others around the world) had lost all sense of bearing and any sense of human values or rights. Displaced people were wandering from country to country with no sense of home or identity. At the same time, there was a desperate effort to reassert a sense of nation and of race.

It was a time, according to Arendt (1966/1948, p. 268), when there seemed to be nothing more pervasive than a diffuse sense of hate—which is the universal substitute for a sense of hope regarding the future:

Hatred, certainly not lacking in the pre-war world, began to play a central role in public affairs everywhere, so that the political scene in the deceptively quiet years of the twenties assumed the sordid and weird atmosphere of a Strindbergian family quarrel. Nothing perhaps illustrates the general disintegration of political life better than this vague,

pervasive hatred of everybody and everything, without a focus for its passionate attention, with nobody to make responsible for the state of affairs—neither the government nor the bourgeoisie nor an outside power. It consequently turned in all directions, haphazardly and unpredictably, incapable of assuming an air of healthy indifference toward any thing under the sun.

To what extent does Arendt's description of 1920s Europe ring true today in Europe and elsewhere? Perhaps the world that was created after World War I continues to exist. A world exists in which there is no grand narrative to connect the past and the present. A clear image is absent of a sustainable future (a connection between the present and the future). Certainly, the heirs of those displaced people continue to roam the world. They are joined by a multitude of people displaced by many other conflicts that have taken place throughout the world over the past half century.

If some of the “nomads” were finally given a home (such as the Jews), it has usually only been at the cost of displacing other people (for example, the Palestinians). Furthermore, the rise of nationalism and racial hatred throughout Europe and many other countries in the world is evident. Is the third decade of the 21st Century a repeat of the 1920s? Are new forms of terrorism fueled by hatred to be prevalent in our near future?

Dystopic Visions of the Future

We can look to the past for evidence of the impact that the loss of a common purpose and sense of the future can have on our society. While we can look for clues as to our own future in the mid-20th Century past, we can also look to somewhat more contemporary times.

Narcissistic Loss

The astute social observer, Christopher Lasch described a culture of narcissism which he came to believe typified the 1970s in the United States and other Western countries. His observations still seem to be appropriate. They are related to the challenge of forging a viable vision of the future (Lasch, 1979, p. 193):

The culture of narcissism is not necessarily a culture in which moral constraints on selfishness have collapsed or in which people released from the bonds of social obligation have lost themselves in a riot of hedonistic self-indulgence. What has weakened is not so much the structure of moral obligations and commandments as the belief in a world that survives its inhabitants. In our time, the survival and therefore the reality of the external world, the world of human associations and collective memories, appears increasingly problematic.

Lasch identifies the absence of both durable social structures and ample psychological resources in a world saturated with narcissistic individualism (Lasch, 1979, p. 193):

The fading of a durable, common, public world, we may conjecture, intensifies the fear of separation at the same time that it weakens the psychological resources that make it

possible to confront this fear realistically. It has freed the imagination from external constraints but exposed it more directly than before to the tyranny of inner compulsions and anxieties.

At this point, Lasch turns to the obsessive consumerism that is also identified by Fromm (1955) in one of his later assessments (in the United States regarding escape from freedom. Christopher Lasch (1979, p. 193) puts it this way:

The inescapable facts of separation and death are bearable only because the reassuring world of man-made objects and human culture restores the sense of primary connection on a new basis. When that world begins to lose its reality, the fear of separation becomes almost overwhelming and the need for illusions, accordingly, more intense than ever.

Catastrophic Loss

Another image of our possible future speaks further to the social impact of collective loss. In this case it is the absence of any hope regarding a sustainable future. Within this image we find the apocalypse of the New Testament and the ecological collapse envisioned by many alarmed environmentalists. This image is portrayed graphically in the movie *Mad Max* and the novel, *The Road*. Much as in Hannah Arendt's Europe of the 1920s, the world has just experienced a major catastrophe in this movie and novel. The world is coming to an end. The few survivors of the global holocaust live in a world without purpose – and probably without a future. In the last days of the world, these men and women remain in a state of intoxication and violence.

As in the case of 1920s Europe, many of the survivors in *Mad Max* and *The Road* have become homeless, rootless wanderers, finding no identity or acceptance in a world that they did little to either create or destroy. Attendant existential despair was portrayed by 20th Century European authors such as Sartre (1993) and Camus (1989). Following World War II, this despair was portrayed by psychoanalysts such as Ludwig Binswanger (1963) (in Europe) and Rollo May (2007) (in the United States). This lingering sense of despair continues to find itself vividly enacted in *Mad Max* and *The Road* as well as in many 21st Century movies, songs and novels that express nihilism and often exhibit a preference for anarchy.

It is particularly insightful in *Mad Max* to note that the adult survivors paid no attention to their children. This next generation would have held the collective future in their hands. But there is no future. The one child in *Mad Max*'s society is an abandoned foundling who receives no care from any one. Worlds without a future apparently have no need for and no interest to be shown for children. By contrast, there is one child in *The Road* who is cared for in a world without care – so a short-term, intimate commitment to care is possible (though painfully ironic).

Multiple Visions of the Future

A clear, straightforward and bleak image of the future is portrayed in Christopher Lasch's pervasive narcissism. It is also conveyed by authors and moviemakers who couple existential despair with the end of our world as we know it. By contrast, Kenneth Gergen (2000/1991)

suggests that the challenge is not one of confronting a single, distressing future. Instead, it is one of confronting multiple images of the future (and images of the present day as well).

Gergen (1991, pp. 6-7) proposes that contemporary men and women are saturated with many partial and superficial images of self and the future:

Social saturation furnishes us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of self. For everything we "know to be true" about ourselves, other voices within respond with doubt and even derision. This fragmentation of self-conceptions corresponds to a multiplicity of incoherent and disconnected relationships. These relationships pull us in myriad directions, inviting us to play such a variety of roles that the very concept of an "authentic self" with knowable characteristics recedes from view. The fully saturated self becomes no self at all. Each reality of self gives way to reflective questioning, irony and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality. The center fails to hold.

A single coherent image of the future is difficult to achieve. It is not clear in our VUCA-Plus saturated world if such an image is even possible. And is this coherent image even needed? It is desirable given the inclinations of we human beings to distort reality in order to find clarity (what I have identified as a pull toward distorted serenity).

In arguing for a clear, coherent, and compelling image of the future do we mean to imply that there need be only one image in any one society? Such would be impossible in a VUCA-Plus world without being based on intolerable fanaticism. Perhaps this single image would arise from a state of "friendly fascism" (Gross, 1980). Such an image would appeal to the present-day version of the 1950s "authoritarian personality" identified by Adorno and his associates (1964) as well as Eric Hoffer's (1951) "true believers". Hopefully, the 21st Century replicas of these long-standing escapes from freedom will not prevail. Responsible citizens will reflect on and appreciate not only their own personal values, beliefs, and actions, but also those of people embracing diverse values and belief who wish to take quite different actions that are guided by quite different visions of the future.

What might a society look like in which multiple images of the future are embraced? Ogilvy (1979, p. 59) offers the image of a multidimensional person living in a multidimensional society. This person lives in true freedom when he or she is able to resist "deterministic forces of socialization" – what we have described as the pervasive illusions of freedom. He or she is able to discuss and debate this resistance with other people in this society so that the resistance does not regress into "blind and senseless rebellion." Under these conditions, according to Ogilvy (1979, p. 59) "a multiplicity of well-founded interpretive schemes giving objective support to several interpretations of social interactions" are available to this individual and society. Perhaps this is the way in which true freedom is engaged.

Along with Ogilvy, many postmodern social theorists and observers (for example, Bauman, 1992, pp. 150- 152), question the need for a single unified image of the future. They argue instead for a more process-oriented (Whiteheadian) notion of future imaging. Democracy, according to William Hastie (quoted in Gross, 1980, p. 349) is "a process, not a static condition. It is becoming,

rather than being. It can easily be lost but is never fully won. Its essence is eternal struggle." We might find some reassurance in what Hastie declares given our current struggles with the elusive processes of democratic governance.

I would propose that his description regarding the delicate and seemingly ephemeral entity called "democracy" is particularly salient in the mid-21st Century politics of the United States (and many other countries). From this more process-oriented and contextual perspective, it is in the political, economic, psychological, sociological, and even spiritual effort to formulate a new compelling image of the future that a society finds its coherence and sustaining integration. To arrive at a single image or even several related images is absurd in the fragmented VUCA-Plus world of the mid-21st Century. However, the act of searching for such an image or set of images might be appropriate and essential for a viable community or society – and for the emergence of true freedom.

A Postmodern Future of Differentiation and Integration

What, then, will be the nature of a society that manifests true freedom? Is it possible for our preliminary and tentative reflections on Freedom in 1994 (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994) to be expanded into a dialogue regarding the nature of freedom in 21st Century Eastern Europe and the United States? It would, of course, be presumptuous of me to formulate a detailed plan for Hungary, Estonia, or the United States. However, our interviews and observations in Eastern Europe align with some of the observations made by Gergen, Ogilvy – and Hastie in particular.

In 1994, Berne Weiss and I suggested that we must do an effective job of creating, recognizing, and making use of the wide variety of institutions types, societal functions, and cultural characteristics that are found in our communities. This is a process called *differentiation* (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967; Bergquist, 1993).). At the same time, we must find, hold, and celebrate the traditions, values, myths, and stories that bind members of a society together. This is a process called *integration*. True freedom in any society might require a balancing and interweaving of differentiation and integration.

With the achievement of freedom comes the potential for greater diversity, specialization, and individualism. As I have already noted, with the opening of freedom's door comes the potential for fragmentation and alienation – allowing for entrance of such unwanted ghosts as isolating nationalism, racism, ethnocentrism, and protective regionalism. True freedom calls for a comparable increase in integrative functions – such as care for other people, a countering of individual rights with collective responsibility and identification of interests that are in harmony.

Berne Weiss and I found that the differentiation emerging from a social revolution must be accompanied by integrative initiatives. A void is left when authoritarian regimes collapse, when the monolithic state bureaucracy is dissolved, and when the overarching ideology and political doctrine (in Eastern Europe this was Marxism) and vision of a future society is discredited. In its place must come a new, integrative vision (or integrative process of deliberating about a shared vision).

A new, genuine sense of community must be built on something other than just hatred for another people or doctrine. Shared interests must be identified and enforced. People must feel safe and supported by their community. The integration must occur at both the personal and societal levels. Moreover, integration cannot simply occur through the reintroduction of centralization of vision and functions. The former Soviet Union provides a compelling example of centralization having failed miserably.

Arrogance and Friendly Fascism

It is particularly important for those of us who come out of an American liberal tradition to be aware. We are predisposed to address complex social problems through the initiation of centralized, governmental functions. We must repeatedly challenge our assumptions about governmental engagement. We liberals must sometimes reconsider our expectations that government will provide systemwide solutions. We need to establish a closer relationship with our personal social responsibilities as an expression of our freedom.

Hannah Arendt (1966/1948) reminds us in her analysis of bureaucratic racism in European colonialization that social reform motives can all too easily translate into arrogance. We become blind with regard to what seems to be “justifiable” authority when intervening in the life of another person in order to bring her or him “true” knowledge, values, and perspectives on life. At these moments are we acting as conquerors rather than caregivers?

I once again bring in the challenging insights offered by Bertrand Gross (1980). We should first note that Gross is an avowed liberal who has a long, impressive history of service to the federal government. He provides his own confession regarding the often-inappropriate role of centralization in liberal thought. Gross (1980, pp. 4-5) observes that for many years he “sought solutions for America's ills – particularly unemployment, ill health and slums – through [placing] more power in the hands of central government. In this I was not alone. Almost all my fellow planners, reformers, social scientists, and urbanists presumed the benevolence of more concentrated government power.”

Gross goes on to note the parallel between liberal centralization and the seemingly antithetical centralization to be found in the conservative encouragement of unrestricted corporate growth in American society. Gross identifies a major blind spot to be found in not just our “enemies” but also ourselves as liberal social critics and activists:

The major exceptions [to those who advocate the benevolence of concentrated government power] were those who went to the other extreme of presuming the benevolence of concentrated corporate power, often hiding its existence behind sophisticated litanies of praise for the 'rationality,' 'efficiency,' or 'democracy' of market systems and 'free competitive' private enterprise. Thus, the propensity toward friendly fascism lies deep in American society. There may even be a little bit of neofascism in those of us who are proudest of our antifascist credentials and commitments.

The challenge, therefore, is to find means of integration that retain and promote diversity. We must find sources of community that do not require centralization of control.

Images that Integrate

What will be the primary fabric of this new integrative yet diversified society? What is strong enough to hold people together in a single society that honors differences? In the past, images of society have often relied on economic images of the individual and society to provide the integration. This is no longer appropriate, if it ever was. It appears that Marxism was flawed, or at least limited from the first. Marx restricted his analysis to the economic sphere and, more specifically, to the sphere of production (see Triando, 1992, pp. 72-73). In many ways, Marx turned all of Europe into a sweatshop. He ignored the many variations in economic life and the presence of noneconomic life in the emerging modern nation states of Europe. Capitalism, or at least American capitalism, has been similarly restrictive in describing the factors that motivate people primarily in economic terms. We are motivated by so many other factors and are much more than *homo economicus*.

Whether from a Marxist or a Capitalist perspective, the economic person was in essence a product of the modern world (Bergquist, 1993). Regardless of the ideology being propounded, the assumption was made that profit and salary are the primary goals of life. The economic person was seen as an advance over the person as primarily a religious being or as merely an object (servant, slave, chattel). A secular "grand narrative" of primarily economic and political content was constructed during the modern era. It took on several different forms: communism in Eastern Europe, *noblesse oblige* in colonializing Western Europe (Arendt, 1966/1948), and manifest destiny in the United States.

Those who have identified and documented the transition into a postmodern era have written about the decline of the grand narrative. There is no longer one commonly accepted story or legend that justifies and provides a rationale for our collective behavior (Arendt, 1966/1948, p. 208). As we enter a postmodern world, we find that postmodern people (and the postmodern society) are not exclusively or even primarily economic. They are a composite of several postmodern and modern forms (political, religious, cultural, and economic).

Max Weber's (1958) description of humans as religious and culturally oriented is still valid. The composite also contains newly emerging, post modern images of men and women as ecological, international, and equality-oriented learners. They also exist, according to Huizinger (2008) as those seeking a challenge and accompanying display of competence (*homo ludens*). I am moving toward a suggestion in this book that we human beings are even more inclined to lean and learn into the future. Is there such a term as *homo futurus*? [Yes, it is used by Barbara Rosenthal, a concept artist]

The New Postmodern Narrative

The new, postmodern narrative or vision of the future will and must be a hybrid of old and new forms. The failure of communism in Eastern Europe was the failure to impose a grand narrative

based on the primacy of the economic sector of society – and the state as the final arbiter of truth. The message from the fall of communism is the need for hybrid forms (Feher, 1992, p. 110). This, in turn, requires tolerance for (even enthusiastic embracing of) ambiguity. What Frederic Jameson (1991) calls the "troubling ambiguity" of postmodern society offers a major challenge for any striving toward true freedom. What I call VUCA-Plus and the interweaving of six disruptive conditions in the mid-21st Century requires that true freedom be an agile hybrid.

The new narrative or vision of differentiation and integration must blend the best of both free market and socialistic systems, especially an emphasis on shared welfare. It must effectively incorporate the arts, humanities, and social sciences with economics and politics. Such a model will be challenging for both the right wing and the left wing (Feher, 1992, pp. 113- 114). The central remaining question is: will the new narrative or vision be coherent and sustainable? Will it instead – as the postmodernists suggest – be more of a process than an enduring product? Berne Weiss and I concluded from our observations and interviews in both Estonia and Hungary that in these two countries the new vision would be expressed primarily as an ongoing dialogue among many divergent forces in each country (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994). This would be both the strength and challenge of experiencing true freedom in Estonia and in Hungary.

Our extension into the future appears to be at least partially valid given the complex and often turbulent clash of ideologies in both countries since the early 1990s. Both countries have thriving economies – but remain a bit distant from the economic and political narrative offered by the United States – especially as this American narrative has fallen into disarray and polarization. The Estonians and Hungarians, like many other citizens of the 21st Century throughout the world, have witnessed what occurs when the rampant individualism of American society has led to violence, political extremism. With considerable concern, they have observed a failure for Americans to engage a successful transition in national leadership. The ousted president remains adamant that he won the election. For him, the past remains the present. There is no room for any of the VUCA-Plus conditions. Distorting serenity must prevail.

The future for Estonia, Hungary and many other societies may have to contain a mixture of perspectives and elements – as will also be required in American society. It may require a collective tolerance for VUCA-Plus conditions – and ultimately a move to the conditions of Essence and Essential (to which I turn later in this book).

Polak's Image of the Future

What would a more diverse future look like in Eastern Europe, the United States or elsewhere in the world? I seek to provide a particular answer to this challenging question by looking to guidance offered by Fred Polak (1973). As a Dutch sociologist, Polak published a remarkable book about images of the future that brings into focus the diverse perspectives I have already offered in this chapter. As in the case of *Harmony of Interest*, written by Anonymous (1849) during the 19th Mid-Century, Polak's *Image of the Future* has been quite influential in the writing of many observers of contemporary societies (notably Kenneth Boulding, the Nobel Prize winning economist).

While being influential, the writings of Fred Polak have not been widely accessible to the American reading public—as was also the case with Anonymous' *Harmony of Interests*. I have been fortunate to obtain an English version of his book, which was translated and edited by Elise Boulding (after she spent an entire year learning Danish, so that she could prepare this English version). Both Elise and Kenneth Boulding are to be thanked for their enduring efforts to make Polak's book more accessible—and for Ken Boulding (1956) to build on it in his own book: *The Image*.

Confronting the Other: A Numinous Future

For Polak, the Future is more complex and often elusive than that identified and analyzed by the social observers I have already cited. He writes about the Future as being profoundly Other. It is to be differentiated from that which has already taken place (the Past) and is now taking place (the Present). The Other that represents our Future is compelling, yet shadowy; it provides direction and motivation, yet is ever changing. I would suggest that Polak's Future resembled the powerful and elusive "numinous" that I introduced earlier in this book

As described by Otto (1923) and incorporated in the work of Jung (1938)], the numinous is directly aligned with Polak's perspective regarding the Future as Other. Otto (1923, P. 11) writes about a powerful, enthralling experience that is "felt as objective and outside the self" — much as is the case with Polak's future. Otto's numinous experience is simultaneously awe-some and awe-full. We are enthralled and repelled — as we are when considering our personal and collective future. We feel powerless in the presence of the numinous yet seem to gain power ("inspiration") from participation in its wonderment. We feel out of control with regard to creating the future—yet are inspired regarding the prospects of a positive future.

Using more contemporary psychological terms, the boundaries between internal and external locus of control seem to be shattered when one is enmeshed in a numinous experience or contemplation of the future. The outside enters the inside and the inside is drawn to the outside. As an example, I point to the horrible and dreadful images and pictures of gods in primitive cultures. They continue to enthrall us—leading us to feelings of profound admiration and often at the same time profound disgust. We view a miracle, in the form of a newborn child or the recovery of a loved one from a life-threatening disease. This leads us to a sense of the numinous.

Somehow, a power from outside time and space seems to intervene and lead us to an experience that penetrates and changes everything (though we don't know how). This sense of Other that is beyond knowable time and space is what Polak has identified as our Image of the Future. Some of us identify this as God's intervention to heal or save. Another perspective is offered by those who believe in the healing and saving power of Nature or Karma. A more contemporary perspective is offered by those who extoll the "miraculous" power of "modern medicine" or the capacity of human society to do good work. Regardless of its purported secular or sacred nature, this healing or saving power has numinous qualities.

Carl Jung built on and extendedⁱ Otto's portrayal of the numinous. He describes a numinous experience as one that "seizes and controls the human subject . . . an involuntary condition . . .

due to a cause external to the individual. The numinous is either a quality of a visible object or the influence of an invisible presence causing a peculiar alteration of consciousness." (Jung, 1938, p. 4) Jung's notion of numinous is founded on experience and not just ideation. Much is also the case with Fred Polak, who proposes that an *Idea* of the Future is not the same thing as (and not as compelling as) an *Image* of the Future. Both the Future and the Numinous are compelling, elusive and frightening. They both pull us in and provide us with compelling images.

To use a term made somewhat famous by chaos theorists, the Future and the Numinous are *Strange Attractors*. The so-called "attractor" basins identified by researchers such as Edward Lorenz are powerful, prevalent and "self-organizing" – much as is the Future and the Numinous. Attractors are powerful and prevalent because any complex system seems to "have a natural tendency to [fall] under the influence of different attractors that ultimately define the context in which detailed system behaviors unfold." (Morgan, 2006, p. 254). Attractors are self-organizing in that there is no external source that dictates the way in which these attractors operate. The quality of numinous is deeply embedded in these dynamic attracting systems. Perhaps that is why strange attractors were avoided by scientists for many centuries and why they were called "strange." These dynamic elements of many (if not all) systems are now of such great appeal to many scientists and non-scientists who are studying complexity.

Five Perspectives on the Future

Polak (1973, p. 2) offers five ways in which we tend to orient our perspectives on life to this challenge of our Future being the Other (and a source of numinous uncertainty and even terror, as well as strange attraction):

1. Life cannot be purely transitory: there must be something more enduring. Man hopes for future grace.
2. There must be another realm into which man can enter.
3. Life should not be transitory and imperfect. Man rebels out of despair, but without hope.
4. Life is not as it appears to be. This world is an illusion, and the essential reality is veiled from man.
5. Life does not have to be the way it is. Man can reform and re-create the world after any image he chooses.

We see the third perspective vividly displayed in the forementioned pessimistic, existential images offered by the post-world war novelists and psychoanalysts. This perspective is perhaps to be found in Lasch's description of an individualistic, narcissism-based future. We see two of the more optimistic perspectives on the future offered by social observers who come from a more theological orientation. Martin Buber (1958) offers us a vision that speaks to the first perspective – that there is something beyond our current concerns that deserves our commitment. *I/Thou* is

about relationships that are embedded in a deep, caring love for one another on behalf of the ultimate Thou (God).

Paul Tillich (1948) offers a similar perspective—but it is somewhat more secular in nature than that offered by Buber. We find Grace in relationship to one another in society; however, this Grace is embedded in full appreciation for all aspects of human history (including its atrocities). Furthermore, grace is embedded in the reform of human society. We find similar visions offered by other political, economic and religious leaders throughout the world and throughout history. Some of these perspectives remain inaccessible or not very compelling. Others have a numinous and strange attractive appeal that has driven decisions made by and actions taken within specific societies. For Polak, it seems to be essential that we fully appreciate the way that an idea is translated into a specific, tangible image.

The World of "Eidetics" (a general theory of images)

Fred Polak (1973, p. 5) notes that the future "not only must be perceived, it also must be shaped." This means that we must move from an idea about the future to a tangible image of the future. (I have tried to provide this tangibility when offering specific examples and focusing on Balance, Harmony and Vision). Polak believes that the future must be seen, heard and even tasted. As a palpable entity, the Future can be the focus of countless debates, deliberations, quarrels, shared moments on enthusiasm, collective inspiration, and collaboration. Images are formed in myths, legends, songs, and theatrical enactments. We live in a world of eidectics (images). We celebrate the potential of collective futures during our holidays, in our construction of monuments, in our enactment of parades, and in our faithful repetition of family rituals. These enactments move us beyond idea to image. I would suggest that we as human beings are *homo eidectics* (lover of images) -- just as we are *homo ludens*, *homo economicus* and perhaps *homo futurus*. All of these human proclivities might be closely aligned with *homo eidectics*.

Images are formed and changed by producers and consumers. They are created by capitalists and by communists. Images saturate the lives of artists, bohemians and scientists, entrepreneurs and working men. They are formed and dictated by schools of morality and religions. There are good guys and bad guys in the image of a future. Organization men and rugged individualists, family members (husbands, wives and children, father and mothers) are guided by tangible images of possibility, potentials, attainable goals. The images of the future ultimately bring everyone to the table--as I have repeatedly noted regarding the characteristics of true freedom.

Spatial Eidectics: Polak (1973, p. 3) proposes that spatial images of the Future are a distinct Other (in relationship to our past and present reality and the state of our current world). They have taken many forms through time and have been roughly placed by Polak in the following seven categories:

Before this world: Images concerning an original state of nature a lost paradise, Eden, Arcady.

This world: Images of the Promised Land, the New Jerusalem.

Below this world: Images of Hades or Tartarus an oceanic or volcanic kingdom, a land of the dead, a land of shadows, hell.

Above this world: Images of the beyond, a Kingdom of Heaven, Olympus, empyrean.

Outside this world: Images of the Isles of the blessed, Atlantis, never-never land.

After this world: Images of Elysium, Valhalla, a hereafter, a resting place for spirits of the departed.

Beyond all worlds: Spatial images of a metaphysical-cosmic nature. which are essentially nonspatial and ethereal: The All-One, infinity, nirvana.

As Polak notes, images shape a society and are in turn shaped by the actions and resulting outcomes of a society's venture into its own future. The specific special position of the image relative to our present world is critical to shaping the response of any society to its immediate and future challenges. I propose that some of the images offered by the social observers we have already reviewed are aligned with one of Polak's seven special categories.

These largely secular observations have produced both negative and positive images of the future. The world portrayed by some of our observers has either already fallen or will soon fall. We find a secular Hades (below the world) in many of the fore-mentioned novels and movies of despair (such as *The Road* and *Mad Max*) that describe a lost future. The future described by Arendt and Lasch is almost as bleak, while the diverse futures described by Gergen and Ogilvy are quite challenging (if not depressing).

Conversely, images of Eden and the New Jerusalem can be found in many societies throughout history (particularly in the Christian world), while images of a world beyond our current world can be found in many Asian societies. More diverse and highly secular images are envisioned in the world of true freedom I have described in this book. This is a world of balance, harmony and vision.

Could such a world of the future actually be built and maintained by people of good will and competence? Is this secular image sufficiently compelling (numinous) to lead a mid-21st Century society into the future? While many of the other images throughout history have been compelling and have guided the actions taken by specific societies, they have usually blended secular and sacred elements. Can a secular image such as the postmodernists are proposing win the day or are many 21st Century societies faced with the lost future portrayed by our least positive observers?

Temporal Eidetics: Images of the future have not just a spatial quality. The image can also assume a temporal quality. The future, after all, does carry us beyond the present time into a future time. With my colleague, Gary Quehl, I have described the state of generativity in human development as a temporal perspective on the future (Bergquist and Quehl, 2021). We care deeply about that which we care about – to quote Erik Erikson (1963). If genuinely generative, this caring must be

sustained over time. It is even a matter of finding ways in which we can live beyond our current life. It is this intimation of mortality that has motivated many acts of generativity (Kotre, 1984).

Polak (1973, pp. 3-4) places the temporary character of Images in an historical context:

Temporal images of the world have been variously projected into the distant future or, as in classical mythology, into the past. At certain times in history, eschatological images of the future have shouted "Soon! " Images projected into the past represent romantic idealizations of that past: the biblical paradise, the Renaissance image of antiquity. The age of romanticism looked to bygone times, and our own century reveres the Middle Ages, a period despised by the Enlightenment.

Many of us living in the United States during the 20th and 21st Century revere a much more recent past – and one that has been widely distorted and used (recently) for political purposes. This is reverence for the fabled American cowboy of the 19th Century. This “mythic” figure (which was first portrayed during the late 19th Century) was the individualist who “pioneered” the West in North America or as the protective family man who “settled” the West. The cowpoke was always a White male (though many of the early cowboys were African American) (Richardson, 2024g, p. 28).

The Buffalo Bill Wild West shows personified this mythic figure. In recent years, television programs like *Rawhide* offered us an image of the cattleman who was never quite settled, while *Gunsmoke* (and the movie, *High Noon*) provided us with the image of a frontier town that was protected by the brave, often stoic, sheriff. Resolution of conflict usually occurred on the dusty street in front of the town bar. Guns were swiftly drawn. Justice prevailed with the death of a desperado. Even in 20th Century politics, we see portrayals of the cowboy who would ensure law and order (Richardson, 2024f, pp. 31-32. Notably, there was Barry Goldwater as a presidential candidate, and, of course, Ronald Regan, who transmuted his Hollywood image of Western hero into his presidential campaign and presidency.

What resides at the heart of this mythic image? There is the patriarchal father who protected his wife and family from the natural and human threat associated with life on the prairie, mountain foothills or frontier town. We see the all-controlling, all-wise and benevolent father portrayed on TV programs such as *Little House on the Prairie* and *Bonanza*. As Heather Cox Richardson (2024b) has recently noted:

The cowboy image suggested that a true American was an individualist man who worked hard to provide for and to protect his homebound wife and children, with a gun if necessary, and wanted only for the government to leave him and his business alone.

She also noted that:

Modern-day Americans could embrace the cowboy myth so long as our laws addressed conditions in the real world. But as extremist lawmakers and judges have removed those guardrails by legislating around ideology rather than reality . . . they have ushered in conditions that are badly hurting Americans.

There is also a tendency today to idealize the wisdom of primitive man. The aching nostalgia for the time of unspoiled beginnings represents a kind of vision of the future—an image of unattainability. These dreams of the past operate on the future, though indirectly. Mostly, however, it is the future that has attracted man's dreams, hopes, and fears. The future rather than the past is seen as holding the key to the riddle of his existence. Death itself, the one certainty, is the chief inciter of our thirst for knowledge of what is to come. Man has never been able to accept *Ignoramus, ignorabimus* as his motto.

The noted historian and economist, RoBERT Heilbroner (1960) offers an even broader perspective regarding the distinctly American version of the future. He focuses, in particular, on deeply embedded optimism (at least until recently) regarding the future. While European (and most other societal) histories are filled with warfare, defeat, disease and despair, the Americans from Europe and elsewhere came to a North American continent that had a “clean slate” (when the history of the native population is ignored) (Heilbroner, 1960, p. 51):

A . . . cause of the optimistic mood which has always enthralled America must be sought in this nation's lack of an onerous past. If we have never displayed Europe's characteristic penchant for tragic thought, it is partly because we have never shared Europe's acquaintance with tragedy as an inseparable aspect of history. Unlike its mother-nations America has never experienced the dragging weight of a changeless past; has never had to cope with the peasant tradition or with Its resistance to change. In America we have no chastening ruins of past glories, no crumbling monuments to forgotten vanities. Of such pointed traces of the past, such counsels of futility, we have been as unencumbered as a people could be.

Yet, with this “naïve” optimism comes the vulnerability associated with this cowboy-based sense of self-reliance. Heilbroner (1960, p. 54) turns to an observation made by another historian (and science fiction writers) — H.G. Wells:

H. G. Wells, writing on *The Future in America* in 1906 characterized the national temper as "a sort of optimistic fatalism." It was an apt observation. For as we strove to move in the very direction in which our social and political and economic drives propelled us and for which our geographic advantages fitted and protected us, we were never aware that our movement was due to any source other than the power of our wills, or that it might have any limitation other than our own aspirations. Still less did we entertain the idea that the forces of history might go against our volitions. As few peoples on earth, we were permitted the belief that we were the sole masters of our destiny, and as few peoples on earth have been, we were.

Heilbroner (1960, p. 58) concludes that:

. . . [O]ur optimism blinds us to a central reality of our historic situation: that, after a long voyage in which the favoring currents of history bore us in the direction in which we sought to navigate, we have emerged into an open sea where powerful contrary winds come directly into conflict with our passage. To America—if not to Europe or to most of

the rest of the world--this is an utterly new experience. It is as if history of a kind we had never known before were closing in upon us. We must try to understand what its portends for the future may be.

While Heilbroner was offering this observation in 1959, he seems to be anticipating a world that I have identified as filled with the conditions of VUCA-Plus. This md-21st Century world certainly “portends” what the future could be – and as eternally-optimistic Americans we are shocked and look for an exist into a wonderland of Serenity.

It is in the framing of Future Images within an historical context that we extract meaning. Robert Heilbroner offers this historical context as do many of our other guides in this book. He speaks to the need for all of us to discover ways in which great historical forces controls our destiny rather than we, as cowboys, being in charge (Heilbroner, 1960, p. 55):

History less and less - presents itself as something we make, and more and more as something we find made for us. The mastery over our destiny, which has always been an unthinking assumption of our voyage into the hopeful future, now seems in danger of being wrested away by forces which neither precedent nor intuitive understanding illumines for us.

We find ourselves, within a historical context, being swept away by powerful forces that provide us with the forementioned sense of numinous awe. Under such conditions, do we seek out a place of Serenity where the conditions of history can somehow be ignored. Are there psychological or physical barriers that can be constructed to hold off history. Or do we find ways to live with or even take advantage of the challenging conditions that history provides?

Sacred Eidetics: It is at this point that Polak seems to agree with Carl Jung (and Rudolph Otto). Images are ultimately a matter of religion and theology. Images of the Future frame the very nature of life and death as a matter of the distinction between finite mortality (the current reality and world) and the wholly Other infinite and eternal Future.

Polak offers the following historical perspective (Polak, 1973, p. 226):

Whenever a new image of the future itself grows old and hardens into infallible orthodoxy, the danger of hypostasy sets in, and a bail and chain is fastened to the fleeing foot of time. The Christian Church of the Middle Ages threatened to dig itself into the existing order. Talmudism repeated itself in scholasticism, Phariseeism in Christian hypocrisy. The image of the future which does not move forward with its own time loses its vital force and must seek under- ground methods of self-realization. But its procreative power is not thereby destroyed. Again and again, it arouses for its own self- preservation those counterforces and movements which are in rebel- lion against a standstill of time.

Just as Jesus revived the fading Jewish image of the future, so did sectarian chiliasm attempt to revive the weakened Christian image of the future by counteraction directed against the Church. The rebellion which developed during the Middle Ages and found expression in the Reformation was much more a reformation of the Church than a

reformation of the image of the future, even though it represented a movement back to primitive Christianity. The Middle Ages themselves were burst asunder by the regenerating images of the future of *rinascimento* and *risorgimento*, and these images laid special emphasis on rebirth and resurrection.

Gardens filled with diverse images of the future were now to be found throughout Europe. Verdant soil had been laid down that nourished these sacred images of the future (Polak, 1973, p. 226):

After this there followed a rapid succession of renewed, renewing, and sometimes contradictory images of the future, influenced by and influencing new currents of thought: rationalism and romanticism, revolution and evolution, individualism and collectivism, Christian restoration and humanistic secularism. These new images inaugurated new periods or introduced new currents into existing periods. The unbroken continuation and bringing up to date of images of a possible and desirable Other world increasingly made another world of this world, as profound structural changes took place in response to one set of images after another.

Even if the current world was in miserable shape (or perhaps because it was unlivable), the imaged world would be there for us after death—or after we have instigated radical change in our society.

Coherent Eidetics: Utopias and Dystopias

Polak often moves from a more general observation of special and temporal images of the future that influence and even potentially guide actions in our life to a specific kind of image that offers a complete—or at least coherent—vision of the world that could be. This is the utopian vision that is often not only written about, but also enacted in often-short-lived utopian communities. These coherent images also appear in a very negative form—the dystopian novel and the highly destructive utopian communities that have turned inward on themselves.

I turn again to Polak's own analysis (Polak, 1973, p. 178)

The first task of the utopia consists in holding up two mirrors: one to reflect the contemporary generation, and one to reflect a counter- image of a possible future. As an eternal questioner, the utopist is also the prototype of the revolutionary and radical spirit. His thorny questions penetrate the crust of bourgeois self-satisfaction, giving ail vested interests the uneasy feeling that their ramparts are being breached.

While many of the compelling images regarding a desirable future resided in churches and cloistered retreats, the utopian images of the future—as well as the dystopian images—often were envisioned and portrayed by secular writers. Beginning with the utopian vision offered in 1516 by [Thomas More](#) in his book, *Utopia*, the concept of an ideal society is to be found in historical records predating More. Utopian visions are prevalent across diverse nations and communities, with content variations influenced by cultural differences. Richard Heinberg (1989, p. xxv) offers

the following pronouncement regarding the universality of Utopias – and images of paradise in particular:

Nearly all human endeavors—from the search for better jobs and more fulfilling relationships to the founding of nations and the pursuit of technological and social progress--can be seen as expressions of a primal longing for an ultimate state of happiness and fulfillment. This longing, which fires the passions of each generation, can be traced back through the earliest expressions of the human imagination in literature and folklore to the primordial memory of an original Paradise where human beings lived in innocent and miraculous harmony with Nature and Cosmos. The paradisaic image still beckons us with a power and insistence that are truly archetypal, yet its source and meaning are nevertheless mysterious. Like a forgotten hypnotic suggestion, it compels our behavior but itself remains obscure.

Much as in the case of Rudolph Otto and Carl Jung's numinous, there is an internally compelling attraction to be found in all of us regarding a utopian paradise. It can take the form of an escape into the distorted reality of Serenity or can serve as a motivation for a journey to true freedom. It can lead us back (regression) to a state of apparent innocence (a modern-day Eden) or lead us forward to a fully conscious awareness of and transformation of VUCA-Plus conditions.

It is particularly important to note that a paradise of innocence will often come with little or no structure. It exists in a world where there are no social institutions to regulate our behavior. There are no specific beliefs or ideologies to guide (or restrict) our actions. As John Lennon declared:

Imagine there's no countries

It isn't hard to do

Nothing to kill or die for

And no religion, too

Imagine all the people

Living life in peace

...

Imagine no possessions

I wonder if you can

No need for greed or hunger

A brotherhood of man

Imagine all the people

Sharing all the world

We might first ask if such a world is even possible – or is John Lennons just a dreamer. A noted (and controversial) political anthropologist, Pierre Clastres (1987, p. 22), seems to be suggesting that a world without formal structures and institutions is possible.

Political power as coercion (or as the relation of command- obedience) is not the only model of true power, but simply a particular case, a concrete realization of political power in some cultures, Western culture for instance (but, of course, the latter is not the only instance). Hence, there is no scientific reason for granting that modality the privilege of serving as the reference point and the basis for explaining other and different modalities.

Clastres focuses in particular on aboriginal societies in North America that exist without coercive politically based structures. While, in the study of Central and South American societies, most attention has focused on the “totalitarian empire” of the Incas, Clastres (1987, p. 28) notes that:

. . . most Indian societies of America are distinguished by their sense of democracy and taste for equality. The first explorers of Brazil and the ethnographers who came after often emphasized the fact that the most notable characteristic of the Indian chief consists of his almost complete lack of authority; among these people the political function appears barely differentiated. Though it is scattered and inadequate, the documentation we have lends support to that vivid impression of democracy common to all those who studied American societies. . . . It is the lack of social stratification and the authority of power that should be stressed as the distinguishing features of the political organization of the majority of Indian societies. Some of them, such as the Ona and the Yahgan of Tierra del Fuego, do not even possess the institution of chieftainship; and it is said of the Jivaro that their language has no term for the chief.

While chiefs might not exist, Clastres (1987, pp. 22-23) observes that power always exists in a society. However, it need not be engaged in a violent manner:

Even in societies in which the political institution is absent, where for example chiefs do not exist, even there the political is present, even there the question of power is posed: not in the misleading sense of wanting to account for an impossible absence, but in the contrary sense whereby, perhaps mysteriously, something exists within the absence. If political power is not a necessity inherent in human nature, i.e., in man as a natural being (and there Nietzsche is wrong), it is a necessity inherent in social life. The political can be conceived apart from violence; the social cannot be conceived without the political. In other words, there are no societies without power.

Thus, we might derive from Clastres’ analysis that there might be true freedom in a society that lacks formal authority structures, but it has to be a society in which coercion and violence are absent. Imagine such a world if you can . . . a world in which people live in peace. Could such a society exist in our current VUCA-Plus world? Would such a paradise lead us to a state of true freedom? Or would it eventually lead us to anarchy and the ultimate emergence of dictatorial rule? Do humans as natural beings require that political power exist in any community in which

they reside—or can they reside free of political power and violence as Clastres has tried to document in many aboriginal communities?

Utopian visions of a much less ethereal nature were articulated in the 19th Century on behalf of those working in the factories and sweatshops of European societies. These visions were clearly political in nature and often involved some violence. Undoubtedly the best known and most influential of these worker-oriented images was offered by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Our historian, Robert Heilbroner (1960, P. 41) offered a very interesting perspective regarding the Marxist image of the future:

Unlike his radical contemporaries Marx did not call for an opposition to the forces of history. On the contrary he accepted all of them, the drive of technology, the revolutionizing effects of democratic striving; even the vagaries of capitalism, as being indeed the carriers of a brighter future. The difference was that he envisaged this future as lying beyond the confines of the existing structure of society. To Marx, one last barrier had to be crossed before the promise of history would be fulfilled. That was the overthrow of the outmoded system of private production, and the passage through a transition of socialism into the ultimate communist destination of social history. The achievement of the communist revolution--itself both a "heroic" act and an "inevitable" culmination of the forces inherent in history--was thus to be the true realization of the optimistic content of the present.

Thus, it was in the work of Marx that we find a full recognition that history wins out over personal initiatives. There is no cowboy in Marx's narrative that will come to save the beaten down workers. There were only the inevitable historical forces that would eventually liberate the workers from their oppressive chains.

While Marx awaited history, there were others (especially in the United States) who took matters in their own hands. They served as cowboys (often operating as a whole posse rather than as a lone ranger) who came to the rescue of those in distress. These men (and some women) offered more mundane, yet practical, manifestations of a compelling future. Workmen organizations were established in small towns and cities all over the United States during the late 19th Century.

Labor Day marches were followed by the establishment of fraternal organizations that were tailored to the aspirations of workers rather than those of college students or business leaders (Richardson, 2024g, p. 218). The Knights of Pythias, for instance, were founded to aid those in need (which was quite common during the late 19th and early 20th Century). Building on the ancient myth of *Damon and Pythias* (who established a deep friendship with one another), these knights exhibit an abiding devotion to each other and to the community they serve as volunteers.

The Odd Fellows similarly provide life insurance policies for their members along with survivor benefits. Out in the countryside and in small rural communities, the farmers organized granges to provide collective action against those who were beginning to take control of agricultural production. The Granger movement of the late 19th Century was a coalition of U.S. farmers who fought monopolistic grain transport practices. The movement called for government regulation

of railroads and other industries whose prices and practices were considered monopolistic and unfair. Like chapters of the Knights of Pythias and Odd Fellows, the granges that sprung up throughout the American farm community provided welfare and multiple social gatherings along with advocacy for equity and social justice.

I was particularly impressed with an account offered by our guide, Heather Cox Richardson (2022e), regarding the formation of alliances among farmers in the American West:

Far from the policy struggles of the Republicans and Democrats back East, in the summer of 1890, a new movement began, quietly, to take shape. In western towns, workers and poor farmers and entrepreneurs shut out of opportunities by monopolies began to talk to each other. They discovered a shared dismay over a government that seemed to work only for the rich industrialists, and anger that they seemed to be working themselves to the bone only to have the fruits of their labor taken by the rich. "Wall Street owns the country," western organizer Mary Elizabeth Lease told audiences. "It is no longer a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, but a government of Wall Street, by Wall Street, and for Wall Street."

Westerners suffering in the new economy began to come together. Reviving older Farmers' Alliances, they distributed literature across the country explaining how tariffs worked and how railroad monopolies jacked up prices. Existing newspapers began to echo their arguments, and where there weren't local newspapers, Alliance members began to print them.

At this point, Richardson brings in a key ingredient of true freedom and sustained equity. This ingredient is their vision of a quite different world:

They offered a different vision of the country's political economy, defending the idea that the government should treat everyone equally. Alliances declared that they shared the same interests as workers, and called for "the reform of unjust systems and the repeal of laws that bear unequally upon the 'people.'"

They also redefined what it meant to be a success in America. Rather than the cutthroat individualism of those like Carnegie, they called for reviving an older tradition, one in which "manliness" meant honesty, generosity, community-mindedness, and dignity. They called for "a manly, honest defense of popular rights, a clear cut expression of principles, a bold demand for the restoration of that of which they have been despoiled under the deceitful forms and names of law." Their emphasis on reason and honorable conduct meant that they rejected the era's political fights for dominance, and so there was room in their political coalition for women and often, despite the era's Jim Crow walls, for Black farmers.

In many ways, those habits of the heart that de Tocqueville had identified in early 19th Century American life remained intact among those involved in these fraternal organizations. Furthermore, many of these fraternal organizations preceded the formation of labor union and in some instances provided the foundation and guiding principles for these unions. While the dreams held by these fraternal factory workers and farmers were often modest, they were more

often realized in a constructive and nonpolitical manner than were the dreams and manifesto offered by Marx and his followers.

Eidectics of Essentials and Essence

I have offered my own preliminary images of the future that are specifically aligned with challenges offered by the six VUCA-Plus conditions and provide an alternative to the escape into Serenity. These images relate to two sets of lenses. One set of lenses leads us to a focus on that which is *Essential* in our personal and collective life. The other set of lenses provides us with guidance toward the *Essence* of what we wish to find in our future. I have prepared a set of two essays that provide summary descriptions of the six lenses associated with what is Essential, along with two essays describing the six lenses that enable us to discover and act upon that which is at the Essence of our aspirations regarding the future.

In the first essay (Bergquist, 2024c) on the lenses of Essential I introduce a concept that guides my analysis of all twelve Essential lenses and lenses of Essence. This is the concept of Polystasis. As an alternative to homeostasis and building on the important concept of Allostasis that has been introduced by Peter Sterling (2020), Polystasis described a dynamic system in which baselines are altered with the ongoing *Appraisal* of a shifting environment (VUCA-Plus), *Adjustment* of our predictions regarding what might best be done given this appraisal, and *Action* taken on behalf of this altered baseline and prediction.

With this framework in place, I identify four general functions that are served by the Essential and Essence lenses, and then turn my attention specifically to those Essential lenses that help to transform the first two conditions of VUCA-Plus. I consider how Anchoring can transform the challenge of Volatility and how Curiosity (and subsequent Creativity) can transform the troubling conditions of Uncertainty. My second essay (Bergquist, 2024d) concerns the other four VUCA-Plus conditions. How is complexity transformed into a focus on Enablement, and how does the condition of Ambiguity become transformed into an appreciation of alternative perspectives. Consideration is then given to the opportunity for learning in the midst of turbulence and for prioritization when faced with the challenge of contradiction.

I have published two other essays that offer a complementary set of visions regarding a desirable future under the conditions of VUCA-Plus. Engaging lenses that focus on what is the Essence of our desired future, I once again identify transformative responses to each of the six VUCA-Plus conditions making use of the Polystasis concept. In the first of these two essays (Bergquist, 2024e) I consider how Volatility is transformed to a recognition of Patterns and Cycles and how Uncertainty is transformed through the maintenance of these Patterns and Cycles. I then consider how Complexity is transformed into recognition of self-organization and conclude by considering how the Essence-based lens of Illumination can transform the challenging condition of Ambiguity.

In my fourth essay (Bergquist, 2024f) I turn to the lenses of Essence that are engaged to deal with the two “Plus” conditions in VUCA-Plus: turbulence and contradiction. Turbulence is

transformed by full engagement of centering and balancing in the navigation of a turbulent river. Contradiction is transformed through the engagement of the polarity management process described in this book—with a focus on the way in which Integration can emerge from this management process.

I welcome you to this more general and extended description of twelve strategies (six related to Essentials and six related to Essence). They are all relevant to our journey to true freedom. However, I wish to stick to the matter at hand in this book—this being the creation of a compelling vision of the future that is based on a harmony of interests and a balance of individual rights and collective responsibilities. I believe that my twelve lenses can be effectively deployed in the creation of a compelling vision of the future and hope to deploy these lenses on behalf of this vision in a future publication. However, today it is about true freedom and how to attain this elusive outcome.

Images and Locus of Control

I return to insights offered by our guide, Fred Polak. Specially, I want to reintroduce the concept of locus of control as the perspectives of internal and external locus of control relate to the creation of a compelling vision of the future. Given a sense of the Future as being of an entirely different substance than anything in our current world, then how do we engage with and influence this Future? Polak addresses this question by introducing the concept on which I have focused in two of my recent essays—this concept being Essence. Polak distinguishing between images of the future that assume primary, irreversible essence and those that are based on an assumption concerning the capacity of human influence.

Polak offers the following terms and draws the following distinctions. *Essence-optimism* and *Essence-pessimism* both assume that the future is not in human hands, but is instead in the hands of God, fate, nature, or some other external, powerful force. These images are aligned with an external locus of control. Conversely, *Influence-optimism* and *Influence-pessimism* are directly aligned with an internal locus of control--the assumption being made that the future resides in the heads and hands of people (individually or collectively). Building on this distinction, Polak (1973, p. 17) concludes that:

... the most negative image of the future grows out of a combination of essence-pessimism and influence-pessimism. In this view of life chaos overrules cosmos from beginning to end, and man can do nothing except resign himself to the inevitable."

I introduced the concept of external and internal locus of control previously in this book when describing and analyzing ways in which a potential for freedom is viewed by different members of a society. I suggest that both perspectives on control are required when building a society in which true freedom reigns supreme.

Chaos and Freedom

In considering an integrated and balanced perspective regarding locus of control and the specific status of hope in our American culture, I am reminded of the powerful images of chaos that are

exhibited in the Babylonian saga of Marduk and Tiamat (and replicated in the Old Testament stories of Noah's ark and the great flood). This image is one where an external locus of control reigns supreme. It speaks directly to the "optimistic fatalism" introduced by H.G. Wells.

Represented in the real world by the yearly flooding of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers of the fertile crescent in Mesopotamia, the mythic telling of a massive war between chaos (Tiamat) and order (Marduk) offers us a compelling (and numinous) image of a Future that is completely outside our control. Our Future is an Other that allows us only to observe, narrate and become victims of outcomes produced by external forces that create our collective future. A similar flood of pessimism can be found in the narratives of Arendt, Lasch and many of the postmodernists I have cited.

Beyond the Babylonian myths, we can look to Judaic and Christian theology for other examples of external control—but also for examples of integration. I have previously written about "Grace" in this book. I propose that it offers an image of integration. There is one form of Grace that resides in external control. This is the Grace to be found in Essence-optimism—it is granted by God (in traditional Christian theology). Conversely, there is a form of Grace that resides in an internal realm of control. This is the Grace to be found in the I/Thou relationship established on earth that was identified by the Jewish theologian, Martin Buber (1958). This is also the Grace to be found in the history of human caring and forgiveness identified by the Christian theologian, Paul Tillich (1948). These forms of Grace are not totally beholden to God's benevolence. These are forms of Grace based in Polak's Influence-optimism.

Grace that resides in the domain of Influence-optimism and is informed by an internal locus of control is forged on an anvil I have described previously in this book. Grace is forged on an anvil of shared commitment to higher purposes (a harmony of interest). It is an anvil of balanced individual rights and collective responsibility. Influence-based optimism and a sustained internal locus of control require recognition and reconciliation of all aspects of past human history. It is a Grace of I-Thou that allows for and is enabled by the forgiveness that comes not from God, but from neighbors (from all over the world) who we have wronged. It is a grace that allows us, finally, to even forgive ourselves (Bergquist and Pomerantz, 2020).

Discernment and the Future

How do we find (or construct) this anvil of Grace? Polak (1973, p. 20) offers some suggestions: "The future works upon the present only to the extent that the present can receive the challenging images it broadcasts. Man has to be tuned in to the right wavelength." In medieval times, this tuning to the right wavelength was called "discernment." The mystics were to learn how to discern which messages they were receiving came from God and which came from Satan. Both God and Satan had control of very powerful modes of communication--as they still do today via social media, the Internet and polarized cable networks. Discernment was thus necessary if the mystics were to be agents of God or agents of Satan.

According to Polak (1973, p. 20) "adequate response can be nothing less than a comprehensive and inspiring vision of the future." This suggests that discernment in contemporary times

requires that any viable image of the future must be systemic (comprehensive) and appreciative (inspiring). These two criteria to be used in receiving and engaging a specific vision have been advocated and illustrated throughout this book. It is this type of systemic and appreciative image of the future that can produce Grace. It is what Polak (1973, p. 21) labels "a renewed influence-optimism which can lift us out of [what Polak identifies as] the lethargy of our present essence-pessimism."

This is all well and good—but compelling visions are not just tidy, secular creations of humankind. As Polak notes, they seem to come from outside regular human experience. They are forms of the "Other" and are numinous in character. How then does one discern the numinous? How does one discern its source? Does it come from a Godly (or at least humane) source, or is it aligned with humankind's "worst nature" (the present-day evil that seems to pervade our 21st Century world)? Furthermore, how does one categorize and confine that which resides outside categories and eludes confinement? As I noted previously, Carl Jung (1938) has offered an important suggestion: structures need to be put in place that enable us to confront and somehow find coherence in the numinous. He identified the Catholic church as a primary source of this structure in early European history, until such time as the Protestant Church shattered this structure and forced its followers to address God (and the numinous) directly.

According to Jung, it is only with the imposition of totalitarian structures (such as the Third Reich) that Protestants were protected once again from the numinous. Jung suggests that an experience of the numinous is quite frightening and often not welcomed. He proposes that we build societal norms and institutional structures to protect us from the numinous. It may be the case that we sacrifice true freedom for protection from the numinous. We find the challenge of discernment regarding competing visions of the future to be quite challenging precisely because of their awe-filled, numinous quality. We look away from compelling visions and seek an indirect interpretation of (and buffering from) these visions through institutional structures that are often, as Jung suggests, authoritarian in nature.

The Future as Strange Attractor

Whether or not Jung is correct in linking the Third Reich and ultimately the Holocaust to the threat of numinous experiences, we certainly can acknowledge and respect the power of anything identified as the Other (such as Polak portrays the Future). We can recognize that the Future has many properties associated with all attractor basins. They are powerful, compelling and self-organizing. As Morgan (2006, p. 254) notes, some of these compelling attractors "pull a system into states of equilibrium or near equilibrium, [while] other attractors have a tendency to flip a system into completely new configurations." We might find that some images of the future similarly are reconfirming of current directions (thus establishing continuity and equilibrium) while other images are "revolutionary" in nature and compel a "flipping" of the future into a whole new dynamic and structural realm—much as Malcolm Gladwell (2002) identifies in his description of "tipping points" and Argyris (2001) identifies as "second order" change.

Polak (1973, p. 4) seems to be saying something similar to what Jung and the chaos theorists have said when he suggests how human encounter the Future:

The domain of the future . . . is without boundaries. Yet it is only by drawing boundaries in the thought-realm that man can produce a problem that can be grasped and worked with, and it is only by redrawing the boundaries of the unknown that man can increase his knowledge. No problem so persistently defies our skill at drawing boundaries as the problem of the future, and no problem presses quite so hard on our intellectual horizons. In the act of searching out the future, Homo sapiens crosses the frontiers of the unknown and is transformed from the man of action, who responds to the moment, to the man of thought, who takes account of the consequences of his actions. He leaves behind the familiar universe of sight and sound and surveys the universe of the unseen and unheard, continually bringing small fragments of the unknown back with him out of the darkness and adding them to the known. Who can say whether this building up of the known diminishes the unknown?

Like Jung and the Chaos theorists, Polak describes a future that is unfamiliar and without clear boundaries. Polak's future seems to be a variety of attractor that disrupts rather than reinforces societal equilibrium. It should be noted, however, that Polak's (1973, p. 4) account of how human beings actually address the challenge inherent in this challenging encounter differs from that offered by Jung and the chaos theorists:

Man is not easily discouraged, however. Everything drives him to accept the challenge of the unknown. The instincts of preservation and reproduction demand it. All economic activity is an answer to this challenge; the primitive nomad gathering fruits and nuts and the modern industrial magnate are alike answering the call of the unborn tomorrow; so are the men who chart the seas and those who chart the heavens. No man, not even the suicide, can leave tomorrow alone. The suicide but hastens tomorrow in his impatience.

It is at this point in his exceptional study of world cultures that Polak (1973) offers an important statement about the relationship between compelling images of the future and the future of societies who hold or do not hold such an image. He describes the way in which the Other is confiscated and brought into societal reality.

Future of the Future

While Polak believes that revolutionary Futures can be realized, he also notes that without this realization, a society is likely to fall into disrepair—displaying the characteristics of dystopias such as I have previously identified. Polak writes about the inevitable decline of civilizations that do not have a defining image of their own future. In *The Image of the Future*, he extensively documents the demise of societies in which no defining purpose animated a commitment of energy, dedication, and resources toward some shared future.

Polak (1973, p. 300) offers the following conclusion based on his analysis regarding the rise and fall of many civilizations:

First, we found the positive image of the future at work in every instance of the flowering of a culture, and weakened images of the future as a primary factor in the decay of cultures. The image of the future has been represented as itself subject to a dialectical movement between the poles of optimism and pessimism.

Second, we found that the potential strength of a culture could be measured by measuring the intensity and energy of its image of the future. These images were seen to act as a barometer indicating the potential rise or fall of a culture.

Third, the concept of the image of the future has made it possible to move from diagnosis to prognosis. This is possible because of the intimate relationship between the image of the future and the future.

The image of the future can act not only as a barometer, but as a regulative mechanism which alternately opens and shuts the dampers on the mighty blast-furnace of culture. It not only indicates alternative choices and possibilities, but actively promotes certain choices and in effect puts them to work in determining the future. A close examination of prevailing images, then, puts us in a position to forecast the probable future.

Here is a summary of his often-disturbing proposition (Polak, 1973, p. 19):

The rise and fall of images of the future precedes or accompanies the rise and fall of cultures. As long as a society's image is positive and flourishing, the flower of culture is in full bloom. Once the image begins to decay and lose its vitality, however, the culture does not long survive. The secret of Greek culture, which came to its second flowering in the Renaissance, lies in the imperishable harmony of its image of the future. The endurance of Jewish culture, reborn today in Israel, lies in its fervently held image of the future, which has survived diaspora and pogrom alike. The prognosis of the dying Christian culture – if it can be said to be dying – lies in its dying image of the future.

It is at this point that Polak (1973, p. 19) offers his provocative challenge:

The primary question then is not how to explain the rise and fall of cultures, but how to explain the succession of shifting images of the future. How do virile and forceful images of the future arise, and what causes them to decline and gradually fade away? Furthermore, how do the successive waves of optimism and pessimism regarding the images fit into the total cultural framework and its accompanying dynamics?

In alignment with Polak, I propose that the future of any society resides in large part in its collective image of its own future. Furthermore, true freedom is inevitably interwoven with the presence or absence of a compelling image of the future. The loss of true freedom typically accompanies and contributes to the decline of a civilization in large part because its citizens see no need to fight for their freedom. There is nothing that they particularly wish to do with it other than escape from it. This escape can take several different forms.

Members of a collapsing society can rely on authority or become saturated in consumption. Escape can also take place through widespread substance abuse – be it alcohol, opiate, gambling or pornography (take your pick). Alternatively, the escape can take place through the creation of

a future that is nothing but an illusion. With reliance on (and even worship of) an illusory Future, members of a collapsing society do not have to acknowledge the absence of a truly viable Future nor mourn the loss of a once compelling and guiding Future.

Without a compelling image of the future, we are unwilling to make long-term commitments to other people or even ourselves. Robert Jay Lifton (1995) speaks of the "protean man" who has no clear sense of self or of the Future. Much as the Greek god Proteus could change his shape from wild boar to dragon to fire or flood, Lifton's protean man is constantly shifting his form and style without achieving any sense of coherence or purpose. We find ourselves, like Lifton's protean man, always being expedient. We are always changing our form, our roles, and our beliefs to adjust properly to a new social "reality."

In particular, we are unwilling to make a covenant with the next generation, ensuring them a viable society or a viable environment. Jay Ogilvy (1979, p. 153) suggests that "for the Protean Man a promise is more an oath of the moment, than a truth for all times." Margaret Mead once said that we should always have a child present at any meeting where we are planning for the future to remind each of us that we are planning for the future on behalf of our children. "With rising insistence and anguish," writes Mead, "there is now a new note: Can I commit my life to anything? Is there anything in human cultures worth saving, worth committing myself to?" (quoted in Gross, 1980, p. 109). What about the adults in *Mad Max*? They have created a post-nuclear society in which there is little or no hope – and not much envisioning or planning-for a collective future. Why be concerned with the welfare of a child if there is no expectation that there will be a future in which the child will live?

In essence, it becomes increasingly difficult for the protean man to move toward commitment to anyone or anything given the fragmentation of our personal and collective image of the present, let alone the Future. Without a clear and compelling image of the Future, it is easy and very tempting to be expedient or remain noncommitted. Kundera (1984) describes this condition in the title of his famous book about freedom and the loss of freedom in Eastern Europe during the 1960s: *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Alternatively, we regress to a simplistic frame and borrow an old and often destructive image of the Future from some authoritarian source. We become Adorno's "authoritarian" or Hoffer's "true believer". Tragically, we now regress with vengeance and stubbornness, having felt betrayed by those who have offered us a false truth and have portrayed a Future that can never be realized. Having found no alternative image to motivate or sustain us, we are inclined to become the protean men and women described by Lifton.

Conclusions

Today, we are faced with a particularly difficult challenge regarding the creation of a viable image of the Future. First, we find this task difficult because there are so many alternatives available to us. At each corner and every turn, we find some contemporary guru who is selling his or her own distinctive image of the best Future, or the probable Future – or the Future from which we should escape through drugs, transcendence, or even (in a compound in Waco or a jungle in South America) death. Because we have lost our "grand narrative," we are inclined to accept many

partial, superficial, and manipulative "narratives" that are not very grand by any standard. A protean stance awaits us.

Ultimately, a new image of the Future in any society must be built on our love of and concern for the welfare of our children and the next generation in our society. This commitment reflects the position I have taken previously concerning the balancing of rights and responsibilities and the harmony of interests. We must find or create a foundation of what Paul Tillich (1948) calls "Grace" that is interwoven with Martin Buber's (1958) "I-Thou" commitment to a greater good and higher purpose. The challenge inherent in this set of statements is great – perhaps only a dream rather than a potential reality. A bit of Don Quixote's quest for a better world. At the very least, it is an inter-generational project that is worth our sustained dedication and action.

Section Three

Creating Conditions for The Realization of True Freedom

Chapter Nine

Confronting Tyranny I: The Epistemology of Individualism and Collectivism

In the midst of our current global struggle pitted between autocratic and democratic rule, it is quite nature that we look for guidance and (perhaps) reassurance from those who have thought deeply about this struggle. Timothy Snyder (2017) is one of these thought leaders. He has written a quite frank account of what we have (or should have) learned about tyranny during the 20th Century. As our teacher, Snyder is offering us 20 historical lessons from the 20th Century. We should take notes and prepare for the final exam (our actions against tyranny). We are to absorb what Snyder is teaching us. Then, we must either change or sustain our current behavior based on the lessons he is sharing with us.

Experts on learning identify this as a process of *accommodation*. We “accommodate” to the new information that is entering our brain (and body) from Timothy Snyder. The process of accommodation is found among those people who have very little experience in or few skills related to the challenge at hand. As adults, we typically don’t just sit passively with pen in hand. Rather we take what is being taught and integrate this new material with what we already have experienced or acquired from previous “teachers” (educators, authors, columnists, etc.). Learning experts identify this as a process of *assimilation*. Much as we do when digesting food, we transform (assimilate) that which is entering our mind and body. What is being taught is not necessarily (nor often) that which is learned.

Such is the case with this set of four chapters. As the author of this book, I come to Snyder’s 20 lessons with my own life experience and previous lessons learned. Some of what I bring to Snyder’s work has been conveyed in this book on True Freedom. Other experiences I have had and concepts I have acquired are activated by the lessons Snyder is presenting. Much of what we “learn” from other people (especially “experts”) as we mature is actually the activation and potential re-integration of information, assumptions and images we already possess.

Studies of adult learning suggest that we might be slow to learn new material as we grow older not because we have slowly become a bit “stupid” but rather because we are devoting time and attention to integrating (assimilating) the new information with the old information. We are doing some shuffling of the new epistemological deck. And other parts of our body often have to adjust to the re-shuffled deck –as advocates of and researchers aligned with the new biopsychosocial perspective are “teaching us” (which we must now assimilate in our own notions about the relationship between mind, body and society).

All of this means that I will be taking each of Snyder’s 20 lessons and doing some “riffing” on this lesson. I will be bringing in some of my own ideas and relating his lessons to what I have already offered in this book. I am thankful for the “teaching” moments that Snyder has provided. I hope

that my extension (and even modification) of his lessons would meet with his approval. Given this framework, I turn to Lesson One.

1. Do not obey in advance.

Most of the power of authoritarianism is freely given. In times like these, individuals think ahead about what a more repressive government will want, and then offer themselves without being asked. A citizen who adapts in this way is teaching power what it can do. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 17)

The balance between collectivism and individualism is always precarious. In his first lesson, Timothy Snyder identifies one of the dangers inherent in tipping the scales toward collectivism. He identifies ways in which a collective mentality is not only embraced by authoritarians but is also a source of insights for the authoritarian leader. If Snyder is correct then authoritarians not only teach their followers about collective compliance, they also are taught by their followers. Important lessons are learned regarding the needs, hope and fears of their followers. Much is also learned about the ways in which other people not only follow the authoritarian leader but also produce their own “creative” reasons for blindly following this leader. A smart authoritarian leader, in other words, should be taking notes when their followers come to praise them.

We might even suggest that Snyder is offering a correction to (and expansion on) Bion’s notion of the dependency assumption. The leader who is operating under the umbrella of this assumption is no longer to be considered the source of all wisdom. According to Snyder, the person who is the leader and primary teacher should also be a learner. Ironically, the successful leader retains their position of power by not only teaching, but also learning from those being “taught.” As Anna in the musical, *King and I*, proclaims “it is by my students that I am taught.” For Anna and the King of Siam, it is not only the students who teach them. They learn from one another about culture, customs – and the use of authority.

This reciprocity of teaching and learning might be considered central to (and serves as an expansion on) the dynamics of collectivism. Reciprocity also vividly represents the dynamics of enmeshment – whether in a family system or society. When members of a family or society are heavily enmeshed, then they are mutually dependent on one another. They must closely follow every move being made by other members of this enmeshed system. On a crowded city street, we must be vigilant about the movement of other people around us – otherwise we are likely to bump into them or even be tripped as we move forward oblivious to the behavior of other folks on the street.

As experts in the dynamics of systems (and especially those conversant with the newly emerging tools of “agent-based modeling”) have noted, spaces that are crowded with people soon begin to seem artfully orchestrated – a dance-like process is soon engaged. And it is engaged without a choreographer or any formal rules (operating as a “self-organizing” system.) We find the same kind of “dance” operating among birds as they flock in the sky (without there being any “lead bird”). Fish swim artfully and gracefully in schools, while those travelers navigating with suitcase in hand (or on wheels) move smoothly past one another on the way to their gate at the airport.

It seems that highly collective human systems (which often are quite “crowded”) also operate as “flocks” with everyone learning from everyone else. We must learn collectively from everyone else who is near us on the crowded street. Birds must learn from those other birds flying right beside them. Agent-based modeling has shown us in dramatic fashion that we learn from one another, shift attitudes and modify behaviors primarily when interacting with those right beside us. Enmeshment takes place and is quite powerful because the “glue” for enmeshment is quite local and right with learning. It is for the authoritarian leader – and tyrant – to learn about and learn from this enmeshment and local learning. Snyder seems to be pointing in this direction when presenting this first lesson.

2. Defend institutions.

It is institutions that help us to preserve decency. They need our help as well. Do not speak of "our institutions" unless you make them yours by acting on their behalf. Institutions do not protect themselves. They fall one after the other unless each is defended from the beginning. So choose an institution you care about--a court, a newspaper, a law, a labor union--and take its side. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 22)

In this second lesson, Snyder is offering us an important suggestion regarding the receptacle(s) for our compelling image of the future. He is suggesting that these receptacles are often found (and nurtured) in the formal institutions of a society. I am reminded of a strategy for reform identified by Jay Forrester, the inventor of *System Dynamics*. Forrester was an early advocate for new public policies regarding climate and more broadly, the destructive impact of unlimited growth. Forrester indicated that any change in public attitudes about these critical environmental matters – and any collective action to bring about environmental correctives – must reside in existing institutions rather than in institutions that are being newly formed to address environmental issues. Forrester pointed specifically to existing churches and other religious institutions as the settings for reform. It seems that Forrester agrees with Snyder that “institutions . . . help us to preserved decency.”

I would extend this point of apparent agreement between Snyder and Forrester. I apply their insights to the broader initiative that I have identified in this book. They have something to say about creation and maintenance of a compelling image of the future that is held and shared by all members of a society. Perhaps, this image is best held within institutions. In his own description and analysis of “images of the future”, Fred Polak often focused on the history of institutions. We can take the lesson being taught by Snyder to reinforce Polak’s focus. We must, like Jay Forrester, look to diverse institutions in our society to forge, exemplify and disseminate a compelling image.

We certainly are aware that new images of the future are often offered and exemplified by individual leaders – such as Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, and Rosa Parks. However, Snyder might be right in pointing to the central role played by institutions – and in pointing out

that these institutions “must be defended from the beginning.” As citizens seeking to confront and overcome tyranny, Snyder suggests that we must act on behalf of the institutions that hold the image – for institutions “do not protect themselves.” If Snyder is correct and if images of the future are often dependent on institutions, then these images are themselves vulnerable and quite delicate. As individual actors, we must protect and defend them.

3. Beware the one-party state.

The parties that remade states and suppressed rivals were not omnipotent from the start. They exploited a historic moment to make political life impossible for their opponents. So support the multi-party system and defend the rules of democratic elections. Vote in local and state elections while you can. Consider running for office. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 26)

With this third lesson, Timothy Snyder seems to be offering two 21st Century points of advice regarding the mid-19th Century pronouncement of the “Harmony of Interests.” Snyder is first cautioning us against finding this harmony by simply reducing or eliminating differences in the interests, needs and priorities to be found among the various constituencies in a community or society. Embedded in this advice is the assumption that diversity in the “interests” held by people in a contemporary society is inevitable (as probably was the case even during the mid-19th Century). A homogenous society is likely to be a society of repression in which heterogeneous interests are being squashed. The system is closed to outside influences. Everyone agrees or pretends to agree on everything – or at least on ideas and issues that reside at a very abstract level (such as those associated with “motherhood and apple pie”).

We know that closed systems don’t last very long. At some point, there must be the input of outside resources (such as food and technology). As many societies fail to replenish their population (not enough babies are born) there is also ultimately the need for people immigrating from the outside. Without this immigration, many mid-21st Century countries will have to “close shop” by the middle of this century –for they won’t have enough people to keep this society functioning. Furthermore, in a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected – whether flat (Friedman, 2007) or curved (Smick, 2008) –there is little choice in this matter. Our growing appreciation for the global nature of ecosystems further seals the deal. No society can survive for long in a state of full shelter from the rest of the world. All of this means that harmony of interest can’t be sustained by blocking off the outer world. Somehow, harmony of interest must be created and sustained in the midst of diversity. Quite a challenge!

The second piece of advice offered by Snyder concerns this challenge –and the accompanying fragility of any community of interests. Snyder urges us to be active citizens and to “defend” the rules that enable diversity to prevail. So, how does the harmony take place in the first place? Without an appreciation of this founding process, the defense of harmony is likely to be misguided –often leading to a new stagnate harmony of homogeneity. I will have much to say about harmony in the midst of diversity when expanding on the additional lessons offered by

Snyder. However, at this point I can identify three fundamental principles that might be kept in mind.

First, a set of guidelines must be established regarding the generation of valid and useful information. How do we know something is accurate? What are the criteria for determining validity of the information we receive? As I will note at several points (in support of Snyder) the criteria might relate to the need for multiple sources of information generated through the implementation of multiple methods for obtaining the information. This “multi-source/multi-method criterion should be complimented by a criterion of transparency: what are the vested interests associated with each source and each method. In other words, what are the benefits and who are the beneficiaries associated with the acceptance of each source and each method? I believe that the other information-based guideline concerns the ongoing collection of multi-source/multi-method information. All systems are dynamic, which means that we need motion pictures not one-time snapshots. We should not just introduce change, but also learn from the way the system responds to this change.

A second set of guidelines emerges from the first. These guidelines concern the identification of intentions related to the harmony we seek to achieve. What are the intentions (aspirations, goals, outcomes) upon which we can all agree? What are the diverse intentions held by the diverse populations residing in the community where harmony is to be achieved? There is a valuable image to be introduced here. This is the image of a Target. In many of the attempts to describe desired intentions the term target is used. However, what is usually meant is the bullseye.

The assumption is made that there is one specific goal or outcome to be achieved. Success is measured by the achievement of this one goal. However, in a dynamic and complex system, there are multiple goals and more than one desired outcome. Some of them can be placed near one another on the target, but others must be placed on opposite sides of the target. We can also identify some goals as close to the center of the target (near the bullseye), while others lie toward the periphery of the target. All intentions must be identified and honored (even if near the outer edge of the target).

There is a second, critical observation to be made about targets. Daniel Kahneman and his two colleagues, Olivier Sibony and Cass Sustein (2021) write about the distinction between bias and noise—and relate this distinction specifically to targets. They begin with a story about assessing the success of someone shooting arrows into a target. One desirable outcome would be for all the arrows to hit the target in the same area. When this occurs, we can applaud the consistency of the archer. Another outcome would be for the arrows to arrive all over the target. Typically, we devalue this outcome. The archer has not been consistent in directing arrows toward the target.

Kahneman, Sibony and Sustein (2021) suggest that these assessments of success must be questioned. The first outcome indicates only that there is consistency—not that the arrows have arrived at or near the bullseye. The arrows could cluster at some point at quite a distance from the bullseye. This placement would reveal a BIAS. Conversely, arrows arriving at many places on the target reveal NOISE. Our authors suggest that these are quite different flaws in the

performance of the archer. Both Noise and Bias are to be found frequently in the judgements made by most of us.

I suggest that the following questions be addressed:

- How would you know if you have been successful in this endeavor?
- What would make you happy?
- Who else has an investment in this project and what do they want to happen?
- What would happen if you did not achieve this goal?
- What would happen if you did achieve this goal?
- What scares you most about not achieving this goal?
- What scares you most about achieving this goal?

If there is shared agreement regarding the answers to these questions, then a group must test its own assumptions. The process of collusion might be prevalent (Weitz and Bergquist, 2004). BIAS might be fully in effect. Conversely, if there are multiple and often conflicting answers to these questions then NOISE is operating. While diversity of thought and perspective can often be beneficial (Page, 2011), this diversity can often pose quite a challenge for groups. It is important to remain patient in addressing these differences; furthermore, the process of polarity management that I introduced earlier in this book can be of great benefit.

There is another important point to be made regarding intentions and targets operating in a dynamic, interconnected system. Some intentions are important in and of themselves. They “stand alone” on the target. Other intentions are not particularly important in and of themselves. Rather they are valuable because they enable other intentions to be realized. Enablement is found in a newly improved accounting system, in a more efficient procurement process, or in the training of employees to be more skillful in working with one another – what is often identified as “emotional intelligence” (Coleman, 1995). To assess enablement, one must adopt a systems perspective in examining how various intentions on a target interact.

A third set of guidelines concerns the ways in one makes use of the valid information in order to find pathways to the diverse intentions that have been identified. This is where a judgement regarding the value of information must incorporate not just validity, but also usefulness. The information we have generated is only useful if it is directly tied to the intentions that have been identified. One of the main reasons that the information should come from multiple sources and through the use of multiple methods is that it will be aligned with diverse intentions (often coming from diverse populations within the community where harmony is to be achieved).

Some of the people will believe and find direction in specific kinds of information found in specific places—other methods and sources are dismissed. These differences regarding preferences for certain kind of information is particularly evident in the diffusion groups identified by Everett Rogers (2008). Some people (early adopters) are convinced by data, while

others are convinced by their neighbor's experiences (early majority) or what everyone else is doing (the late majority) (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024) Thus, information and intentions must come together in the midst of diversity.

Finally, what does it mean to find harmony, given diverse information and intentions? There are two primary pathways. The first is a pathway of divergence which incorporates strategies of creativity. "Open space" technologies that were developed by Harrison Owens can be engaged. They allow for the full and unrestricted display of diverse information and diverse intentions. The second is a pathway of convergence which incorporates ordering strategies. This ordering can be achieved (building on the diverse process just completed) by pasting up summary statements of all pieces of diverse information and intentions on a wall. They are then moved around on the wall to form compatible clusters of information and intentions. Strings are then pasted between the clusters where the information in one cluster relates to information in another cluster. One or more intentions in one cluster enables achievement of intentions regarding one or more of the other clusters.

While I have illustrated only one of many different ways in which divergent and convergent processes might be engaged and integrated, the fundamental principle is that the full population of ideas (information and intentions) must be retained in moving toward a harmony of interests. The portrait that is derived (through studying and appreciating these pasteups on the wall or through use of some other method) will begin to reveal a deep underlying pattern of harmony. All of the interests are acknowledged and related to one another. Enablement is engaged—demonstrating that diverse interests are ultimately interdependent.

As is the case regarding the original use of the term "harmony", the portrait of interests is enhanced (as is the presentation of a musical work) by the interweaving of diverse interests. In the case of musical harmony there is a combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes that produce chords and chordal progressions that yield, in turn, a pleasing aural effect. When we look to the creation of a harmony of interests, we begin with a combination of simultaneously portrayed points of diverse information and intentions that produce existing interconnected interests as well as newly emerging shared interests ("progressions"). This, in turn, yields a pleasing communal effect. Harmony is achieved in the midst of diversity and the one-party silo identified by Snyder is blocked.

4. Take responsibility for the face of the world.

The symbols of today enable the reality of tomorrow. Notice the swastikas and the other signs of hate. Do not look away, and do not get used to them. Remove them yourself and set an example for others to do so. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 32)

Snyder's fourth lesson aligns directly with Fred Polak's image of the future. Visual images (along with many other symbols to be found in words and ceremonial actions) provide concrete and compelling guides for the future. According to Snyder and Polak, symbols point to the future (much more than to the present day). As I noted in my description of the "singing revolution" in

Estonia, we can symbolize our way into our collective future. We can envision and portray a desired future through song, through poetry (as in the case of Vaclav Havel), through narrative (as in the case of the interview-based stories conveyed by David Rubenstein) or through symbolic action (as in the case of Gandhi's hunger strike).

We can also witness the demonic symbols that lead to repression, authoritarianism and violence. One need only watch Leni Riefenstahl's photo essays to find the way in which symbols can perversely impact a society. Symbols help to create an image of the future that Polak would identify as dystopian. Though framed in a negative and quite ugly manner, these images are often much more compelling than those offered in a more nuanced way by those aligned with democratic ideals. We find in the symbols of Nazi Germany or of Mao's *Red Book* a pull toward collective regression to a more primitive state of reasoning and feeling. Returning to Bion's three assumptions, the images aligned with evil and authoritarian intents speak to the stupidity and weakness of the "common man" (and in particular the "common woman") – thus necessitating dependency on the great and wise (male) leader.

Alternatively (or simultaneously) the symbol can speak to the presence of Barry Oshry's menacing "other" (Oshry, 2018). These are people of a particular race, greed or culture) who threaten the current (homogenized) way of thinking, feeling, and acting (the "grand narrative"). A third use of Bion's basic assumption points to the power inherent in a "pairing" assumption. This assumption involves the linking of a leader to one specific location (Jerusalem), event (the Eschaton) or alliance (the Holy Roman Empire).

The enactment of any basic assumption offered by Bion through the use of symbols leads inevitably to regressive thinking, feeling and acting on the part of the crowd. Evil prevails and we must be vigilant in identifying and blocking this evil.

5. Remember professional ethics.

When political leaders set a negative example, professional commitments to just practice become more important, It is hard to subvert a rule-of-law state without lawyers, or to hold show trials without judges. Authoritarians need obedient civil servants, and concentration camp directors seek businessmen interested in cheap labor. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 38)

A community of interest requires some rules of the "game." With the dominance of the professional culture (in American society (Bledstein, 1976), many of the rules are to be found in the code of ethics that gird each profession. When we visit the office of our family physician, we trust that this professional will be guided by the ethical code of their profession – much as we expect our dentist, attorney and accountant to abide by a strict set of rules. A violation of the rules in virtually any profession makes for headline news. These ethical codes serve as basis for what I wish to call a *Communality of Concerns* shared by the professional and their client/patient. This seems to be one domain in contemporary American life where communality of concerns still usually reigns supreme. However, we find in some sectors (especially medicine) that a profit-oriented managerial culture is now ascendent and the professional culture is no longer in the

driver's seat (Bergquist, Guest and Rooney, 2002; Salus Health Care Forum, 2024a; Salus Health Care Forum, 2024b).

What about the world outside of the professional's office? What takes place in a world of virtual reality and Artificial Intelligence. Are the codes of ethics just as viable—can we trust the advice of our “expert” professionals (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024)? Is there a vacuum of conduct that not only calls the communality of concerns into question, but also the viability of democracy. Law enforcement officers and judges are expected to enforce the formal laws. Lawyers are expected to “play fair” in litigating conflicting interests in our society. Quite sadly (even tragically) the level of public confidence in these critical institutions is now in decline.

We don't trust lawyers (though probably never have). Police officers are definitely not trusted by some members of the community whom they have been paid (and commissioned) to serve. Judges may no longer be the paid “hacks” that are under the thumb of some city crime boss. However, they are often now seen as representatives of a specific political ideology--and this ideology may readily sway (and bias) decisions reached by these members of the judicial system. This is especially a critical betrayal by those at upper levels of this system who have to decide on life-and-death decisions rather than issue traffic citations or resolve domestica disputes (as portrayed on televised court proceedings).

With this decline in public confidence regarding the judicial system, it is tempting to check the authoritarianism box when reviewing Snyder's fifth lesson. In the creation of an independent United States, there clearly were concerns among the founding fathers about the potential corruption of the judicial system. By setting up this branch of government independent of the other two politicized blanches (executive and legislative), these architects of government undoubtedly hoped that judges would reside independent of (though probably not immune to) the politics of their time.

Before the professional culture became dominant in American society, it was often those in the judicial system who ensured that at least a modicum of communality was to be found among the disparate populations (and disparate interests) of American communities. It is also clear, however, that the communality was often found and enforced by excluding certain members of the American community from the communality table. Law enforcement was similarly intended to enforce equity and order. A communality of concern was found among those who protect and those who are protected. However, once again it was often at the expense of certain populations in specific communities. The concern was not shared by those who felt little protection. It is quite troubling to note that the dynamics of exclusion are still being observed throughout American society. Perhaps we as human beings are inclined toward differentiations and polarizations—especially when we are anxious and fearful of our own personal future.

6. Be wary of paramilitaries.

When the men with guns who have always claimed to be against the system start wearing uniforms and marching with torches and pictures of a leader, the end is nigh. When the pro-leader

paramilitary and the official police and military intermingle; the end has come. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 42)

What sustains the collective enforcement of laws? Guns. What is the central focus (obsession) of those who are fully aligned with individualism? Guns. Collectivism? Individualism? I would suggest that this is one of the most profound and gnawing contradictions that exist in contemporary American society. We are confused and contradictory about who should be able to own a gun and what kind of gun they should be able to own (for which they should get a license).

We want to be hard on crime but soft on those who own guns for “recreational” purposes. It is with gun-ownership that we find perhaps the most intransigent of all balancing acts between collectivism and individualism. If we can’t find this balance in the coming years, then any viable image of the future will be difficult to find amidst gun smoke. Any words regarding a new Harmony of Interests will be drowned out by the sounds of weapons being fired (accompanied by shouts and groans).

I would suggest that this balance might best be achieved through the introduction of the polarity management process that has been introduced at several points in this book – and that will be introduced at several additional points later in this book. The signals of polarization have been sounded many times over the past half century. It is time to heed these warning signs. Snyder has suggested that guns and (more broadly) militarization signals the potential emergence of a dominating authoritarianism and tyranny in many mid- 21st Century societies (especially that which exists in the United States). Is this enough of a warning sign? Do we need a louder signal? How many bodies of the young and old need to pile up for the current condition to be disrupted?

7. Be reflective if you must be armed.

If you carry a weapon in public service may God bless you and keep you. But know that evils of the past involved policemen and soldiers finding themselves, one day, doing irregular things. Be ready to say no, (Snyder, 2017, pg. 47)

Residing behind the search for true freedom is the capacity and desire for those seeking this freedom to be open to new learning throughout their life. As we find in the literature on contemporary adult development (e.g. Frederick Hudson, 1999), the typical adult living in a 21st Century Western society will be moving through repeated learning cycles in their lives. These cycles might involve a rather straightforward acquisition of some new knowledge and/or skills – often associated with taking on a new job or higher position in their current organization. My colleague, Agnes Mura, and I have identified this as first order learning (Bergquist and Mura, 2014). At other times, an adult learner is adding to their current repertoire of knowledge and skills. This is second order learning and is often not even acknowledged as learning in contemporary societies. Raising a first child might require first order learning, while the second child often requires second order learner.

In a book that he was never able to finish before his untimely death, my colleague Bob Shukraft suggested that we do both first order and second order learning during the first half of our life. During the second half of life, we are likely to focus on rearranging, integrating and implementing what we learned during the first half of our life. This might be a third (or even fourth) order of change (Kegan, 1982; Kegan, 1994) – one that impacts our basic sense of self and our enduring sense of meaning and purpose in life.

At the collective level, organizations must “learn” from their mistakes. The proponents of “organizational learning” (Argyris and Schon, 1978) declare that there is nothing wrong with an organization making a mistake – especially in our current VUCA-Plus environment. However, an organization must avoid making the same mistake repeatedly. It must learn from its mistakes – at both the first and second order level. Coming to the issue of organizational learning from an appreciative perspective (Bergquist, 2003, Bergquist and Mura, 2011), I would suggest that members of an organization can also learn from their successes. Rather than merely celebrating a success or moving on feeling only relief and a release of burden when a project has worked, it is important for members of an organization to pause and spend a bit of time determining what has been learned from this success that might be replicated in the near future.

We can also expand our scope and consider the nature and dynamics of a “learning” community or even a “learning” society. Like the learning organization, the community and society can change, adopt and mature – as a result of the commitment of its own members to learning from the mistakes (and successes) of their complex (and often delicate) human system. Obviously, one of the areas of concern in most communities and societies – especially in the United States – focuses on the use of weapons (especially guns and other firearms) and the resultant violence and bloodshed that comes from the indeterminant or (worse yet) highly intentional use of these weapons. Learning must occur that is particularly directed toward management of the polarization that typically occurs when issues associated with “gun-control” are addressed in a community or whole society.

What about the “second half of life” for an organization? Is there a time in the life of an organization when its members focus on meaning and purpose? Is there a time for focusing on the priorities of the organization as related to broader societal priorities? What would this third and fourth order of learning look like in an organizational setting? How might an organization take a position regarding gun ownership and use?

I would suggest that these higher orders of learning are closely aligned with the creation and maintenance of a compelling vision of the future. We collectively expand our perspective regarding organizational values when we share a commitment regarding the future with people outside our organization. We collectively envision a society in which guns are owned and used in an appropriate manner? We share a harmony of interests regarding the regulation of guns. Organizational silos crumble under the force of collective commitment – so long as this collective commitment is balanced with a commitment to individual rights. And so long as the collective commitment is not imposed by an authoritarian regime.

I wish to reinforce my perspective that collective learning at all levels regarding the regulation of guns is embedded in the fundamental balance of collectivism versus individualism. Does an individual in a community or society have the right to bear arms? Is this a basic individual right (that is identified in the American constitution) or are there mediating provisos that limit this right. Does the collective have the right to restrict the use of weapons if they are harming or have the potential of harming members of the collective? Furthermore, does each individual in a community or society hold a collective obligation to control the use of weapons that they do own? As Snyder declares, those who own weapons have the obligation to say “no” when exhorted to use these weapons on behalf of a political aim. I would suggest that the important decision to say “no” is not always easy. It requires a higher order level of learning than is to be found in adjust to a new job or second child.

Specifically, as I have suggested, a full understanding of the dynamics operating in a polarity such as gun-control requires that we move to a higher order of learning. Robert Kegan writes about this higher order—as do Argyris and Schon (building on the wise observations made by Gregory Bateson, 1972, 1979). At this higher order, we must think in a systemic manner: viewing all sides of an issue (polarity analysis) and recognizing that everything is connected to and has an impact on everything else (holistic perspective). Put simply, as I reintroduce an important distinction made by Miller and Page (2007), an issue such as gun control is not just complicated (many parts). It is also complex (all of the parts are interdependent. These parts include business interests, political lobbying, recreational habits, political pressures, and media coverage of mass shoots—the list is quite long. As Ken Gergen (2000/1991) has noted, we are often “in over our heads” when confronting a complex issue such as gun-control. A higher order of learning is needed to confront this overwhelm in a successful manner.

I would take this matter of higher order learning a couple of steps further. Ken Pawlak and I have written about types of learning that may be even more important when it comes to the confrontation of authoritarian rule (Pawlak and Bergquist, 2014). There is “transformational” learning, which was first introduced by Jack Mezirow (1991). This form of learning leads to a fundamental shift in the way in which we view our world and in which we engage this world. My colleague, Kristina Liu (2022) writes about the internal journey and external journey that accompanies transformative learning. She suggests (at least for herself) that the transformative journey is from the inside to the outside.

When addressing the issue of gun control this transformative journey might involve coming to a fuller, more compassion and more extended understanding of the impact which the killing of a loved one has on the people who survive this victim. It might also involve gaining greater understanding of the conditions that led the killer to pull the trigger. With this internal understanding comes a shift to the external enactment of advocacy regarding appropriate public policies and effective enforcement of existing and new laws. As Snyder suggests, this type of learning might be an important antidote to authoritarianism—even if this learning results in nothing more than saying “No”.

There is one final point to be made. Pawlak and I have identified a fourth type of learning (Pawlak and Bergquist, 2014). This is what we have identified as “appreciative learning.” As one might anticipate, this type of learning is often associated with the strategy I have already identified: learning from our past successes. With regard to gun control, this would mean collective learning about past successes in shifting public attitudes. We would appreciate the moments of relative quiet and moment when generalized fear declined regarding potential abridgement of individual rights. This fourth type of learning also addresses the personal challenge of facing a complex issue (such as gun-control) that leads to our feeling that this matter is “over our heads.”

I would suggest that living in a VUCA-Plus world requires us often to face “in over our heads” challenges. We have met these challenges at several levels. We have successfully addressed complex, systemic issues in our individual lives and in the organizations of which we have been a member. There is the opportunity to learn not just from our individual and organizational mistakes but also from our individual and organizational successes. As sung in the musical “The Fantasticks” we should “try to remember.” This doesn’t mean distorting our memories of the past through misguided nostalgia. It doesn’t mean escaping into the world of Serenity. It means engaging in a critical, but appreciative review of our past successes and failures as caring citizens who have recognized and acted on our collective responsibilities. These actions might have been minor (such as just going out to vote). However, we can learn from them and become better equipped to confront head-on a complex issue such as gun control. We can say “No” – and can help to craft a balanced policy regarding guns.

8. Stand out.

Someone has to. It is easy to follow along. It can feel strange to do or say something different. But without that unease there is no freedom. Remember Rosa Parks. The moment you set an example, the spell of the status quo is broken, and others will follow. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 51)

It is in this eighth lesson that we find some of Snyder’s strongest leanings toward individualism as an important deterrent of tyranny. We must “stand out” and declare ourselves willing to declare that “the emperor has no clothes!” We might even emulate Rosa Parks and defy the unfair laws of our society. In making use of the term “standing out”, Snyder is embracing a very Western (and particularly American) assumption about identity and societal norms. In some parts of the world, “standing out” signals not a principled stand, but instead an unacceptable level of arrogance and self-serving behavior.

I am reminded of an experience in my own background. I was teaching students from Asian countries. In one of the MBA classes I was working with mature students from Taiwan, I was trying to make the course come alive. I embedded the course in reality by pointing to the actual challenges being faced by these highly experienced students. I focused in particular on one student who served as a senior level leader in the business owned by his parents. During a break, this student came up to me. He quietly asked (with considerable embarrassment) if I would refer to him less often during my presentations. He said that he was now “standing out” in this class.

By this he did not mean that he was somehow superior to others in the class. This might be the case with an American student who was being referenced as someone knowledgeable about or at least familiar with the issue being addressed in class. Rather, he was referring to the social dynamics that were operating in the class: he was attending. This gentleman was “standing outside” of the other students in the class. He was blocked unfortunately from interacting with the other students. I began to notice this “shunning” dynamic being engaged during the subsequent classroom breaks. I immediately began avoiding any focus on this student (or any other student in the class). I had learned by lesson about cultural differences in perspectives regarding individualism and personal identity.

I am also reminded of the research I conducted on African models of leadership (Bergquist, 2021c). I focused on the formation of personal identity in many sub-Sahara African countries. It seems that one is born into these African communities without any personal identity (and in some cases not even a personal name). One “earns” their personal identity by actively participating in and contributing in some meaningful way to the welfare of the local tribe/community. Then in late adolescence or early adulthood, a personal identity is acquired (and a personal name). Premature “standing out” in these African societies would have earned one no points – and perhaps an enduring lack of any societally-accepted personal identity. Like my Taiwan student, the young African would not appreciate being singled out in a classroom –or anywhere else in their society. They could only become a Rosa Parks as a mature adult who had already “earned their rights” as an early-life contributing member of their society.

There is another very important point being made by Snyder that relates directly to the character of an individualistic perspective. In the midst of this declaration of profound individualism, Snyder points to the attending need for courage. There is collective courage in a collectivist culture – with a large assembly of people rising up against oppression. By contrast, the isolated act of an individual person is often admired and even celebrated in the United States. One can readily identify these heroes. Not just Rosa Parks, but also other civil-rights leaders such as Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez. Yet, this individual act of courage often comes at considerable cost – be it loss of a job, loss of physical safety or even loss of life.

Much is at stake. We can point to the blackballed screen writers and actors during the McCarthy era who lost the right to perform because of often unproven accusations of Communist affiliations. There were the gifted artists such as Paul Robeson and Josephine Baker who were forced to live abroad (in Paris). For others, like Peter Seeger and Dalton Trumbull, who remained in the United States they lost the right to perform or write. For these brave women and men there is a search for safety and acceptance. Encouragement would be something of an added gift. Robeson and Baker found this encouragement in the life of pre-war and post-war Paris. Many of those continuing to live in the United States found little encouragement, even when found not to be a communist. Robert Kegan (1982) once noted that when the word “encouragement” is broken down into its parts (“en-courage-ment”) the primacy of courage comes forth. It is with encouragement that courage is often found. Collective support is often to be found alongside individual bravery when an act of courage is engaged – even in the United State.

What about those living in a collectivist society? They are to be particularly admired in their display of individual courage, for they not only risk imprisonment or even death, but also the potential “shunning” of other members of their society. They are likely to stand alone—even outside the walls of a prison. We can point with great respect to the individual courage (standing alone) displayed by such renowned figures as Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi (at least during her early years of resistance).

I propose that individual courage and collective courage might be experienced in quite different ways by those who engage in risky, reforming or cutting-edge activities. Collective courage often is attended by a general regression in the functioning of both cognitive and affective process among those engaged in the courageous act. These participants in a courageous act are being heavily influenced by a fundamental motivation and assumption held by all members of the collected group (often this being Bion’s fight/flight dynamic). They are also being influenced by the behavior of those situated next to them.

As I have already noted with regard to the insights offered by agent-based modeling, the collective actions of multiple people (like multiple birds) are heavily influenced (even fully determined) by the actions each individual observed among their “neighbors.” It is always good to have a friend and neighbor on which one can lean and who will confirm one’s beliefs. This is only one of many benefits that are associated with living in a collectivist society. I have identified these benefits throughout this book, However, as I have also frequently noted, the vulnerability to tyranny might be greater in a collectivist society than in an individualistic society—at least with regard to the unlikely stance of the lone dissenter against a tyrannical foe.

For those who are lone dissenters and choose to act alone there is an attendant fear. Along with a personal sense of courage, there is the risk of becoming a lone bird. This would be a bird that decides not to follow their flock-mates. They would truly be courageous. They would be risking not only the shunning of the other birds in their flock but also exposure to predators who are likely to view these isolated birds as much easier to capture than birds in the flock. I think that similar “existential” risk is being taken by the member of a collectivist culture who is “standing out” with courage.

With all of the courage being manifest by the brave isolate, it is worth noting that these people often do not consider themselves to be “courageous.” My colleague, Suzan Guest, conducted in depth interviews with people who could easily be identified as “courageous.” She found that virtually all of these “courageous” people simply took actions that they thought appropriate or necessary at the time. Like Gandhi, King and Mandela, they often hold a compelling vision of a justice future that overshadows any concern about their own personal welfare.

For others, like Rosa Park, it might simply be a matter of “standing up” for their personal right to sit anywhere in the bus. Collective responsibility had given way in her community (and elsewhere in the United States) to the collective privilege of the White community. Balance had to be restored for Ms. Park. For yet others, it was a matter of maintaining a harmony of interests

in their community. Peter Seeger looked to this harmony in the civil rights (and later the environmental protection) community. He engaged harmony of song to find harmony of interests. Paul Robeson and Josephine Baker similarly deployed their own harmony of song (and dance) as they fought for a harmony of interest in the United States – especially regarding race relations. Neither found this harmony in America. They chose eventually to search elsewhere for this harmony of interest. They both found it in the Parisian artistic community.

It would seem individual courage is often founded on one of the three pillars (balance, harmony and vision) that I am featuring in this book. En-courage-ment is to be found in one's association with one or more of these pillars. Without one of them, courage often leaves one very lonely and vulnerable to the many forms of regression and authoritarian abuse I have identified throughout this book. Outliers are outlived by those who work with other people on behalf of a balance and harmony that leads toward fulfillment of a shared vision.

9. Be kind to our language.

Avoid pronouncing the phrases everyone else does. Think up your own way of speaking, even if only to convey that thing you think everyone is saying. Make an effort to separate yourself from the internet. Read books. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 59)

With this lesson, Snyder is approaching the individualistic perspective – and its benefits – from another angle. He is encouraging us to step out of the linguistic crowd and “avoid pronouncing the phrases everyone else does”. I am reminded of Plato's metaphor of those who dwell in epistemological caves. As I noted previously in this book, we are vulnerable to or might inevitably living in a cave where the only access we have to “reality” is via shadows on the cave's walls or an even more constrained interpretation of these shadows by an “expert” observer and commentator.

It is hard to ever leave the cave. As I noted before, it is even harder to return to the cave and make anyone else believe (or even listen to) what we have learned from leaving the cave. Furthermore, as I have also mentioned, it might even be the case that we simply enter a second cave rather than somehow venturing into a wondrous new world that requires and allows no cave.

In identifying the sources of tyranny, Snyder is particularly concerned with the Internet shadows that have been cast on our mid-21st Century cave. We should instead read a good book (if these books have not been banned or burned) Perhaps we should read several books that offer perspectives that differ from the one which reinforces our prevalent beliefs. In reading these divergent books, we might be entering a new cave.

Snyder also points to the subtle way in which language molds our thinking about reality. We are vulnerable not only to visual images but also words (such as those offered by commentators regarding the cave' shadows). In a previous chapter I have pointed to some of this subtlety when noting the way in which both the semantics (meaning) and syntax (structure) of our language help to define the way in which we see and interpret reality. My Chinese colleague, Sharon Ma (2019), has even pointed out ways in which the physical/symbolic representation of an idea or

entity can influence how we view this entity – at least when this language is logographic (each word being represented by a specific symbol).

Dr. Ma has noted that the distinctive element of the symbol for woman in the Chinese language is placed inside and below the primary male element of the symbol. Does the repeatedly received visual representation of this subservience make any difference? Are visual representations similarly to be found deeply embedded in Western societies that point to and perhaps reinforce specific aspects of reality? Just as shadows on the metaphoric cave wall are visual in nature, so might the real world be viewed by us in part through narrow (and perhaps even distorted) lens that are built upon the visual representations that surround us.

10. Believe in the truth.

To abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true, then no one can criticize power, because there is no basis upon which to do so. If nothing is true, then all is spectacle. The biggest wallet pays for the most blinding lights. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 65)

The tenth lesson conveyed by Snyder points to a key controversial message I have delivered in this book. This message concerns the social construction of reality and the constructivist argument that no pathway exists that allows us to confirm any truth. Hence there is no absolute truth. What if one aligns themselves with the strict criteria offered a century ago by the so-called logical positivists (and logical empiricists) of the Vienna Circle. They proposed that any statement regarding “truth” must be verified with specific, observable (and measurable) “facts.”

Any other so-called truths, according to the positivists, are “metaphysical.” These are simply to be lumped together with fables, fairy stories – and even most theology and religious ideology. All sources of non-verifiable speculation and fantasy are to be dismissed or at least treated as something other than “scientific.” In their attempt to come up with a unified science, members of the Vienna Circle (philosophers and historians, as well as scientists) were willing to throw out the “baby” with the “bath water.” In this instance, the “baby” amounts to most sources of meaning and understanding for members of the general public. The “bath water” which is being thrown out is the long history of church-imposed foolish and often destructive doctrine.

What then do we do with Snyder’s tenth lesson? What is his definition of facts? Certainly, things get quite muddled when we enter the domain of public discourse and political dialogue. The distinction drawn by members of the Vienna Circle regarding facts and fiction would suggest that there are not many facts upon which we can rely outside the cloistered halls of science. This being the case, then as Snyder warns us: everything becomes “speculation” and “the biggest wallet pays for the most blinding lights.” Do we bring bath water back into society? Do we throw out Viennese verification criteria when entering the political realm?

In responding to this dilemma, I return to an analysis I offered in an earlier chapter. This is an analysis of epistemological stances that was offered by William Perry (1970). He identified an initial dualistic stance whereby there is a right and wrong, and a true and false in our world. This stance is classic “objectivism.” As the folks in Vienna suggest, there are ways to determine the

validity of a specific declaration regarding reality. This first stance, however, should not be assigned to those in the Vienna Circle.

It seems that dualists typically rely on sources of formal authority to determine what is valid. They don't rely on science and in recent years often dismiss all scientific evidence. By contrast, the Viennese specifically are trying to get away from the authorities (primarily the church – but also the state). They are turning instead to the scientific community for determination (“verification”) of validity. Supposedly, legitimacy in the scientific community is based on something other than formal authority and the “irrational” wielding of power – though the work of Thomas Kuhn (2012) and his historical analysis of competing paradigms would call this assumption into question.

When one moves beyond dualism in the Perry scheme, the Snyder concerns emerge. If there is no immediately valid truth, then, as Snyder indicates, there is no truth at all. Power wins the day. We can declare the victory of tyranny over freedom. We can indeed rely on the wallet to determine what is and is not true – as well as what is and is not good. As I have noted, Perry identifies this as a “multiplist” stance. Without truth there is only expedience. “Anything goes” in the world of multiplicity. Perry suggests that this is commonly found among disillusioned college Sophomores.

I would suggest that this stance might have also been prevalent during the turbulent 1960s in the United States when disbelief and cynicism saturated American culture. This stance might also be prevalent today as we confront half-truths, alternative realities, and polarized truths distributed by multiple media sources with strong political and economic agendas. Wallets are full and those owning the mid-21st Century wallets are willing to open these wallets to further and sustain one of their own pet truths. There are many befuddled citizens of the mid-21st Century who are tempting to escape down the rabbit hole and find a reality of their own liking – paid for by those with full wallets.

What then is the alternative? What does Snyder seem to be saying? We can return to Perry's third epistemological stance that he identifies as “relativism.” We might consider Snyder to be a thoughtful relativist who realizes that there are multiple, valid perspectives. Any of these perspectives might be taken when considering truth in a political or economic domain. It would be hard for Snyder to somehow believe that truth is easily found in either the political or economic domain – especially given the anxiety-fille and polarized world on VUCA-Plus in which we are now living.

I don't think this is an accurate interpretation of the tenth lesson that Snyder is sharing with us. I suspect (perhaps even believe) that Snyder is coming to us from “commitment in relativism.” Perry identified this as the fourth and highest epistemological stance. As I mentioned in the earlier chapter, this stance requires that we make a decision and take action (“commitment”) in the midst of relativism. On the one hand, we recognize that there are multiple ways in which to perceive and interpret reality. Afterall, we are living in a world that we now know offers a multitude of valid perspectives and practices. On the other hand, we must make a choice as a

responsible citizen. As Snyder is suggesting, without making a choice there is room only for tyranny. If we introduce Snyder to William Perry, then I think they would both agree that freedom requires choice. We are free to decide and act. If we don't make commitments in the midst of relativism, then we risk sacrificing our freedom.

An American poet Wallace Stevens has offered a particularly poignant summation of this challenging stance: "The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly." It is in the "exquisite truth" identified by Stevens that we find guidance and courage in the midst of multiple realities. I suspect that members of the Vienna Circle would not identify this "exquisite truth" as subject to formal verification. However, their own commitment to finding a unified science was itself a form of commitment that was founded on hope rather than scientific proof. To knowingly believe in a specific set of "facts" that are offered in a political arena seems to be essential if, as Snyder suggests, we must confront tyranny with resolve. Timothy Snyder – might I introduce you to both William Perry and Wallace Stevens. I think all three of you have much to say to one another.

11. Investigate.

Figure things out for yourself. Spend more time with long articles. Subsidize investigative journalism by subscribing to print media. Realize that some of what is on the internet is there to harm you. Learn about sites that investigate propaganda campaigns (some of which come from abroad). Take responsibility for what you communicate with others. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 72)

I would suggest that the process Snyder is proposing in this lesson dates back to the Medieval period of Western European history. The mystics of this time period initiated a process called "discernment." It seems that the most successful mystics had "antennas" that picked up messages from God and other sources of divine insight and inspiration. Their antennae, however, also picked up messages from less positive sources. Apparently, the Devil was quite skillful in getting across messages. This still seems to be the case according to the C.S. Lewis (1942/2001). The mystic of the past (and present) must discern which messages are from a divine source and which arrive from a satanic source.

The same process seems to be required of us non-mystics in the mid-21st Century – but we have neither the training nor credentials of the medieval mystics. How do we go about discerning what is divine (or at least accurate and thoughtful) and what is satanic/ What is there to ultimately be of benefit to us (and society) and what is there to harm us? Snyder offers a couple of specific suggestions.

First, we should read long articles rather than short summaries. Pick up the *Atlantic Monthly* or *New Yorker* magazine and read some of the articles. We are also supposed to support and even subsidize these notable publications. Does that mean that we at least renew our subscription? Skimming through these magazines and looking only at the *New Yorker* cartoons and short articles apparently is not sufficient. As residents in a Platonic Cave, we shouldn't just rely on those

interpreting the shadows on the wall – or those painting cartoons on tablets that we hold in our hands. We shouldn't just listen to those interpreters who place everything in short bullets and power points. The cartoons might be interesting and fun – but they are someone else's take on the world (usually based on the same shadows we are seeing).

Snyder offers a second proposal. We should embrace a fundamental recommendation made by scholars such as Gregory Bateson, Robert Kegan, Chris Argyris, Don Schon and Peter Senge. We should engage in second-order reflection. We are not only encouraged to read thoughtful articles and books – it is also important that we read articles and books that are thoughtful about the thoughtfulness of other articles and books. In other words, we are given some assistance with our discernment. These second-order sources of insight are often framed historically (expanding our temporal perspective) or are framed systemically (expanding our spatial perspectives). We are invited to explore how ideas and events connect with one another over time as well as how they contradict one another.

I would add three other tools to this short list of discernment tools. First, I turn to insights offered by two of the scholars just mentioned (Chris Argyris and Donald Schon). Specifically, during more than twenty years of remarkable collaborative work, Argyris and Schon provided a detailed analysis of the way in which we operate with two distinctive theories about human behavior and particularly about our own behavior. These two theories guide us as leader or as member of a work group, human service agency or clinic treating psychopathology.

On the one hand, we have an *Espoused Theory*. This is the theory we offer to other people when asked why we do what we do:

“Why do I confront this person who works for me by offering examples of his misconduct? I do this because, he needs to know what he is doing in order to improve his performance.”

“As a leader, it is important for me to treat all of my employees in a fair and equitable manner. That is the modern way to be a leader.”

Our espoused theories often come from the books or articles we have read or the training session we attended last week (if we can still remember what was contained on the power points). At some level, we even believe that we operate in a manner that is aligned with this theory – though we are usually aware that there are “exceptions.” We might acknowledge that our espoused theory doesn't apply when my subordinate has ignored my previous feedback, or when the organization I lead is “in crisis.”

This moves us to the second type of theory identified by Argyris and Schon. This is the *Theory-In-Use* – a theory that guides the way in which we actually operate. This is the theory that would be identified by someone who is being objective and perhaps naïve (the proverbial “person from Mars”) when observing our behavior. For our thoughtful boss who is offering feedback to his subordinate, the theory-in-use might be:

I will provide the feedback, knowing that nothing will change. However, I can feel good about myself knowing that I provided the feedback and can use this as evidence that my subordinate will never change. Even though I have offered him my candid feedback, he is too well defended to listen to what I have said and to entrenched to ever change!

The caring leader may hold a more general theory-in-use that suggests:

The way in which to get people really working is to identify the current situation as a crisis and push hard for results. I am only being tough on people because of the crisis. I will return to a more -kindly style of leadership once the crisis is over. It is important for people whom I supervise to recognize that I really do care about them. However, it is also important for them to realized that I never want anyone to take advantage of my kindness.

Someone from the outside (the Platonic cave) could probably figure out the theories-in-use of our boss, our leader or ourselves. They need only watch the boss, leader or themselves in operation for several weeks (or maybe just a couple of hours). The outside observer would note that the employee receiving feedback from the boss seems to be quite anxious when confronted by the boss. The employee doesn't seem to be paying much attention to their boss' feedback. Instead, the employee is seeking to identify the reason why their boss doesn't approve of their behavior. Or they are searching for a reason to blame someone else for poor performance. It might be even easier to identify the leader's (or our own) theory-in-use – for it is displayed in a very public place. In this case, as an observer from Mars, we note that the leader's organization seems to always be in crisis. In part, crises are rampant because the leader is always acting in an erratic and dehumanizing manner.

It is remarkable for each of us to note how “blind” we are to our theory-in-use – or how reticent we are to acknowledge that this is the theory we are actually using most of the time in our relationship with other people. We are truly living in a cave and find the prospects of leaving the cave to be daunting. Argyris and Schon have offered us valuable insights about our own behavior—though we are often unwilling to act upon these insights. It is not just that these insights are uncomfortable for us to hear and act upon. It goes much deeper than this.

Our theories-in-use are often self-fulfilling. We get what we expect to get. Our employee doesn't do anything different after we offer feedback. Our organization can legitimately be considered “in crisis.” This justifies our actions and reconfirms our theory-in-use. The processes of collusion that I mentioned earlier in this book further support this process of self-fulfillment. We know that collusion is a complex and often subtle process, typically involving all parties in a relationship or group.

I propose that there are two forms of collusion that relate directly to the matter of discernment and Snyder's thoughtful investigation. There is *Soft Collusion* resulting in members of a group making false assumptions regarding what “the other people” want to do. There is also soft collusion that involves the passive acceptance of a destructive action taken by another person – based once again on a false assumption that someone else will step forward and block this action. There is also *Hard Collusion* where people are working together and sharing beliefs (often invalid) out of fear of being ostracized or harmed. This is a form of collusion that is closely aligned with

authoritarian rule. Another kind of Hard Collusion takes place when unconscious dynamics are dominating a system. There is little awareness of what is actually occurring. Invalid assumptions are repeatedly being self-fulfilled.

One form of Soft Collusion often is engaged for laudable reasons. People want to be careful of other people's feelings. There is an effort to avoid conflict at all costs. This typically results in the kind of "silent collusion" that was manifested in the behavior of Alice's Tweedle brothers who talked about openness to disagreement but never did. Furthermore, soft collusion often means that we assume everyone agrees about the actions that should (or should not) be taken. We hope that everyone is in agreement (even if we personally disagree) and that we can all live peacefully together—even if this might mean never testing reality or checking on what other people really believe or what they want to do. No one wants to "rock the boat". The official psychological term is that people are inclined not to manage agreement in an effective manner.

A specific description of this failure to management agreement was offered many years ago by Jerry Harvey (1988), who offered a folksy (and disturbing) story of a family deciding whether or not they should travel from their small town in Texas to the nearby city of Abilene. Called the "Abilene Paradox" by Harvey, the family does decide to leave their comfortable Texan home so that they might enjoy the pleasures of big-city life in Abilene for a few hours. It begins with the father-in-law suggesting that the family drive to Abilene for dinner. His wife agrees that it is a "good idea." They ask her mother if she wants to go. Her response: "Of course I want to go. I haven't been to Abilene in a long time."

They pack up and hit the road. It is a long, hot and dirty drive. At the end of the drive, they found the food at the café to be at best mediocre. It was a quiet trip back home. When they sat back down on chairs located on their porch, there was the perfunctory comment that "it was a great trip." A surprising event then occurred. Mother stated that actually she would have preferred to stay home. "Everyone else seemed so enthusiastic, I decided that it was best to go along with everyone."

The husband then declared that he also didn't want to drive to Abilene. He was just trying to satisfy everyone else's wishes. The wife then noted that it was crazy to take the trip in all of the heat. And Who decided on this café anyway. The father-in-law chimes in: "I only suggested the trip to Abilene because everyone else seemed to be bored and in need of something different." Members of the family went silent. They were all wondering how in the world they decided to go to Abilene when everyone seemed to be content to sit on the porch and enjoy some cool refreshments. The Abilene Paradox was in full display.

I experienced the soft collusive power of the Abilene Paradox when consulting to the library staff of a major American university. In this case, it was actually a reverse Abilene: it concerned collusion in believing that something could NOT be done. Here is the story:

I was brought in because this staff was stuck in its attempts to upgrade its facilities in the face of revolutionary new digital technologies and changing databases. A senior vice president invited me to consult because she knew of my work regarding academic

cultures and assumed that the problem of being stuck in place had to do with the culture of this library staff. I found the director of the library to be very open to my intervention and to be in full accord with the Vice President about the need for disengaging the resistance in his library. The librarian identified one of the ideas that had been broached about improvement in digitally-based library functions – and that had been turned down by the staff.

I proposed that I do a set of interviews with each member of the library staff that focused on their attitudes about digitally based innovations. I went about conducting the interviews and found that virtually all staff members were supportive of innovations but indicated that they were alone in this regard. Most of the other staff members, they believed, tended to be stuck in their own ways of doing things. This was particularly true of the idea that the Library Director had identified. Most of the staff members I interviewed thought it was a good idea, but they indicated that they were pretty much alone in this regard.

After completing the interview, I made a report to the entire library staff regarding my findings. One of my major findings was that virtually everyone was supportive of finding new ways to address the digital challenge. Specifically, almost all of the people I interviewed were supportive of the supposedly unsupported idea. However, they didn't think other staff members were in favor of this idea. At this point, everyone got a little restless and then one of the usually soft-spoken librarians spoke up. He wondered if this was the usual state of affairs: "we always think that we are alone and don't speak up. Then a good idea is set aside. This is really stupid!"

This cracked open the door not just to further consideration of many ideas that had been passed over but also to the "meta-conversation" about why everyone thought that there was nothing but resistance in the room. The Library Director looked over at me and muttered "Thank you." I felt like I had been of some assistance in providing information that helped to challenge widely held assumptions among members of this library staff.

Here was a clear and powerful example of how a department made up of bright and thoughtful staff members must be (and can be) very careful in their assessment of what other members of their department believe and want. In being very considerate and in seeking to avoid any conflict, they were colluding in taking no action – much like our actors in the Abilene drama were being considerate in taking action that no one wanted to take. Soft collusion is alive and well. It can drastically distort belief and action related to matters of authoritarian rule.

There is a second kind of Soft Collusion. Even if a participant is not actively involved in the collusion, the mere acquiescence to the collusion will exacerbate the collusive process. No one observing the parade route said anything about the emperor wearing no clothing. It was only the child who spoke up. This is a key point. To simply not say anything about what is happening in front of one's own eyes is participation in the collusion, and maintenance of close-minded serenity.

In turning to Hard Collusion, we discover a dynamic that is based on widespread fear that actively involves everyone in the relationship, group or organization. The collusion is typically driven by one of four fears: (1) fear that one will be ostracized from the relationship or group for disrupting the collusion by making an inappropriate comment or violating the norms of the system, (2) fear that confronting the collusion could lead to psychological or physical retribution, (3) fear that there will be tit-for-tat (if you reveal something about me, then I will reveal something about you) or (4) fear that I might be wrong and that what I see is really more about me than about what is happening in the relationship or group. More than one fear might be swirling about, making the collusion even more powerful (and potentially destructive).

At other times, the Hard Collusion occurs because no one is really aware that the collusion is in operation. The silence can be just as destructive as a collusion that is based on fear. A conservative, status-quo climate abounds in the group. It is assumed that the collusive process is simply “the way things are done around here” or even more broadly “the way nature works.” This “natural” rationale is prevalent when the collusion involves race or gender, while the rationale regarding the way things are done around here is typically found in a setting with a very “thick” or “enmeshed” culture (where most of the behavior is dictated by a set of implicit and strongly enforced norms).

This conservative lack of awareness tends to be closely interrelated with and enhanced by the dynamic of fear. We are most likely to be driven toward unawareness with regard to that which is ultimately most fearful. Sigmund Freud (1936/1990) pointed this out many years ago in *The Problem of Anxiety*. As we have already noted when considering the challenges of VUCA-Plus, Freud suggests that we are aware of that which we are unaware—for we have to know in some manner that something exists and is very scary (anxiety-provoking) if we are to “repress” and become unaware. Anxiety signals that we should “beware.”

To point back to a well-worn example, the crowd must have been aware at some level that the emperor was naked and that commenting on the nudity could get them in trouble. They would not have been fearful of making a critical comment if they were not aware of both factors. The child wasn’t the only one to see that the emperor was naked; however, the child was the only one not to know (or at least not to assume) that it would be a bad thing to comment on the emperor’s nudity.

With this overview of soft and hard collusive processes in place, I wish to dig a bit deeper regarding this critical issue of thoughtful investigation. I will be using some psychodynamic terminology. Basically, collusion often begins to take place through a dynamic I have already introduced: *Projective Identification*. In an organizational setting, collusion occurs when members of the organization project different “objects” (images, assumptions, personality characteristics) onto their leader. In the case of the Abilene Paradox, it was important that someone “in power” (the father-in-law) offered the suggestion that a trip to Abilene might be a good idea. Our library client was similarly operating under the assumption that someone (probably the Director) was “in charge” and would have asked for everyone’s advice if he thought

it was appropriate. Perhaps, his decision to bring in a consultant sent a signal to everyone on his staff that he really did want something to change.

Projective identity begins with an assignment to other people of our own power. These are aspects of themselves (“internal objects”) that members of a group refuse to recognize. These internal objects might be their own fears, their competencies, their anger, their arrogance – and especially their personal power. They don’t accept aspects of themselves, because to do so would make them anxious. They would begin to feel personally responsible for some decision to be made or action to be taken. This would make them feel bad about themselves:

“I don’t want to be an angry woman.”

“I don’t want to be an arrogant man.”

“I don’t want to feel afraid or appear to be a fool or coward.”

“I don’t want to be the one person who could solve this problem.”)

By placing praise or blame on their leader, members of an organization can take it off themselves. Serenity can reign supreme. They don’t have to make other members of the staff feel bad or disagree with their Abilene father-in-law. Most importantly, they don’t have to challenge someone else’s racist comments or jump in to prevent a destructive act. It is the leader (or someone we think should be a leader) who is wise enough or brave enough to make the decision and take the appropriate action. Authoritarian rule is waiting off-stage.

There is a powerful, related dynamic that is taking place in the group. The leader usually has some personal reason to accept this projection. The identification is “sticky” (to use a non-psychological term) The leader is not a Velcro Don on whom nothing adheres for very long. The leader feels a bit afraid himself, and thus readily accepts assumption made by other members of the organization that he is very much afraid. The leader at some level believes that she is very competent and courageous (or would at least like to think of herself as competent and courageous). Thus, she welcomes the admiration and assumptions of competence and courage made by other members of her organization.

The father-in-law is pleased that he is meeting everyone’s wishes by suggesting a trip to Abilene that will break the boredom: obviously he is not only wise but also caring for all family members. “No wonder I am loved and followed!” The library director is pleased that there is agreement among all of her staff (even if the agreement blocks all progress). The pleasantries among her staff provide evidence that she is a good leader. This acceptance of praise and assumed mastery is particularly prevalent (and destructive) among those leaders who are narcissistic.

The collusion is further reinforced by the overall culture of the organization (or Texas family). Commonly held projections on leaders (as dissenters, visionaries, fight leaders, flight leaders, jokesters, etc.) in the organization will reinforce in discriminant projections onto anyone in the organization:

“All the executives in this organization are corrupt and self-serving!”

“He is just another one of those damned fools that they promote in this organization.”

“You know, engineers always operate this way.” “

All of those accountants are nothing more than number crunchers.”

The outcome of these culture-based (and systemic) clusters of assumptions and expectations is assigned a psychological label: *Role Suction*. Certain functions (both formal and informal) in the organization lead to certain repeated patterns that are sustained (self-fulfilling prophecies) by certain projections. Organizations that operate with very strong (enmeshed) cultures are particularly vulnerable to collusive process – as are close-knit families in Texas and elsewhere in the world.

“Actors” are assigned a specific role in the organizational “play” and cannot easily shift to a different role. Other members of the organization readily join in the play, as supporting characters, colluding with the principal actor in sustaining the play. As Kets de Vries (2003) declares in dramatic fashion, the role player (particularly the imposter) “like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, seems to weave a magic spell, and people are only too ready to follow. Imposters [and other role-suctioned actors] seem to be able to awaken otherwise dormant tendencies within us by which we can be carried away, blinded to reality.”

It is something of a vicious circle with regard to culture, collusion and projective identifications. The organization tends to attract and hold employees and leaders with certain “favorite” projections. Furthermore, there are what psychologists call secondary gains associated with collusions and projective identifications. It is not just that members of the organization feel less anxious or less responsible when they project certain characteristics onto their leaders or other role players. Something else (and often more powerful) is operating:

Something constructive (for at least some members of the organization) is gained from this collusive process: “the Boss pays more attention to me (us) because of the praise.” “It is important for Joe to always be the realist, otherwise we are likely to move in the wrong direction.” “Thank goodness, Susan brings up the issues of sexual discrimination whenever the HR Committee convenes.” The only problem with these secondary gains is that one person is often stuck operating in a specific role and assuming responsibility for some problem. Furthermore, the organization gets stuck: there is no growth on the part of organizational members and not much collective learning (let alone much genuine growth in collective intelligence).

I conclude this extended analysis of collusion by returning to insights offered by Gregory Bateson (2000) regarding *Schismogenesis*. According to Bateson, two systems (organizations, tribes, nations) tend to relate to one another in a manner that drives the two systems further apart from one another or that leads to escalation of similar activities in both systems. As I have noted, complementary schismogenesis is engaged when one system goes in one direction while the other system goes in the opposite direction. For instance, as one tribe becomes more belligerent and active, the other tribe becomes more passive and withdrawn. We see this occurring in many organizations, with the leader becoming more assertive and his employees becoming more

compliant. Both parties are colluding in making the leader's assertiveness justifiable and acceptable. This complementary form of collusion tends to be long-lasting, and it is deeply embedded, as a rule, in the culture of an organization.

By contrast, symmetrical schismogenesis occurs when one system exhibits higher levels of a specific behavior while the other system will try to match this level. For instance, if one nation builds more rockets, then the rival nation will also have to build more rockets – the classic arms race. In an organizational setting, this symmetrical dynamic operates when both the leader and the employees tend to become more assertive (or more passively aggressive).

This symmetrical process of collusion is often what we mean by the “vicious circle.” It is characterized by exponential growth (the “power law” of contemporary chaos and complexity theorists) and will lead quickly to explosion and collapse. We typically don't find symmetrical collusion to be long-lasting in organizations. Rather, we are likely to witness escalation, collapse and then a renewal of the symmetrical collusion with new parties being invited to engage in this very dangerous and destructive dance of symmetrical collusion. Under such conditions, we are likely to find Snyder's eleventh lesson had to deploy. Under these investigative conditions, VUCA-Plus is in full force. The condition in which we find ourselves and upon which we base our actions is “real” – but we are not being “realistic” (or honest) about our own complicity in bringing about these conditions. We are personally and collectively amplified in our beliefs and actions by symmetrical schismogenesis. Furthermore, we rarely acknowledging the contributions to the escalating collusion being made by those with whom we are working

There is yet another way in which collusion operates. I return to Argyris and Schon's theory-in-use. We are unaware of our own theory-in-use because everyone is colluding to ensure that honest appraisals are not issued. No one is telling us what is really occurring. A leader's colleagues rarely provide much discernment. There is no “person from Mars.” If there is this neutral observer, they don't want to confront us with the “bad news”. They have their own theory-in-use about us:

“This person won't listen to what I have said and will never change.”

“It is too dangerous to tell the truth!”

We end up looking a lot like the subordinate we identified earlier who never seems to change. Conversely, the theory-in-use of the neutral observer might concern their own credibility or neutrality:

“I might not be seeing what is really happening” or

“I have too much at stake in viewing this situation to be in any way objective.” or

“I shouldn't say anything at this point because I might be wrong” or

“I might be biased.”

The resulting decision takes place in the observer's mind:

“I will remain quiet, even if asked what I have observed.”

Thus, any conversation about theories-in-use is avoided. The collusion is being played out in a successful manner. There can't even be a mention of the collusion that is taking place:

“We are doing fine, thank you.”

“There is remarkable good will and honesty in this group.”

“Please don't bring in your harmful suspicions. Leave your psychological jargon at the front door and join us in a constructive conversation.”

Argyris and Schon identify this as a “self-sealing” process. It ensures that theories-in-use are never identified. Furthermore, these theories are non-discussable. We can't talk about them or don't see any reason to talk about that which is “obvious.” We can't even talk about why we can't talk about these theories. We can add together the “self-fulfilling” and “self-sealing” dynamics inherent in our theories-in-use. When we do so, we see how powerful these theories can be and how resistant they are either to inspection or change. We continue to live comfortably with our espoused theories and slam the door shut on our theories in use.

Argyris and Schon have sought to counter the self-fulfilling and self-sealing processes by not only noting how they operate (as processes devised by Satan), but also how we can be more aligned with processes that are a bit more divine in nature. They have described a process that makes use of what they call the “left and right columns.” Specific statements are posted regarding the behavior observed in an interaction (right column) and the assumptions, beliefs, and related matters that reside behind these behaviors (left column).

Along with their student, Peter Senge, Argyris and Schon identify a “ladder of inference” that should be a guide to the discernment of one's own assumptions and biases (often based on the often-devilish stereotypes and falsehoods conveyed and reinforced by their community and society). Derived originally from the exceptional wisdom of Gregory Bateson, the second order reflection and learning that arises from the left/right column and ladder of inference discernment processes can help one to achieve Snyder's investigative goals.

A second tool is found in the work of scholars who often lived next door to Argyris and Schon in Cambridge Massachusetts. These are the behavioral economists who I have often referenced in this book. This tool is the process of slow thinking (as opposed to fast thinking) that is articulated by Daniel Kahneman (2011). Slow thinking is needed in particular when one is seeking to discern the validity of specific information. By contrast, fast thinking is engaged when we want to move quickly to decisions and actions – and when we rely on such heuristic processes as priming and framing.

Priming occurs when we are influenced inordinately (and often unconsciously) by recent events. Framing occurs when we react very differently to the same information depending on how it is presented. For example, when fast thinking is engaged we will respond quite differently when a problem or decision is presented in a positive manner that focuses on gain rather than in a

negative way that implies loss. Slow thinking requires that we wait until all of the information is received before deciding. We look for alternative framing of a specific condition before making any decisions. Snyder's recommendation regarding long articles and articles about articles seems relevant here.

While there are numerous other heuristic modes of fast thinking that Kahneman and other behavioral economists have identified, I wish to focus on only one—for it is likely to be particularly relevant with regard to the preservation of democracy. This heuristic concerns loss and gain. The fear of loss is a much more compelling voice than any voice offering the incentive of gain. Humans tend to hate losses much more than they are excited about gaining the same thing. With regard to the voices found in the domain of politics and public policy, this prevalent fear of loss shows up in the politics of negativity.

We base our fast-thinking votes on negative advertising and what we think will be lost if the other party wins. We want someone who will protect us and help us hold on to everything that we have somehow gained in our life. Tyrants often are willing to offer this assurance. We are often willing to sacrifice democracy when told by the Satanic voice that all could be lost if we choose freedom. Discernment requires that we turn away from this temptation. We are encouraged to recognize the potential gains that could accrue if we have the freedom (and take on the responsibility) to make our own choices and take responsibility for taking action based on these choices.

Finally, I return to the matter of Noise and Bias that was introduced by Kahneman and his colleagues several years ago (Kahneman, Sibony and Susteiu, 2021) This important discernment between Noise and Bias shows up in many arenas. In my own field of psychology, noise is considered to be statistical variance in the results obtained from a psychological experiment. The focus of most studies typically is on the mean (average) of the scores obtained. Variance is an unwanted visitor to the experiment and does nothing more than reduce the level of significance found in the comparison between experimental groups. As psychologists, we focus on the bullseye (mean) not the distribution of results.

We often find that the pattern of variation in results obtained is much more interesting than the mean. I am in a minority, for those with a more behavioral bent (and an alliance with the scientific culture) tend to view "error variance" as nothing more than evidence of sloppy research, given that everything is determined by invariant external stimulus properties (situations/settings) and rewards rather by messy internal determinants such as personality or moment-to-moment chaotic judgements. These variances in human behavior (and the human psyche) are much more often a focus in the humanities—being portrayed in novels, portrait renderings and ballets. I would suggest that the variances are also frequently found in the domain of public life and politics. It is appropriate to return to variance when following Snyder's recommendation regarding investigation. Variance requires slow thinking and often involves swimming against the tide. However, it is where there is disagreement that some modicum of truth can be found. It is at moments and points of disagreement that the pull of collusion can be most often thwarted.

Conclusions

I propose that any comprehensive view of a human experience or any attempt to engage in systemic thinking will produce noise. As I noted previously, Miller and Page (2007) proposed that complex systems contain many interconnected parts. These systems are not just made up of many parts, as are complicated systems. The interconnectivity produces noise and unpredictability (outcomes that traditional scientists hate). We only get simplicity and consistency when we erect a silo and enter the wonderland of Serenity. In doing so we are vulnerable to the bias identified by Kahneman, Sibony and Sustein. I assume that Scott Page (2011) would suggest that we reduce bias with a diversity of perspectives—and this diversity inevitably produces noise. It is global diversity that has helped to challenge the biases inherent in the grand narrative offered by Western societies.

Each of us must come to grips with the judgmental challenges of bias and noise. This relates directly to what Snyder is urging with regard to investigation. Where are we most vulnerable—where is the voice of Satan likely to be most compelling? Satan can offer consistent perspectives and advocate for consistent practices. Satan can offer Serenity. However, we are open to profound biases when listening to Satan. We could do damage when listening to the opinions and following advice that comes from the wonderland of Serenti. In this compelling bias, we find the seeds of authoritarianism and the death of democracy.

Conversely, we could hear more angelic voices that encourage us to open up when encountering new information. Diverse perspectives and multiple bits of advice are offered. This “noisy” voice is likely to lack formal “credibility”. It is easily dismissed in a collusive turn to the more easily accepted “truths” of Serenity. Few people are willing to follow this angel’s suggestions. We find this challenge of inconsistency and diversity of opinion to be operating about those who offer “expert” advice regarding viruses, wars on poverty and drugs, and the preservation of democracy. Put simply, “noisy” experts are in trouble—even though they might have the best hold on contemporary reality. This is a very difficult condition embedded in the distinction to be drawn between BIAS and NOISE.

Chapter Ten

Confronting Tyranny II: Engagement and Learning

I turn in this chapter to the next six lessons that Timothy Snyder has shared with us in our efforts to confront tyranny. He is suggesting ways in which we most effectively engage with other people and ways in which we expand our own domain of learning. It is through both reflection and action that we are best positioned to overcome the lure and power of induced ignorance and isolation – and the concurrent sense of powerlessness and hopelessness.

12. Make eye contact and small talk.

This is not just polite. It is part of being a citizen and a responsible member of society. It is also a way to stay in touch with your surroundings, break down social barriers, and understand whom you should and should not trust. If we enter a culture of denunciation, you will want to know the psychological landscape of your daily life. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 81)

I suspect that Snyder is offering this twelfth lesson in large part because those of us living in a society that is highly individualistic requires some “instruction” regarding how to stay in touch with our interpersonal “surroundings.” Many of us lack the social wisdom to “break social barriers.” We lack the social insight to determine where “trust” should be invested. Most importantly, we don’t know how to help one another (living in an individualistic society) to become more socially “intelligence.” It would seem appropriate that Snyder is assisted by those like Daniel Goleman (1995) who are providing training in the domain of “emotional intelligence” – or are just trying to teach us a few “people skills (Bolton, 1986)

Staying in touch with our social surroundings seems to be a matter of motivation as well as social intelligence and people skills. We often don’t seem to want meaningful and sustained relationships with many other people. Even if we are extroverted, the friendly relationships we form are often instrumental and transactional (Bergquist, 2024a). As introverts, we “know” that we have to appear “outgoing” and become proficient in putting on a mask (persona) that protects us from genuine engagements.

Sustained, genuine relationships might be particularly challenging during an era of not only increasing reliance on digital communication (which can be quite distancing), but also the threat of new viruses. We find in societies such as Japan that once were quick collectivist that young people are sheltering themselves in their bedrooms and even disguising themselves (with artificial avatars) when interacting with other people on the Internet. And along comes Artificial Intelligence. All of this is captured in a term: *Human Embedded Technologies* (Bergquist, 2022; Weitz and Bergquist, 2024)

It seems that many of us are inclined to interact intimately with machines and technology rather than other people. Are machines and AI somehow safer than other people? Apparently, machines win out in Japan. It has become difficult to incentivize young Japanese men to go out into the world and date eligible Japanese women. We find a similar reluctance on the part of many young men and women in the United States. This reluctance might be portrayed in a more dramatic fashion in Japan precisely because this was a highly collectivistic society only a short while ago. The Japanese certainly have been both blessed and cursed with the domination of new technologies in their country.

The breaking of social barriers returns us once again to the pervasive polarization that exists in many mid-21st Century societies. It is no longer just a matter of race, ethnicity or social/economic level erecting a barrier between various populations in many societies. It is now also a matter of barriers being formed on the basis of many other distinctions such as lifestyle, sexual orientation, cultural differences—and political preferences. I'm sure these barriers have always been there. However, today they seem to be more prominent.

Furthermore, all of these barriers are reinforced by the polarized media that encourages us to “silo” our primary sources of information regarding those “other” people as well as our “own” people. A media-based line is being drawn that prevents us from really getting to know other people. In the past we might have been blocked from interaction with (and appreciation of) other people by geographic distances (“I don't live in your neighborhood”). Today, the digital revolution has mostly eliminated this logistical barrier. A pernicious barrier has replaced it. The new barrier is not so easily overturned. It is based on misinformation, filtered information and distorted images of those “other” people (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024) We are truly living in different Platonic caves and seem to have little interest in visiting the other cave(s). We could easily click a button on our remote or on our computer that takes us to an alien site on the Internet. But we fail to do so.

I have a bit of push back when it comes to Snyder's attention to the matter of trust. My pushback concerns a distinction I have offered elsewhere regarding the multiple dimensions of what we often simply identify as “trust. With two colleagues.” (Bergquist, Betwee and Meuel, 1995), I have proposed that trust might relate to the competency of other people. However, it might also relate to the level of trust we have in the intentions of these other people. A third form of trust concerns our confidence that the other person clearer understands us and our motivations. I have often used the example of something that was popular in human relations training programs several decades ago. This is an exercise known as the “trust fall.” We are standing on a platform and asked to fall backwards into the arms of several people standing beside the platform. We are to “trust” that these other people will catch us and prevent us from harming ourselves.

The situation can be quite different depending on the people waiting there to catch us. It is a matter of competence if these people are very weak, elderly or quite young. A child might care deeply about my welfare yet is unable to catch me. We would both be wounded if I fell backwards. On the other hand, there might be six very strong people waiting to catch me.

However, I have insulted them, and they would care less about my welfare. I could fall backwards, and they might laugh as I fall unhindered to the ground. There is a third possible scenario. The people waiting to catch me come from a very different culture. They don't really comprehend the nature of this exercise and wonder why people in my society enjoy falling off platforms so that they might injure themselves. They might very graciously pick me up from the ground and ask me if I would like to fall off the platform once again.

I would propose that the matter of distinguishing between competence, intentions and understanding is critical when considering the impact of trust on the initiation and maintenance of tyranny. Important distinctions must be drawn between these three forms of trust. An evil tyrant, for instance, might be less of a threat if they are not competent and can't get their agenda engaged. It might be a matter, once again, of emotional intelligence and interpersonal competence. Some tyrants might not know how to be supportive of people under their rule. Their attention is directed elsewhere, and they simply fail to build a competent plan for addressing the real needs of their people. It might instead (or also) be a matter of intentions. The tyrant might simply not care about the welfare of people under their rule – or they might actually wish for the injury or even destruction of these people.

What about the evil tyrant who is highly competent? I suspect these are the autocrats about which Snyder (and all of us for that matter) fear most. Conversely, a benevolent autocrat with the best of intentions might be able to engage quite competently in the improvement of their society. Are these well-intended autocrats any more desirable than either the incompetent, evil tyrant or the evil tyrant who is highly competent? These questions can help us refine Snyder's request that we seek to understand (and identify) who we should and should not trust.

There is also the matter of inter-cultural understanding. We might simply fail to understand or appreciate the way in which people in other societies approach authoritarian rule and order the priorities in their life. Democratic rule and "true freedom" as I define these important concepts in this book simply might not align with the perspectives and practices of people in other societies. They might not find this book (or others of this ilk) relevant or even coherent given their own lenses. These lenses have been crafted by past experiences in their own life and by what they have been "carefully taught" (to borrow a line from Rogers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*). The road to tyranny is paved with the stones of all three forms of mistrust or (more often) misplaced trust.

Putting all of this together, I would add to Snyder's request by identifying the desired outcomes of becoming more socially skillful. We should do so on behalf of what Ken and Mary Gergen (2004) identify as engagement in "constructive dialogue." They proclaim that "truth is only found within community" (2004, p. 19). More specifically, they would suggest that in trusting relationships: "constructivism favors a replacement of the individual as the source of meaning with the relationship." (Gergen and Gergen, 2004, p. 25)

Even more to the point, truth is found in dialogue – and disagreement. The type of contingency thinking and perspective to be found in our respect for and eagerness to learn from the "other" –

or as noted by Ken and Mary Gergen (2004, p. 21): “one is invited into a posture of curiosity and respect for others.” When all three forms of trust are established then there is the opportunity for moments of democratic engagements to occur. Furthermore, according to the Gergens (2004, p. 21) this type of trust-based interaction

is . . . likely to favor forms of dialogue out of which new realities and values might emerge. The challenge is not to locate “the one best way.” But to create the kinds of relationships in which we can collaboratively build our future.

We are not confined to one way of seeing and acting in the world. We are not confined to one of the Platonic caves I identified earlier in this book, because the relationship and the discourse is itself reality. This is not just a reflection of reality. Consequently, social intelligence and the kind of relationships that Snyder would like us to form, become a powerful (even critical) process). Trust becomes the antidote to tyranny during these moment-to-moment relationships.

13. Practice corporeal politics.

Power wants your body softening in your chair and your emotions dissipating on the screen. Get outside. Put your body in unfamiliar places with unfamiliar people. Make new friends and march with them. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 83)

While this thirteenth lesson being taught by Snyder speaks on the surface to the marvels of outdoor life and making new friends – an enlightened version of positive thinking – it also speaks to the very important issue of confronting tyranny by embracing diversity. Snyder goes a step further. His thirteenth lesson speaks to one of the major themes I have introduced in this book. This theme concerns identifying harmony of interests within a society and establishing an expanded and enduring communality of concerns among those living in this specific society. I wish to expand on Snyder’s lesson by considering the interdependence of diversity and harmony – and the critical role they both play in a successful confrontation of social and cultural differences.

First, I want to re-introduce my perspective on diversity. Previously in this book, I noted that diversity relates to the role played by boundaries in any viable system. It is when we cross a boundary and leave one system to enter another one that we encounter diversity. We have already witnessed this dynamic when considering the exit of a Platonic cave. A new world is encountered. As Snyder suggests, it is when we meet new friends, go “outside” and put our body in unfamiliar places that we counter the softening of resolve that occurs when we just sit in our usual comfortable chair.

As experts in ecological systems tell us, it is at the boundaries between systems that there is to be found the most abundant life. Much of the life on our planet, for instance, is to be found at the boundary between sea and land. Environmental richness – the diversity of species – exists where one system collides with another. One of my guides in this book, Scott Page, writes extensively about benefits derived from diversity. According to Page (2011), diversity enhances the robustness of complex systems, drives innovation and productivity. Furthermore, diversity

makes any system more interesting and absorbs large scale events that would otherwise have a profound impact on the functioning of an ecological system.

Perhaps most importantly, diversity in any system increases complexity. This is a real challenge for anyone living in a diverse system—for complexity produces the other conditions of VVUVA-Plus (especially ambiguity). Under these conditions we are likely to experience bewilderment, anxiety and sheer exhaustion. As I have frequently reiterated, it is not only because complex (and diverse) systems contain many moving parts (as a complicated system). It is also because these moving parts are all interconnected (Miller and Page, 2007). When any one of the parts moves (changes), then all other parts of the system have to change. That's what makes complex systems so "tippy" (unstable) and unpredictable. One thing gets messed up and the ramifications are widespread. Thus, a diversity-rich society and a state of mind that is filled with diversity tends to offer great opportunities as well as many challenges. Democracies really are quite messy and potentially splendid.

Frans Johansson (2004, 2006) writes about these dynamic opportunities and challenges as they relate to the fostering of creativity specifically within organizations. Johansson focuses on what he calls the Medici Effect. This effect concerns the "Intersections" between different disciplines and cultures—what Thomas Kuhn (2012) might consider the Intersections between differing paradigms. It is at the Intersection that diverse ideas and perspectives create new ideas and perspectives—even new paradigms. Johansson harkens back to the "explosion of remarkable ideas" during the reign of the Medici family in Florence during the Italian Renaissance. "If we can just reach an intersection of disciplines or cultures," according to Johansson, "we will have a greater change of innovating, simply because there are so many unusual ideas to go around." (Johansson, 2004, p. 20)

Like Florence of the 14th and 15th Centuries, viable mid-21st Century societies are filled with Intersections that create opportunities for the generation of new ideas, as well as the challenge of choice and potential diffusion of power and control. Recently, Gal Beckerman (2022) has written about the appearance of these dynamic intersections in the modest formation of many radical groups. These groups have unexpectedly created new concepts and tools that are world-changing—ranging from the early 20th Century right of women to vote to the more contemporary emergence of "radical" ideas concerning discriminatory acts against minorities (such as "Black Lives Matter").

The 21st Century social media ecosystem (based on digital communication networks) that is described by Beckerman does not differ in many respects from that offered by Johansson as he brought the Medici Effect into contemporary life. As many autocrats today are finding, there are mixed blessings in engaging this ecosystem for it can allow these autocrats to centralize, control and distort information. However, this ecosystem can also create the opportunity for the generation of radical ideas—as Beckerman suggests.

In a prescient book written about a decade ago, Moisés Naim (2013) writes about the impact of diversity and complexity on the allocation and application of power. We find that traditional

autocratic societies rely on centralized sources of power. Aided by the large, centralized power located in loyal government, churches, and corporations, the tyrant seeks to wield overarching and dominating power. However, if there is abundant diversity in the tyrant's society, then this autocrat is no longer able to command full authority. In large part this is because many sources and kinds of power are now present. The tyrant finds themselves living in a world that is diverse with regard to disciplines and cultures. It is also diverse with regard to power, leading to what Naim calls the "end of power." The tyranny will itself end if we are willing, as Snyder suggests, to get up out of our chairs and venture outside and across boundaries.

This leads me back several centuries to the second theme: finding harmony of interests and building an expanded communality of concerns within a society. As Anonymous (the author of the treatise on the Harmony of Interests) noted, the leaders of any viable, non-autocratic society should "put not too many eggs in one basket." (Anonymous, 1849, vol II, p. 58). A diversified basket requires collaboration among entities within a society. To bring about this diversification, Anonymous focuses on societal structures that are themselves quite diverse. This is a critical insight that I shared earlier in this book. These structures range from transportation systems and public policies that influence migration patterns to quality of land for raising crops and quality of machinery for producing goods.

Actually, this is a rather "radical" idea. It is easy to assume that harmony of interests is most likely to be found in a homogeneous community. Certainly, this is the case among many men and women who are members of a dominant socio-economic/racial/cultural class. There is a dominant fear among many of these citizens of 21st Century societies that large scale immigration will shatter the apparent harmony of interests that they believe exists in their own society (or at least the sector of their society where they dwell). Anonymous seems to believe that this homogenous harmony of interest with all the eggs in one basket is quite fragile. An enduring harmony of interests requires diversification of enterprise—and this diversification ultimately requires diversity of those who are sitting at the table where decisions are made.

If Anonymous is accurate in his/her assessment, then Snyder would also seem to be correct in suggesting that we get out of our comfortable chair. Departure from the comfortable chair allows for the appearance of a harmony of diverse interests. We are led to an expanded *Communality of Shared Concerns*. A viable, sustained harmony is to be found at a table that incorporates diverse concerns. Participants find a set of shared values and principles that can govern their behavior and the nature of their interaction.

I would also suggest that this expanded community resides in the type of "constructive dialogue" that is recommended by Gergen and Gergen (2004). I have often cited Ken and Mary Gergen in this book and have suggested that Snyder indirectly identified the benefit of constructive dialogue in Lesson Twelve. Perhaps a compelling and shared image of the future is also an important ingredient to be found in any Harmony of Interests. I will soon offer ways in this book that lead to this union.

14. Establish a private life.

Nastier rulers will use what they know about you to push you around. Scrub your computer of malware on a regular basis. Remember that email is skywriting. Consider using alternative forms of the internet, or simply using it less. Have personal exchanges in person. For the same reason, resolve any legal trouble. Tyrants seek the hook on which to hang you. Try not to have hooks. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 87)

The tension between collectivism and individualism rears its ugly, contentious head every time we open up our digital device and enter the world of the Internet. Snyder is correct in pointing out the powerful ways in which content on the Internet—as well as personal emails and text messages we receive—impact our lives. They even impact the ways in which we receive, process and act on information we are receiving from the outside world.

While we usually focus on how humans have impacted technologies, I have reversed this focus and look at the way in which technologies—and particularly Internet-based digital technologies—have intimately embedded themselves in the human psyche (Bergquist, 2022; Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). No doubt (as Snyder suggests) these embedded technologist powerfully and often unconsciously, influence the way in which we view (and tolerate) various forms of authority.

Let me back off a bit and offer a bit of background regarding human-embedded technologies. In recent years, there has been a revolution in the presence of technologies inside or closely associated with human beings and their immediate environment. This is sometimes labeled “Intimate technology.” I suggest that this phrase can be misleading. I would prefer to label this major shift in the human-technology interface as “*technology embedment*.” We might even want to dust off an old word: “*propinquity*” I would use this word in describing the special (and diverse) relationships that now exist and will increasingly exist between humans and technology. We are facing technological propinquity that will only become more pervasive and influential with the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Most importantly, there are many profound implications associated with this propinquity. These implications, in turn, point to the need for not only greater understanding of this propinquity but also greater capacity to work effectively alongside this AI-enhanced technological propinquity. This working knowledge is especially important if we are to confront tyranny in a successful manner.

What are we talking about here? These technologies range from health-related measurements to sources of streaming information to be found in headsets. For instances, heart rate can be measured on a device that is taped to the body for a one-month period of time. Sleep patterns can now be monitored with a device that is taken home and strapped to one’s head at night. These technologies are serving even more importantly as ways to enhance hearing (hearing aids adjusted via links to a mobile device) and ways to save lives (digitally monitored heart values).

Beyond the matter of health, we can turn to devices that continuously supply information to us visually while we are perceiving and navigating through the world.

The tools of human-embedded technologies are readily available in most mid-21st Century societies. Hand-held devices are nearly universal. They provide us with any information we need. GPS systems guide us through the city streets and countryside. Do we even remember the days when we looked at maps? Now envisioned (but soon accessible) devices that will meet many of our emotional as well as cognitive needs. They will track all of our decisions and preferences-- as capture in the movie: "Her." Human embedded technologies can translate our spoken word into written word and 'improve' our communication via written words (via AI). We soon might even be able to translate our thoughts into words. Our thoughts will suddenly be available via our technologies. We can be assisted by an internal secretary and transcriber

From DNA research and the technologies arising from this research, we now have access to a large amount of information about our ancestors and even the diseases we are likely to encounter in our lives. From neurobiological research we now have access to a large amount of information about how our brain works, how we react to traumatizing events, and how what we eat impacts on how we think, feel and behave. From high-storage watches to chips embedded in our skin and clothing, we are entering a world of remarkable propinquity between person and device.

While there are many implications, I wish to focus on just four. Each of these relates directly to the issue of tyranny: (1) use of the information received, (2) privacy of the information we receive or share about ourselves, (3) blurring of lines between reality and fantasy, and (4) fundamental nature of consciousness. I will use term "technological propinquity" as shorthand for the slightly longer phrase "technologies embedded in humans."

The first and most obvious questions is: how do we go about processing all the information we are receiving about ourselves and our world? We already know more about our body and mind than ever before. We will also soon learn more about our buying habits, our political preferences, and other propensities in our daily journey through life. The new world of propinquity requires a tolerance of ambiguity along with comfort regarding the new technologies. Most of us can no longer live comfortably as "techno-peasants" living in a techno-feudal society ([Varoufakis, 2024](#)).

There was a major field of research that flourished in psychology over several decades known as "human factors." It concerned (among other things) the way in which people (such as pilots) gained access to and made effective use of complex information (such as altitude, speed and pitch). This human factor field is even more important today as we address the challenge of making decisions based on even more complex information as we navigate our own "airborne" VUCA-Plus journey. We are entering the world of "*advanced human factors*." One set of these factors is associated with the way in which we process information about public policy and governance.

We need to be able to think critically. We must engage in what Daniel Kahneman has referred to as "slow thinking." We must engage high levels of cognition and affection – what Robert Kegan, Chris Argyris and Donal Schon have referred to as higher-order learning. We must perform at

these “advanced” levels if we are to avoid the digitally based “hooks” about which Snyder warns us in this fourteenth lesson. The Internet is a highly collective enterprise; however, it is often controlled by a few powerful and controlling autocrats who deploy powerful and addictive algorithms that influence (perhaps even determine) our thinking and feeling. As Snyder notes, we preserve our “private life” by unhooking (at least occasionally) from the Internet and its collective conspiracies.

Closely related to the issue of making use of the information we receive about ourselves is the accessibility of this information to other people. In many ways, we are more “naked” today than we have ever been—since Adam and Eve wandered through their garden. We now enjoy the services of “Alexa” who waits for requests from us to provide information. However, we also know that Alexa might be providing our requests and related information to other people and institutions. We own computer-aided television sets that provide us with easy access to many channels of information, but also know (or at least suspect) that this television set is monitoring our own actions at home. And, of course, we are aware of the extensive information being collected by outside agencies from our hand-held devices and computers. The monitoring does not stop at the door of some entertainment enterprise. It also is to be found in the digital rooms of politicians, policy makers—and tyrants.

What do we do about this matter? It is a trade-off between access to information from outside our self and other people’s access to information from inside ourselves. This challenge is not just about law, ethics and tyranny. It is also about what we want to disclose and what we want to keep private. It is about the multiplicity of selves we project onto and into the world—what our guide, Kenneth Gergen (2000/1991), called our “*saturated self*”. Who are we and what does this mean for other people in the world with whom we wish to (or must) associate? Do we just create an avatar of ourselves for other people to see in a digital world? Is there such a thing any more as a true and authentic self who is known intimately by a few people—often set as a limit of about 150 people (Gladwell, 2002)? There are many psychological challenges associated with this management of the private and public self. As I have noted throughout this book, these challenges relate directly to our search for and attempts to manage true freedom.

There is a third matter. It is the related challenge of somehow discerning between reality and image-production (“virtual reality”). How we integrate the two when we are wandering through the world receiving both kinds of information at the same time. This discernment is particularly important when we enter the realm of politics, governance and authority. Young people around the world are already finding it interesting (and safe) to date an avatar (a person who is able to digitally transform themselves). They never have to actually meet their “date”. And what do we do about the building of relationships with a “machine” that knows more about what we want than anyone with whom we are affiliating. As in the movie (“Her”) there might be more to gain from an intimate relationship with a machine than from an intimate relationship with a living person.

There is a perspective in psychodynamic psychology known as “object relations theory.” This theory might be taking on new relevance as related to the formation of relationships with technological “objects” (rather than real or fantasized people). One of the dimensions of psychology that relates closely to this blurring of lines concerns the locus of control—a topic I have addressed at several other points in this book. We hope to control at least certain aspects of our life (a predisposition toward an internal locus of control) but know that much of the world around us remains out of our control (a recognition of external locus of control).

We no longer live in a small village where we know everyone and have some say about what is happening in this village. We might not have had much control over the weather (hence must have been required to play nice with the gods). However, we could at least influence our neighbors. Now, with little control over many matters in our lives, we find ourselves pulled toward a world of fantasy that we can control. Are the digital games we (or at least our children) play becoming more relevant than the real world in which we live? Do we build communities in a fantastical world because we can’t build communities in the world we actually inhabit? Is the wonderland of Serenity now not only appealing but readily available via the human embedded technologies?

What do we do about this pull toward fantasy and about intimate relationships with machines rather than people? How do we deal with a real world that seems to be beyond our control – or even our influence? How do we avoid the lure of escaping down a rabbit hole to find Serenity? Most importantly, where is a modicum of control to be found in our relationship with formal authority? Do we substitute our fantasies about this authority for any real attempt to exert control? Are Bion’s assumptions about dependency, fight/flight and pairing—that I have introduced at several points in this book—easily translated into fantasy about authority in our new digital world?

There is a fourth challenge related to technological propinquities. And this challenge is a real dilly! Our fundamental assumptions about not just reality but also human consciousness might be on the chopping block. Most of Western (and Eastern) philosophy has always assumed that there is some distinctive way in which we, as *homo sapiens*, can reflect on our own thoughts and experiences. Human consciousness was assumed to be a unique (or at least highly developed) feature of human capacity. It was a process that was assumed to reside within each of us rather than being shared by the entire community.

While there are “intersubjectivity” perspectives in psychology and philosophy that suggest consciousness exists in the space (relationship) between two or more people, it was still a matter of human consciousness – not the consciousness of some machine. This might be changing. We might now be reasoning, deciding and reflecting with the aid of very high-powered machines and the tools of AI. We are about to not only leave the driving to the machine (self-driving cars), but also leave some (or much) of our thinking and reasoning to AI. The private life of which Snyder writes in lesson fourteen, might be replaced by a digital life that can readily be controlled by an outside source (such as a tyrant).

The human brain is much more complex and refined than any computer that now exists (or probably will exist in the near future). However, there are still some domains where we would like some assistance from our technologies. This assistance could end up capturing some of the work for which we might not want assistance – such as our sense of self (our private life) and our capacity to reason, reflect and make decisions (as citizens in a democracy). If some form of artificial intelligence is telling us what ingredients appeal to our taste buds and what food contains these ingredients, then we don't really have to become discerning in our purchases at the supermarket (or in ordering food on-line). One little bit of consciousness might be lost when our choice of food is mediated by a machine. Perhaps a larger part of consciousness can then be chipped off by someone in formal (or informal) authority. A tyrant?

This notion about lost consciousness is closely related to the other three challenges mentioned herein. If we are overwhelmed with information, if our boundaries between private and public are invaded, and if we are having a hard time discriminating between reality and fantasy (often preferring the latter), then we might be losing our sense of self and abandoning the hard work of making choices and reflecting on our own actions. We might be losing our unique consciousness (individual or collective). What are the psychological implications of this loss with regard to confrontation with tyranny? It might be critical to the preservation of democracy and true freedom that we identify and take action regarding these implications. Once again, we might, as Snyder suggests, have to get out of our comfortable chair.

15. Contribute to good causes.

Be active in organizations, political or not, that express your own view of life. Pick a charity or two and set up autopay. Then you will have made a free choice that supports civil society and helps others to do good. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 92)

In offering this fifteenth lesson, Timothy Snyder is yanking the comfortable chair out from under us. He is pushing our contribution to good causes. This lesson is directly related to the harmony of interest theme which is fundamental to our exploration of true freedom. There are several important points that Snyder is making in this brief lesson that can help us expand on the 19th Century advocacy of this harmony.

First, Snyder is encouraging us to align ourselves with an organization that expresses our own personal “view of life.” He is suggesting that individualism can live with collectivism. We discover what is important to us and then find other people and structures (organizations) that support and advance what we value. Having set the stage for each of us to act upon our view of life, Snyder has posed an important question: what is this view and how is it derived?

There are essentially three ways in which we acquire and maintain a view of life (and attendant life values). First, and most commonly, this view and attendant values are taught to us when we are young. They are part of the socialization process to which we are all attuned. To reiterate what Lieutenant Cable observes (sings) in the musical *South Pacific* “we’ve got to be carefully taught.” This process is deeply embedded in not just the instructional (cognitive) processes of

socialization, but also the physiological (affective) processes. With the oxytocin surging through our bodies, we are seeking to bond and be nurtured as young members of a community. This hormone-based motivation leaves us fully attuned to the messages conveyed by those people in our life who are doing the nurturing and with whom we wish to bond. This is part of a process called *Limbic Resonance* (Lewis, Amini and Lannon, 2000) The result of this resonance is the *Inculcation* of life views and values.

The second way in which life views and values are installed is much less benign and is often driven not by hormones that bond—but instead by hormones (such as testosterone) that encourage assertion and conquest. Our guide, Riane Eisler (1995), aligned the first of these hormone-based motives (bonding) with the forementioned image of a chalice. The second of these hormone-based motives is aligned with the image of a blade. In essence, this second blade-enforced mode of installation is *Coercion*. We are forced to adopt (at least superficially) a point of view and set of values that someone else who has power over us demands that we embrace. This obviously is the primary way in which authoritarian rule operates and is precisely what Timothy Snyder wants us to combat—or at least avoid. The blade might be wielded in a quite swift and strong manner. However, it is not necessarily a tool for sustained and fully embraced commitment to an imposed view or value.

What then does occur when views and values are imposed? We might declare: “you may get me to dance, but you can’t get me to enjoy the dance. And I will stop dancing when you are not around!” However, what happens when the autocrat is not only making us dance but also is calling the tune? In other words what happens when everything around us is reinforcing the imposed view and value? At some point, are we likely to become “new believers” who have finally “seen the light”?

Ironically, we are likely to change our attitudes if the imposition and accompanying incentive is mild rather than severe. During World War II, Kurt Lewin, a remarkable social psychologist conducted an experiment on behalf of the US government (Marrow, 1969). He was invited to identify the best way in which to change a fundamental habit of many Americans to consume a fair amount of meat. Members of the US government wanted citizens to consume less meat not because the meat might be bad for them but because the meat was to be saved for the soldiers fighting the battles (an untested assumption being that meat helps warriors be stronger and more aggressive).

Lewin took an interesting approach. He invited a group of women to come up with convincing arguments regarding why people should eat less meat. These women might not themselves believe what they had just identified. However, they were motivated by the duty of citizens to contribute to the war effort. And just being asked is motivating! Lewin found that these women began to change their own attitudes about consumption of meat. Since they were provided with minimal incentives to lie about the benefits of a meatless meal, they had to justify this behavior. They often did so by beginning to believe what they were saying. Lewin and his colleagues identified this as a condition of *Cognitive Dissonance* (Festinger, 1957). We want to believe that we

are honorable and that we never (or rarely) lie. So, something has to change – and this might be a shift in attitudes about eating less meat.

There have been many subsequent studies of this powerful motivation to avoid cognitive dissonance. In recent years, attention has been devoted by behavioral economists to the process of altering our views of life and our values on behalf of a visceral desire to find *Cognitive Consonance*. In essence, we wish to reinforce our tightly held belief that we are rational, consistent, thoughtful, and caring people. We find a way to rationalize our coerced behavior. In some way we are not “really” hurting the people we are ordered to harm. Or these people deserved to be harmed. We are simply being good managers of a process that is inherently destructive. We are complying because we care deeply about the welfare of our family, our team, our organization or even our country. We will begin to believe that which is imposed if the cost of noncompliance is not too great. I would suggest that this is a critical point in understanding the way in which autocratic rule can “sneak up” on us. This is the “friendly fascism” that I have introduced at several points in this book.

The third way in which life views and values are brought into our personal world is through a process known as *Expansion*. We freely embrace a new viewpoint and value because the world has grown bigger for us. As children we begin to explore a world that exists outside our home. We develop a “theory of mind” that leads us to recognize differences in the way other people view the world. We become adolescents and spend time with friends who become our peer-teachers. Our sense of personal identity is expanded based on these peer interactions. Harry Stack Sullivan (Chakrabarti, 2016) even suggests that our first experience of intimacy comes from these peer relationships (“Buddy”) (rather than our first romantic relationship).

We enter college or the military and are exposed to new ideas or even other cultures. I was involved many years ago in a research project that concerned the potential shifts in the preferred learning styles of college students--using the learning style model of David Kolb (1984). As an “experimental” group, we identified some of the most progressive (and high status) colleges and universities in the United States. As a “control” group, we picked several colleges and universities that were deeply conservative (often affiliated with a fundamentalist religious doctrine). After extensive data was collected on Freshmen and Junior students in all of these institutions, we did indeed find some major shifts among the students regarding their preferred learning styles. The shifts, however, were significantly greater among the small “control” group of students attending the conservative church-related colleges and universities!

How could this possibly be the case? As we focused our attention on what was occurring in our “control group,” we found that there was one feature that all of these students had in common. All of their colleges required these students to spend extensive time during their sophomore year as missionaries. They were assigned to other countries in the world. These students were sent to these countries in order to change the life views and values of the “heathen” people they encountered. Instead, it seems that the heathen “nonbelievers” were disrupting the views and values of the “believers.” The students were changing. We don’t know about those who were

being “proselytized.” I suspect that they were more often the teachers than the learners. They might have adjusted temporarily to the “strange” views and behaviors of the proselytizing students. However, they may have patiently “instructed” those Sophomores with whom they were interacting – much as they would “instruct” their own young people regarding the ways in which to view and act in the world created by their society. The conservative college students had encountered Expansion when engaged in their missionary work.

Jack Mezirow (1991) identifies this expansion as “transformational learning” and offers a detailed description regarding how this transformation occurs. Ken Pawlak, and I have also written about this important source of learning for all adults (Pawlak and Bergquist, 2014). I propose that this is the kind of learning that Timothy Snyder is encouraging in many of the lessons he is offering. These lessons hopefully motivate us to leave our comfortable chairs. Like our college students, we expand the size of our world and the diversity of viewpoints that we are encountering.

It is important to recall that Snyder is encouraging us in lesson fifteen to find people with similar viewpoints and values. These are people with whom we can affiliate and promote change. However, he encourages us when offering other lessons to move beyond the comfort of communities where there is an obvious harmony of interests. We must move to a broader community that offers the challenge of finding harmony in the midst of diversity. We must find concurrence in a world filled with different perspectives and narratives when building a coherent and compelling vision of the future. If we can build such a vision, then it will be a source of expansion for all members of this larger community. We are all once again students who learn about one another.

In this lesson, Snyder offers a second important point. He has introduced freedom of choice – a major focus of my work in this book. The distinction I have drawn between Inculcation, Imposition and Expansion is critical when we consider freedom of choice. Typically, neither Inculcation nor Imposition will lead to true freedom. This type of freedom is rarely found when we simply see and do what we have been taught as young people. If that is all we have to hang our hat on with regard to life views and values, then we have never moved past William Perry’s dualism. We have never left home to visit another land. Our silo is deep and strongly fortified.

Under conditions of dualism, we rely on traditional sources of authority when determining what we believe. Often, we remain frozen in this dualistic state because we can’t tolerate the disruption and ultimately the grieving that increased epistemological sophistication requires. We have been kicked out of Eden and stand alone and naked in a new world. We are often not just grieving the loss of innocence that being kicked out of Eden requires, but also are facing our own cognitive dissonance. We don’t want to believe that we are simply not as smart, brave or open as we thought we were. Why do we want to return to Eden if we are smart, brave and open? Why do we want to escape from freedom? Why is the wonderland of Serenity so appealing?

True freedom is elusive when we are kidding ourselves about a change in attitude that is produced only by our desire to reduce (and hopefully eliminate) cognitive dissonance. If we must hold steady to a specific image of self, then we will never learn something new and

transformative. Furthermore, we are likely to be particularly vulnerable to the reassuring words regarding Serenti that are offered by the skillful tyrant. This autocrat is often quite attuned to the closely held sense of self among those members of a society who remain devoted to this tyrant.

Collective resolution of cognitive dissonance through entering the wonderland of Serenity is particularly powerful. "Alternative" reality is defended and serves as a guide precisely because any recognition that this reality is false would lead the believers to a painful recognition that they are not as bright as they thought they were. Attacks on those who accept the alternative reality will only reinforce the resistance. The attackers now become part of the alternative reality. These people now become the "other." They meet all three criteria of threat offered by Charles Osgood (1957) in his theory of semantic differentials.

According to Osgood we tend to view the world primarily from the basis of three criteria. First, is what we are confronting good or bad (regarding intentions related to our personal welfare)? Second, is what we are confronting strong or weak (are we defenseless against this entity)? Third, is the entity we are confronting active or passive (are they likely to take the initiative against us). Kevin Weitz and I (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024) have proposed that these three criteria might operate in our limbic system and particularly our Amygdala which has the primary job of identifying threats and activating our body's reactions to the threats.

In creating and maintaining an alternative reality, we ensure that the "other" is evil, powerful and active. It is not enough that the "other" is evil. If they hold no power and are passive, then they can be ignored. If they are incompetent ("powerless") then we don't worry much about their intentions or their level of activity. If they are all talk and no action (passive) then we might remain vigilant but need not build a defensive wall. When all three criteria are met then the alarm bells go off, the polarities are reinforced, and a blade prevails over the chalice.

While Snyder is making an excellent point in encouraging us to find like-minded people, he is also opening the door to potential collective distortion and ignorance. Here is where his admonition about freedom of choice must come to the fore. We must ask several critical questions:

- Are my choices truly free? Am I being coerced or guided by nothing other than the desire to find cognitive congruence?
- Are my choices based on an evolving sense on my part regarding the need to continually expand my world?
- Am I a lifelong learner and connoisseur of transformation in my own life? Am I also concerned with transformations in the life of people about whom I care and with whom I choose to affiliate?
- Am I living only (or even primarily) in a silo that is fortified against evil, strong and active forces? Do I have the courage to dwell outside this silo and work on behalf of the greater good?

Would Snyder agree with me that these questions should be asked?

16. Learn from peers in other countries.

Keep up your friendships abroad, or make new friends in other countries. 'The present difficulties in the United States are an element of a larger trend. And no country is going to find a solution by itself. Make sure you and your family have passports. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 95)

This sixteenth lesson being taught us by Timothy Snyder continues his emphasis on expanding our informational and epistemological horizons. It is his way, once again, of encouraging us to get out of our comfortable chairs. I would suggest that this means leaving our comfortable but confining Platonic cave. I wish to take a step backwards in order to bring in some systems theory and a bit of something once called cybernetics. In essence, with cybernetics we are talking and writing about ways in which information (feedback) moves in a system. Cybernetics also concerns the resulting movement of energy and resources that operate in this system.

Both negative and positive feedback loops operate in all systems. No viable system can operate with only negative feedback. This system would soon be “dampened” to death. A hailstorm of caution and “bad news” would prevent such a system from ever staying alive. Even more importantly, no system can operate with nothing but positive feedback. It would soon blow up given that it would have no “breaks” (negative loops). There would be nothing to contain its growth, its consumption of energy and resources, or its ability to overwhelm the environment in which it operates.

Some environmentalists suggest that our world is now operating as a positive feedback system as a result of the growth in human populations, exponential expansion of energy and resource consumption, and explosion in environmental toxicity. This might mean that “mother nature” will soon shut us down—having discovered that we are a highly contagious “virus” that is destroying our planet. We are unsure if there is a negative (restraining) feedback loop that is strong enough and durable enough to contain the exponential growth. Stay tuned.

We do have more direct control over a second instance of an unbridled positive feedback system. This system operates in an autocracy and is directly associated with tyranny. What we know is that an autocratic government does not have an adequate negative feedback loop to curtail the thoughts, assumptions or actions taken by an autocrat. There are only “yes” men and women around the tyrant. A strong silo of distorted information, self-fulfilling prophecy and self-sealed assumptions has been constructed. It seems to be impervious to any corrective action. The sense of political powerlessness might be just as justifiable as the sense of environmental powerlessness regarding the human destruction of our planet’s eco-sphere.

Not so fast. We need not be powerless regarding either governance of our imperiled planet. There might be some hope here. Mother nature might find other ways to cope with the human invasion other than killing off the human species. We already know that mother nature did an exceptional job of recovering the environment for a few moments when COVID kept us homebound. It doesn’t take much for our natural world to rebound – we need only consider the weeds that rapidly return after we have done some careful gardening!

What about authoritarian governance? Like other systems with only positive feedback loops, the autocratic system might be quite vulnerable. The autocrat is likely to “overreach” and seek expansion in size and scope that is not warranted nor feasible given the available resources and the corrective (resistant) forces operating outside the autocrat’s realm of direct control. While democratic systems are very messy and are laden with many mistakes and inefficiencies regarding the rate of decision-making and action, there are many corrective loops that put the brakes on foolish decisions and unrealistic actions. The mistakes being made by a democracy are usually rectified. This is often not the case with the positive feedback laden autocracy.

There is another factor that is often ignored when a cybernetic (feedback-based) approach is taken while describing a system. This factor is the *Delay Effect* that I mentioned earlier in this book. Traditional cybernetic models were highly mechanistic in nature. Systems were portrayed as a bundle of feedback loops that are tightly interlocked--like gears in a clock. Information from one part of the system is assumed to have an immediate positive or negative impact on another part.

More recent models of system dynamics provide a more “organic” vision of the way feedback loops influence one another (Meadows, 2008). The most important revision in contemporary system theory may be the introduction of this delay effect. It seems that a change (increase or decrease) in the power, size or positioning of one feedback loop might not immediately influence the behavior of other loops. For instances, changes in policy regarding the recruitment of new employees in a corporation might not go into effective immediately. Messages delivered to soldiers at the front line of a major conflict might not arrive immediately or even in time for a strategic decision regarding the deployment of these soldiers is being made. Needed food does not immediately arrive in a country filled with starving citizens. Money is not immediately available to enhance human services in an underserved community.

A couple of important insights emerged when we introduce delays into our analysis of autocratic and democratic governance systems, First, let’s consider the autocrat. This person or tightly enmeshed group of decision-makers will rarely tolerate any delay in the processes of information or in the deployment of resources when faced with a crisis. They are likely to “march forward” without sufficient timely information about resources, counterforces, and public attitude. It’s not only a matter of wanting “no bad news” (negative feedback). It is also (and perhaps even more importantly) a matter of not waiting for any news at all.

Hence, mistakes are often made. However, lessons are rarely learned or what is learned is not immediately conveyed to those making decisions. Delays in the movement of lessons learned on the production line are often delayed on their way to the autocratic C-Suite. Rigid vertical hierarchies lead to slow movement of lessons upward in the organization with the potential of “no bad news” barriers being potentially erected at each level of the lesson’s upward journey. The learning-ful message never arrives at the C-suite or it is badly bruised and distorted upon its arrival.

This in turn means that there is often a crisis and even greater urgency. Even greater dysfunction and more crises abound in the system. A vicious circle is created resulting in another level of

unbridged positive feedback and exponential increases in crises. The crisis management that emerges might temporarily justify the autocratic rule. However, the system becomes increasingly vulnerable. The tyrannical system is soon likely to tumble. Humpday Dumpty is hard to put back together again. This might lead to a new autocratic ruler and yet another positive feedback system and another cluster of crises. Will it ever change? Stay tuned.

By contrast, we can see that delay functions may have a very difficult role to play in a democratic system. The delay function is often embedded in the deliberative process inherent in this form of government. Yes, there often seems to be nothing but delays. Democracies are rarely efficient or anxiety-free. Financial bills never get passed. New voting rights legislation remains stuck in committee or is blocked by archaic legislative rules. This being the case, we may declare that democracies don't work – especially in the mid-21st Century when decisive decisions have to be made. As many present-day dictators have declared, democracies belong back in the 20th Century (prior to the amplification of VUCA-Plus conditions.

Alternatively, we can declare that these incessant delays are ultimately of great value – especially when VUCA-Plus conditions prevail. They ensure that major mistakes are not being made or that the same mistake isn't being repeated. Competing interests and polarized political parties help to keep other interests and parties in line. There is ample generation and sharing of information and perspectives that counter the assumptions and perspectives held by other people. This is the strength and source of profound frustration in a democracy system. We can't do anything . . . thank God.

One of our guides, Heather Cox Richardson (2024c) has recently provided a brief historical note regarding this messy delaying process called democracy. She specifically offers a set of comments about American democracy that were made by Dwight Eisenhower, a mid-20th Century American president, in his response to a recommendation that a more authoritarian mode of governance would be preferable:

In 1959, veteran Robert Biggs wrote to Republican president Dwight D. Eisenhower, who had led the Allied forces in Europe during World War II, asking the president to make “direct statements” that would give people the confidence to “back him completely.” Americans needed “more of the attitude of a commanding officer who knows the goal and the mission and states, without evasion, the way it is to be done.”

Eisenhower answered that “in a democracy debate is the breath of life. This is to me what Lincoln meant by government ‘of the people, by the people, and for the people.’”

“[D]ictatorial systems make one contribution to their people which leads them to tend to support such systems – freedom from the necessity of informing themselves and making up their own minds concerning...tremendous complex and difficult questions,” Eisenhower wrote. “But while this responsibility is a taxing one to a free people it is their great strength as well – from millions of individual free minds come new ideas, new adjustments to emerging problems, and tremendous vigor, vitality and progress.... While

complete success will always elude us, still it is a quest which is vital to self-government and to our way of life as free men.”

To repeat the wisdom offered by Jay Forrester as one of the main architects of system dynamics: “don’t just do something. Stand there!” This is certainly what often occurs in contemporary democratic systems. Can this delay-laden system of democratic government meet the challenges of our mid-21st World? Stay tuned.

We would be fools if we thought there were clear answers regarding the viability of contemporary governments. There is no way in which we can make valid predictions regarding the future of either autocratic or democratic governance systems. Nevertheless, we can heed Snyder’s advice and open ourselves to outside worlds that provide alternative perspectives on how to conduct ourselves individually and collectively. We can gain insights regarding a manner of personal and societal conduct that is humane. We learn more about how one best cares for the welfare of other people—and the welfare of our environment. True friends who are operating in a societal environment of true freedom can offer information and suggestions that are challenging and corrective (negative feedback). If they are “others” who come from settings that differ radically from our own, then their challenging feedback helps us become less arrogant, less self-centered, less siloed – and ultimately more fully aligned with a mindset and series of attendant actions that confront tyranny and promote democracy. So, with Snyder’s encouragement, we must all get our passports up to date.

17. Listen for Dangerous Words.

Be alert to the use of the words extremism and terrorism. Be alive to the fatal notions of emergency and exception. Be angry about the treacherous use of patriotic vocabulary. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 99)

Words can kill—or at least they can divide. Snyder is teaching us about “dangerous words.” He is pointing specifically to words that are “patriotic.” While these words can be unifying and inspiring, they can also be sources of division. They can elicit the fight/flight response which Wilfred Bion identifies as one of the three often-regressive assumptions that people hold. In addition, I would suggest that dangerous words can provide a seductive division between good/bad, strong/weak and active/passive.

The differential that Charles Osgood (1957) offered was called “semantic” for a very good reason. It is manifest specifically in (and holds much of its power through) the use in words associated with good/bad, strong/weak and active/passive. These three differentials are tied closely to the distinction made between us/them (“other”)—and this distinction is usually arbitrary and artificial. It is not just that skin tone is a rather superficial way to sort people into different categories, or that social class is an inequitable and ultimately unjust way to differentiate and segregate people. It is also that these widespread word-based distinctions do not hold up in contemporary societies. The words are not just dangerous, they are also profoundly out-of-date in our increasingly flat (Friedman, 2007) and terrifyingly interdependent (Smick, 2008) world.

Richard Rodriguez has offered several challenging analyses that call traditional linguistic categorizations into question. First, Rodriguez (1983) stirred things up by questioning the legitimacy of affirmative action guidelines. He proposes that inaccurate labeling occurs when we classify Black people and other racial minorities as “disadvantaged” and in need of preferential treatment in educational and job placements. He notes that many African Americans and Hispanic American people such as himself are not disadvantages. They come from middle-class families and are in no need of preferential treatment. For Rodriguez the critical labeling should be applied to social class—not race. Poor people need a helping hand, not people with darker color of skin or a cultural background that is not Northern European.

Rodriguez (2003) later writes about an even broader and perhaps more disturbing misuse of words. He notes that American society (and many other societies) are becoming increasingly “Brown.” He is referring here not just to the increasing intermingling of races, but also the “browning” (diffusion) of cultural traditions. “Browning” also occurs with multiplications in the labeling of sexual orientations and gender identifications. There is a blending of Jewish and Zen traditions, and an intermingling of Asian and European cuisines, health-related practices, and even based philosophical perspectives. Western Quantum theory meets Buddhism. Many people are giving up on or asking to control the words used to identify their own gender. Brown is the new Black (and White). Dualism is increasingly a nonviable way of distinguishing between various entities in our 21st Century world.

This leaves us with the troubling matter of social class. As Rodriguez notes, social class should often be the basis for determination of preferential treatment. However, we must ask an important question. How is social class being defined and identified? There are many problems associated with this identification. The assessment of wealth has become more elusive as our world moves away from land and even money as a sign of wealth (Bergquist, 1993). New high-tech firms are highly attractive even before earning a single dollar. Volatile cryptocurrency is taking the place of cash, and someone like Anna Delvey (featured in the movie “Inventing Anna”) can thrive for at least an extended period of time on credit cards, promises, and fleet feet.

Just as the financial productive of a company (or an entire country) can no longer capture the overall welfare of those working in the company (or living in the country), so dollars in the bank can no longer capture much about the feeling of wellbeing among most of us living in the mid-21st Century. In my own study regarding the psychology of money, I often point to one of the interviews I conducted when a quite insightful answer was given to a question I often asked: “How much money is enough?” The answer given was “One more dollar than I now have.” Another response is often cited by comedians: “I have enough money as long as my credit card doesn’t wear down!”

There is also the matter of a disappearing social class. Contemporary headlines often offer an alarming declaration that the middle class is collapsing in American society (and many other societies around the world). While it is certainly true that a large amount of wealth is accruing at the top of the financial pyramid, it is also true that “middle class” has simply become a dated

term. We can place only very poor and very rich people in a specific social class. Other people aren't easily placed in a specific economic category that is directly aligned with a specific, isolating social class. The "line" is not so easily drawn these days between the "haves" and the "have not."

What does it mean to be a "have" and how best do we identify the damage caused by the drawing of a line? What is the nature of inequality distribution above and below the line? As Graber and Wengrow (2021, p. 7) have recently noted, the whole notion of inequality is now confusing:

Which kind of inequality? Wealth? Opportunity? Exactly how equal would people have to be in order for us to be able to say we've "eliminated inequality"? . . . Debating inequality allows one to tinker with the numbers, argue about Gini coefficients and thresholds of dysfunction, readjust tax regimes or social welfare mechanisms, even shock the public with figures showing just how bad things have become ("can you imagine" The riches 1 per cent of the world's population own 44 per cent of the world's wealth!)—but it also allow one to do all this without addressing any of the factors that people actually object to about such "unequal" social arrangements: for instance, that some manage to turn their wealth into power over others; or that other people end up being told their needs are not important, and their lives have no intrinsic worth.

The issue then becomes not the nature of inequality, but the way in which inequality impacts on our life. I would propose that this, in turn, requires that we consider not only the impact that inequalities have on our lives, but also how these impacts might vary as a function of the type of inequalities that exist.

For instance, the forementioned Bertram Bledstein (1976) suggested many years ago that economically based social class is being replaced in American society by a distinction drawn between those who consider themselves to be "professionals" and those who consider themselves to be "nonprofessionals." A variant on this distinction is "white collar" and "blue collar". Perhaps it is a distinction drawn by one noted newscaster between those people who take a shower in the morning and those (after a day of physical labor) who take a shower in the early evening. These distinctions, in turn, might relate to the level of education a person has received. It is increasingly the case that level of education might not equate to annual income. Having a "Doctor" in front of your name might not produce a higher income (especially if one is teaching or serving as an advocate). However, the label of "Doctor" holds considerable cache in most mid-21st Century societies (Bergquist, Tan and Little, ip)

Some people in the trades make a whole lot more money than many of their "white collar" colleague who hold Bachelor, Masters (or Doctoral) degrees. Trade school and community college programs that focus on vocational training are often witnessing larger enrollment while many traditional liberal arts colleges are struggling to survive. We might ask: what is the impact? Are distinctions between professional and nonprofessional somehow altering the way people view themselves? Is self-esteem ever tied up in the distinction between blue and white collar? Is this

image of self perhaps shifting with the increased valuing (and often decreased accessibility) of skills in the use of one's hands and one's machine?

Perhaps at a more fundamental level, we should be asking if self-esteem is considered more important than income. On the one hand, we might find the following comment to be commonly expressed: "I might be making more money than you, but I still feel like you are looking down on me when I come to fix your clogged sink." Perhaps words and labels do hurt – maybe more than a small paycheck. On the other hand, we might be finding that money is elusive while tangible skills and knowledge endure. "Smoke and mirrors" somehow seem to capture our work in the world when we produce words (such as I do) or produce emails and text messages (as many people do). We of the "white collar" class might be inclined to declare (in all honesty): "I am making very little real, lasting difference in the world, while those building new homes or producing needed alternative energy products on an assembling line are making a tangible difference. They are leaving their imprint." What then constitutes personal value and self-esteem? Could it perhaps have to do with linking to a harmony of interest, contributing to a balancing of rights and responsibility, and/or engaging in a journey to some compelling future? Stay tuned.

Conclusions

All of this suggests, as we return to Timothy Snyder's concern about the dangerous use of words, that danger often resides not just in the violence-inducing and polarity-inducing words of hate and intolerance, but also in the more pernicious distinctions drawn between people based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disabilities – or even social class. Apparently, we are living in and must get used to living in a world of Brown. Social class and sources of self-esteem are Brown. This world is not very conducive to tyrannical control of words. Everything is a bit vague, confusing and elusive. Perhaps we should keep it this way.

Chapter Eleven

Confronting Tyranny III: Anxiety

We come to the heart of the matter in this third chapter on confronting tyranny. Timothy Snyder is requesting that we confront our fears and that we rise up and take courageous action. I suggest that this is a noble appeal. We should take up the cause. However, we need to do some more thinking and articulating about what all of this means and entails.

18 Be calm when the unthinkable arrives.

Modern tyranny is terror management. When the terrorist attack comes; remember that authoritarians exploit such events in order to consolidate power.¹ The sudden disaster that requires the end of checks and balances, the dissolution of opposition parties, the suspension of freedom of expression, the right to a fair trial, and so on, is the oldest trick in the Hitlerian book. Do not fall for it. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 103)

I will devote a fair amount of attention to this eighteenth lesson conveyed by Snyder because I believe that the management of anxiety is the fundamental tool needed to confront tyranny. As Snyder has noted, “modern tyranny is terror management” and the primary counter to terror management is anxiety management.

As 21st Century citizens we often must deal with major challenges associated with the anxiety experienced by specific members of our society (and often our own anxiety). This anxiety can be induced in many different ways – and there are multiple sources of anxiety. We often face the “perfect storm” of anxiety that is evoked by and contained in the conditions of VUCA-Plus

The Nature of Anxiety

VUCA-Plus produces anxiety at both the individual and collective level. It seems that anxiety is quite contagious. One anxious person in an organization (or group) can readily spread this anxiety to everyone else in the organization. In some ways this contagion is quite adaptive. When human beings were living on the African savannah, they were among the weakest and slowest creatures to populate this threat-filled environment. It seems that we humans survived (and ultimately thrived) by working collaboratively via language and strong bonds of family and clan. We all wanted to know if something was threatening one or more members of our group so that we could act together to fight or flee from the source of the threat. Anxiety served this purpose.

Anxiety as a Signal

Many years ago, Sigmund Freud (1990/1936) wrote about the signal function of anxiety. At the time, he was pointing to the way in which anxiety alerts us to an important psychic reality: we are moving into dangerous territory regarding unconscious processes. We can expand on Freud’s

analysis by considering the collective signaling function served by anxiety in warning us (as families or clans) about sources of danger that are real (such as predators, crop failure or the pending invasion of an adversarial clan) – or are anticipated or imagined.

We can probe for a moment into the neurobiological basis of collective (and contagious) signaling anxiety. In recent years, neurobiologists have recognized the very important role played by a specific neurotransmitter in the lives of human beings. This neurotransmitter is oxytocin. It is sometimes called the “bonding” and “nurturing” chemical – and we human beings have more of this chemical coursing through our brains and veins than most other animals. Oxytocin pulls us together and makes us particularly fearful of being alone and isolated from other members of our family and clan. We want to be close to others and feel threatened when others feel threatened.

This secretion of oxytocin could be considered the basis of empathy and might even be mediated by something called “mirror neurons” which are activated in us when we experience the wounding (physical or psychological) of other people. While the role played by mirror neurons is still quite controversial, there is very little dispute regarding the typical (and necessary) bonding of human beings with one another and the high level of sensitivity regarding our discomfort with witnessing the potential or actual suffering of other people with whom we are bonded – hence the contagious and signaling nature of anxiety.

Real and Imagined Lions

Clearly, we are attuned to the signal of threat transmitted by other people. This signal can be based on “legitimate” threats: the lion can be stalking us or the tribe living in the next valley can actually be plotting to take over our hunting ground or pastureland. However, as made famous by Robert Sapolsky (2004), we are also quite adept at imagining lions – and falsely concluding that our neighboring tribe is plotting against us. Thus, there can be “false alarms” that we have to manage with just as much skill as the alarms based in reality.

Part of our role as combatants of tyranny is to discern the difference between valid signals and invalid signals. This can be quite a challenge in the world of VUCA-Plus – and this is an important element in the metabolism and re-introduction of anxiety into an organization. As parents we need to help our children sort out the difference between the “real” bad things in life and the “unreal” monsters lurking under their bed at night (equivalent in contemporary life to the imaginary lions of the African savannah). As leaders, we similarly have to assist with addressing the imagined VUCA-Plus monsters lingering under our organizational beds.

In essence, I am suggesting that we must fully appreciate the nature of a VUCA-Plus environment in which we must operate. In such an environment, effective and containers and processes of metabolism are needed

The Nature of Anxiety-Management

We are ready to consider ways in which a leader can contain this anxiety and transform (metabolize) this anxiety to re-introduce it in manageable form to other members of their organization. I turn first to the nature and variety of containers and then consider the remarkable

process of metabolism as originally described by the psychoanalytically oriented object relations theorist of the Tavistock Institute in London.

Anxiety and the Container

In his work as a psychotherapist (particularly in group settings), Wilfred Bion (1961, 1995) described the nature of containment and metabolism of anxiety. Bion suggested in several different ways that effective leaders (initially as group therapy facilitators) will contain and then metabolize the anxiety of those with whom they are working. With its metabolism, the anxiety can be reintroduced into the therapy session in a form and manner that is more easily engaged by a client (whether in an individual therapy session or in a group therapy session).

Bion, and other psychologists influenced by his work, recognized that the same process is engaged in organization. An effective leader serves as barrier between the threatening and anxiety-producing outside world and the inner world of the organization. In many ways, the therapist or organizational leader operates in the same way as an effective parent who must provide a buffer for their children. Both the parent and child confront many anxiety-filled challenges—especially those associated with balancing the protection of the child, on the one hand, with providing the child, on the other hand, with multiple opportunities to develop in their capacity to confront and adapt to their ever-expanding world.

This recipe offered by Bion to therapists, group facilitators, organizational leaders (and parents) is all well and good, but what does it really mean and how does a leader (therapist, facilitator or parent) go about engaging the multi-faceted role of container, metabolizer and re-introducer of the anxiety?, I hope to provide clarity in this chapter regarding this important role and will suggest ways in which this role can be engaged to address the challenges of VUCA-Plus. I reflect on the nature of (and dynamics associated with) each of the principal concepts: container and metabolism. I then offer some tools that can assist us as combatants of tyranny in bringing about containment and metabolism. I also introduce several strategies and tools that can be used in the reintroduction of anxiety into a society.

The Nature of Containment

What does it mean to contain anxiety? More generally, what is the nature of psychological containers in our life and the life of our organization? Let me begin by addressing the second question and then considering how the containment of anxiety works. I will be making the case that containment can occur in many ways and in many settings. In essence, containment is about finding sanctuary in one's life—especially when confronting the challenges of VUCA-Plus.

Vulnerability, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence and contradiction are not new to us living in the 21st Century. And we are not the first people to yearn for sanctuary. Back in the 1930s, with World War II looming in the near future and the world limping its way out of a major recession, there was a strong need for sanctuary-- as captured in the popular film, *Lost Horizons*. Ronald Colman played the role of a very successful British statesman who is kidnapped and taken

to a remote land called "Shangri-La." For Colman, as for many of us, this location held great attraction. It was free of pain and strife.

Shangri-La also provided an opportunity for reflection on the complex and turbulent world outside, while giving those who entered its cloistered walls (in this case, a hidden valley) the opportunity for personal growth and renewal. Colman, like many of us who have created or stumbled into "Shangri-La," found that the hardest part is leaving and returning to a world that he no longer appreciated. However, "Shangri-La" like all sanctuaries exists precisely because of our need to remain engaged in an active life in which we address the critical needs and concerns of our family, our organization and our community.

The Varieties of Containment and Sanctuary

Psychological containers come in many forms and there are many types of sanctuary. I turn now to a brief and more systematic exploration of five type of containers—and sanctuary. They are personal psychic containers and containers existing within relationships. Containers can also be defined by temporary boundaries: events can serve as containers. Special locations are noteworthy as containers and sanctuaries. Finally, it is particularly important to recognize that certain leadership functions can provide containment of anxiety. Leadership, in turn, often works alongside one other container (that might be the most important within an organizational setting). This final type of container is the culture of the organizations. In turn first to the most personal type of container.

Personal Imagery as a Container of Anxiety

In a beautifully poignant song ("And So It Goes", 1983), written by the popular singer, Billy Joel, a sanctuary is described that exists in every person's heart. This part of our heart will always be "safe and strong." It is where we "heal the wounds from lovers past/Until a new one comes along." Sanctuaries of a similar nature exist in our heart and hopefully are supported by our organizations and society as a means of healing other wounds and providing space and time for needed reflection and inquiry. In our world of VUCA-PLUS, there is a great need for Billy Joel's "safe and strong" sanctuary.

In one of his gentle stories from the *Prairie Home Companion* radio program about life in a small Minnesota town ("Lake Wobegon"), Garrison Keillor (1985) speaks about the "storm home" that was assigned to him by his school when he was a small boy. Keillor lived in the country and had to get to school by bus. Consequently, to prepare for the possibility that he might be stranded in town as a result of a snow blizzard, the school gave him (and the other children living in the country) an alternative home to go to that is located in town. Keeler never had to go to this home; however, he often walked by his "storm home" and reflected on the loving, supportive nature of the couple who were his "storm parents." He often thought of this man and woman and their house when things were going bad or when he was discouraged. He fantasized that this couple had specifically picked him out as their "storm child" and that they would welcome him with open arms during difficult times.

We may have a similar need for "storm homes" as adults working in a VUCA-Plus world. The "storm home" of the mind may be created through use of a technique or ritual that provides internal support and encouragement for our difficult decisions and risk taking behavior. In essence, we pat ourselves on the back or find a way (through meditation, daydreaming or quiet reflection) to calm ourselves down and gain a sense of reassurance. A colleague of mine who presides over an educational institution found that he could gently touch his forehead when under stress and evoke with this touch a sense of personal calmness. These moments of personal sanctuary during the day may be essential components in any postmodern survival kit. Another colleague ensures that she sets aside one day each week for her writing. A third friend insists on swimming in the San Francisco Bay every day during lunchtime. In each instance, an internal sanctuary that is "safe and strong" has been created for both healing and reflection.

Ultimately, we create containers within our own head and heart. This is where the true sanctuaries in our life reside – and where we not only find refuge from anxiety and real or imagined lions, but also find restoration, renewal and new knowledge and insights. As Bion (1995) noted, metabolism is ultimately an internal psychic process.

These personal and internal sanctuaries and the resulting metabolism of anxiety might relate directly to the states of micro-flow and micro-awe that I identified previously in this book. Keltner (2023, p. 39) offers the following example of outcomes that can emerge from a personal sanctuary filled with awe and wonder:

. . . a mental state of openness, questioning, curiosity, and embracing mystery, arises out of experiences of awe. In our studies, people who find more everyday awe show evidence of living with wonder. They are more open to new ideas. what is unknown. To what language can't describe. To the absurd. To seeking new knowledge. To experience itself, for example, of sound, or color, or bodily sensation, or the directions thought might take during dreams or meditation. To the strengths, and virtues of other people. It should not surprise that people who feel even five minutes a day of everyday awe are more curious about art, music, poetry, new scientific discoveries, philosophy, and questions about life and death. They feel more comfortable with mysteries, with that which cannot be explained.

I would suggest that the state described by Keltner contains not only Awe and Wonder. It also contains Flow. While Awe tends to be a passive experience with powerful forces being observed and absorbed in a psychic storm, Flow tends to be an active experience with the power being found in one's engagement of activities that exist in the threshold between boredom and anxiety. When Flow and Awe join forces, then one may find the kind of openness, questioning, curiosity, and mystery that Keltner has described. Perhaps it is in a blending of Flow and Awe that we find true personal freedom . . .

Relationships as a Container of Anxiety

There is a second important way in which a container can be truly psychological—and truly designed to contain anxiety. These special forms of containment might be found in long-term accepting and supportive relationship with a family member or friend. They might also be found in our moments of play with a child or cherished pet. We return home, hopefully, to an environment of warmth and love—a remarkably important sanctuary for many of us. The container can also be found in the caring attitude of a special teacher, coach, mentor or trainer. If we are fortunate, we can reflect back on a special person in our life who provided guidance, understanding and perhaps a gentle kick in the pants – all elements of effective containment (and central to the metabolism process).

Then there are the important temporary relationships in our life: the therapeutic relationship established with a skillful psychotherapist or counsellor, the wise retreat facilitator and workshop leader. During the mid-20th Century, Warren Bennis and Phillip Slater (1968) prophetically suggested that we (in the West) are creating “temporary societies”. –moving from a world in which most of the people with whom we affiliate have been a part of our life for many years to a world in which we are often interacting for a few moments with people we just met. While, on the one hand, these temporary relationships can be part and parcel of a VUCA-Plus world, they can also be the source of short-term, important containers.

Finally, we can look to the special relationships that are formed within organizational settings. These are the “play spaces” that are created when an organization sets us a “skunk work” task force or sets aside a weekend each year for a retreat in which all members of an organization (regardless of formal status) get to share their ideas and dreams regarding the future of the organization. These may also be the “play spaces” where Flow and Awe can join forces.

Historically, these “play spaces” have yielded impressive results. Settings are created in which we can speak more candidly and take greater risks with “strangers” than with the people we must live with and work with every day (Bradford, Gibb and Benne, 1964). Facilitation processes are put in place that enable management and union leaders to share perspectives and seek to identify mutually satisfactory solutions to shared problems (Blake, Shepard and Mouton, 1964). Safety is secured, which enables members of an organization to envision new and better workplace processes (Hammer and Champy, 1993). Mid-managers can speak openly with both those above them and below them in their organization—their vital role as link-pins to systems above and below them in the hierarchy is acknowledged and valued (Likert, 1967).

Collateral organization is one term that has been used to label these unique relations-based containers. The collateral organization is established on a short-term basis. It is set up a way that enables members of the organization to relate to one another in a new manner—hopefully reducing the anxiety associated with the issues being addressed and creating conditions for metabolism of these issues.

Special Events as Containers of Anxiety

Psychological containers can be engaged through the structuring of time intervals. There is a temporal demarcation. Now is the time for . . . something different. The 50-minute hour in psychotherapy, for instance, is an important container (especially in the containment of anxiety aroused during a therapy session). During much of the 20th Century we lived with the temporal container called the 9 to 5 workday, the 5-day work week, and the non-working weekend and vacation. With the introduction of the computer, internet and home office, this temporary container has often been eliminated.

Many years ago, Matthew Miles (1964) identified the important role played by temporary systems in 20th Century society – these temporary systems might be particularly important to engage in our VUCA-Plus world. Miles suggested that temporary systems are to be found throughout our society but are often given very little attention. Examples of temporary organizational systems that Miles offered include carnivals, theater, celebrations, games, retreats, workshops, conferences, task forces, project teams, coffee breaks, and office parties. At a more personal level, Miles identified love affairs and psychotherapeutic sessions as temporary systems.

The time-delineated container can thus be a specific event (such as Marti Gras or New Years Eve at Time Square). This often is an event that allows us to act in new ways – ways that defuse our anxiety or at least provide us with the opportunity for a short period of time to escape from our imagined lions. The event can actually be a ceremony or ritual that takes us to another plane – what Victor Turner (1977) described as a threshold experience (a state of “liminality”). This can be a graduation ceremony, a wedding, a Bar Mitzvah or a birthday party. The real lions in our life are set aside for a short while – so that we might celebrate our success in defeating past lions or moving into a new life stage that will enable us to do a better job of confronting lions.

Building on the work of Victor Turner, Mihali Csikszentmihalyi (1990) identifies temporary settings that provide the unique threshold between boredom (lack of challenge), on the one hand, anxiety (too much challenge) on the other hand. He identified this threshold experience as “Flow.” He suggests that flow can be found in the many enthralling moments we have all experienced as rock climbers, jazz musicians or chess players. We can even experience a “micro-flow” when twirling a pencil or paper clip in our hand during a particularly boring meeting.

Dacher Keltner (2023, p. 25) speaks of something similar when he notes that in our daily life we frequently “feel awe in encounters with moral beauty and . . . in nature and in experiences with music, art and film.” We have “fun.” Keltner considers this to be a “self-transcendent” state in which we are feeling truly free. In what I would label a state of “micro-awe,” we are transported “out of our self-focused, threat-oriented, and status quo mindset to a realm where we connect to something bigger than the self.” (Keltner, 2023, p. 28)

If we were to blend Csikszentmihalyi and Keltner with Bion, then the outcome might be a suggestion that Flow and Awe are found in a contained experience. Furthermore, flow and awe

provide a metabolism for the person living temporarily in a threshold between boredom and anxiety – perhaps simply in a state of Fun and Joy.

Location as a Container of Anxiety

A psychological container can be a sanctuary located in physical space. These containers have physical boundaries. We enter a safe space – such as a walled garden or therapy office and feel safe. Donald Winnicott (2005) identified something he called *play space* in which we safely search for a new and clearer sense of self. This is the place where (as children) we built forts or constructed family narratives (often in a doll house) as children. Play space is created in therapeutic settings where art, dance or drama are engaged – or where children (or adults) manipulate various objects and create stories in a sand tray. These settings serve as play space containers and create conditions for effective metabolism of anxiety-saturated issues in our lives (or the lives of our children).

Containers can be structures – ranging in size from trunk in which memorable objects are kept, to a special room in our home (such as a “man/woman cave), to a majestic, sacred cathedral. The location-based container often serves as a retreat—a “safe place” within or outside the organization. Some Japanese firms, for instance, provide private rooms where employees can go to let loose their frustrations and anger. However, sanctuaries (almost by definition) usually exist outside of an organizational context. They are found in remote locations, hallowed grounds, beautiful settings or formally constructed retreat centers, spas and health resorts.

Leadership as a Container of Anxiety

The fifth way in which metabolism takes place in an organization can be traced directly to the leadership of the organization. This fifth type of container begins to move us into the realm of metabolism. According to Bion, the leader (like the parent) often plays a key role in the metabolism of anxiety. It is the leader who must personally hold onto the organization’s anxiety and not allow it to leak out and infect the entire organization. This often means that the leader holds back information about what is happening outside the organization (especially potential or impending threats or shifts in the marketplace). Very careful discernment must take place at this point: the leader must not be in the business of lying or spend too much time in denial.

Obviously, no member of the organization will appreciate being left out in the dark about the fate of their organization – or their job. Even if it means being anxious for a while, the news must be delivered—but the leader can pause for a moment (or a short period of time) to not only determine how best to deliver the troubling news, but also determine when the best time is to communicate the critical information. This is critical metabolism.

The challenge of containment for the leader of an organization is either reduced or amplified by the way in which the organization’s anxiety is addressed through the culture of the organization. It is to this final, critical, mode of containment that I now turn.

Organizational Culture as a Container of Anxiety

There is one other type of container that I wish to identify. It is particularly important when considering the role played by leaders in the containment and metabolization of anxiety. This container is the culture of an organization. It is through the culture of an organization that anxiety can be either accentuated or contained. It is through the culture of an organization, that the bonding of its members can be engaged in the constructive reframing and redirecting of anxiety (the metabolism) or in the fearful destruction of the organization's capacity to better understand, overcome or adapt to the real (or imagined) threats inherent in the anxiety. In other words, metabolism occurs when members of an organization collectively (culturally) create a narrative about the source of the anxiety, the current impact of the anxiety on the organization, and the way(s) in which the anxiety will be reduced and/or the sources of the anxiety will be addressed.

As Edgar Schein (1992) noted, this often means creating, maintaining or modifying existing organizational narratives. This is a critical and quite tangible form of metabolism, for organizations are, in a very real sense, nothing more (or less) than sustained narratives. As proponents of appreciative inquiry (AI) (reference) have noted, the shift in an organization's narrative might be the most powerful way in which to bring about change and improvement in the functioning of an organization. Schon suggests that an organizational culture should be built on the narratives of past successes. The AI practitioners would agree to the narrative. I would suggest that this focus on an organization's real (not imagined) strengths and successes can be a highly effective mode of metabolism.

The fundamental interplay between the containment of anxiety and the formation of organizational cultures was carefully and persuasively documented by Isabel Menzies Lyth (1988). She describes ways in which nurses in an English hospital cope with the anxiety that is inevitably associated with issues of health, life and death. Menzies Lyth notes how the hospital in which nurses work help to ameliorate or at least protect the nurses from anxiety. She suggests that a health care organization is primarily in the business of reducing this anxiety. On a daily basis, all other functions of the organization are secondary to this anxiety-reduction function.

It is specifically the culture of the organization that serves as the primary vehicle for addressing anxiety and stress. The culture of an organization is highly resistant to change precisely because change directly threatens the informal system that has been established in the organization to help those working in it to confront and make sense of the anxiety inherent in the operations of the organization. Menzies Lyth's observations have been reaffirmed in many other organizational settings. Anxiety is to be found in most contemporary organizations and efforts to reduce this anxiety are of prominent importance. Somehow an organization that is inclined to evoke anxiety among its employees must discover or construct a buffer that both isolates (contains) the anxiety and addresses the realistic, daily needs of its employees.

Containing the Anxiety

In our brief reflection on the diverse containers of anxiety, we begin to discover the answer to my first question: how is anxiety contained? My identification of sanctuaries as containers of anxiety suggests that a protective function is critical. A sanctuary isolated or protects us for at least a short period of time from anxiety (or perhaps even the source of the anxiety). As I shall note soon, in this protected state we can do something about the anxiety while it is not engulfing us. We can for a specific period of time not be anxious about our anxiety – and can metabolize it (as I will describe in the next section).

Our reflection on the role played by culture as a container takes us to a somewhat different place. The culture of our organization (or family or clan) provides a structure and process for finding meaning and purpose in anxiety. We find out why we are anxious and can better identify the source of the anxiety. This assignment of meaning and etiology (cause/source) might not be accurate. Culture does a great job of imagining the size and shape of the imagined lion and shows us, like Tarzan in the 1940s movies, how we are going to defeat the lion with our own bare hands. What culture does do is reduce our anxiety about anxiety (such as a sanctuary accomplishes). This reassurance can, in turn, lead us to a constructive metabolism of anxiety. It can, on the other hand, lead us astray. We believe that we really have identified the lion and its true intent. And we have identified the Tarzan-like person or group who will (or policy that will) defeat or at least adequately defend us against the attacking lion.

This first set of proposals regarding how anxiety is contained can be supplemented by many other side-strategies of containment – such as keeping the anxiety from spreading to other factions inside or outside the organization and recognizing that specific anxiety-reducing services should be provided to members of the organization (such as provision of employee assistance programs) or to the entire organization (such as an organization-wide picnic or award ceremony). More generally, containers provide direction for how anxiety will get addressed on a daily basis in the organization. This is where culture plays a key role.

Menzies Lyth (1988) suggested that anxiety gets addressed on a daily basis through the “social defense system” – that is, the patterns of interpersonal and group relationships that exist in the organization. Other organizational theorists and researchers, for example Deal & Kennedy (2000) and Schein (1992), similarly suggest that the rituals, routines, stories, and norms (implicit values) of the organization help members of the organization manage anxiety inside the organization. Yet, these rituals, routines, stories and norms are not a random assortment of activities. Rather, they cluster together and form a single, coherent dimension of the organization – they create meaning as well as contain anxiety. This single, coherent dimension resides at the heart of the organization’s culture.

As Edgar Schein (1999) has noted, the culture of an organization is the residue of the organization’s success in confronting varying anxiety-producing conditions in the world. To the extent that an organization is adaptive in responding to and reducing pervasive anxiety

associated with the processes of organizational learning and related functions of the enterprise, the existing cultures of this organization will be reinforced, deepen and become increasingly resistant to challenge or change. It is in this way that organizational culture and organizational containers produce the most effective solutions for addressing the anxiety and sources of anxiety facing the organization. And it is the organization's leader who plays the critical role of creating and maintaining the container and providing the metabolism of the anxiety – and it is to this remarkable and perhaps mysterious metabolism that I will first turn.

The Process of Metabolism

What does it mean to manage and transform anxiety? To use Bion's term, what does it mean to metabolize anxiety? The term "metabolism" was borrowed by Bion and other psychoanalytic theorist from the field of biology. Beginning with Sigmund Freud's "scientific project" – eventually becoming psychoanalysis – there was a strong affinity among practitioners and theorist in this domain of the healing arts (and sciences) with human physiology and the broader biological sciences.

In the case of biological metabolism, we find a process concerned with chemical reactions in the body of all mammals (and many other living organisms). Through metabolism we convert food to energy that is needed for many cellular operations (creation of proteins, lipids, nucleic acids and carbohydrates as well as the elimination of waste). A similar process is described by Bion – though metabolism now involves the conversion and redirection of psychic rather than physiological elements from an "unhealthy" (maladaptive) to a "healthy" (adaptive) state.

Bion's Own Version of Metabolism

I begin a description of the psychological metabolism process by turning to that offered by Bion (1995). Two fundamental elements exist, according to Bion, in human consciousness and thinking. One of these elements is labeled *beta*. These elements are the unmetabolized thoughts, emotions and bodily states that we always experience – whether they come from the outside world or from inside our individual and collective psyches. Among the inside collective elements are the three widely acknowledged basic assumptions that underlie group functioning: dependency, fight-flight and pairing (Bion, 1961). The basic assumptions themselves are likely to dominate group functioning if the elements of anxiety are not metabolized. These basic assumption elements along with many other beta elements (such as dreams and collective myths and fantasies) are associated with anxiety. They represent some very important and often maladaptive elements in the human psyche that need to be transformed.

Alpha and Beta

For Bion, the metabolized elements – that he labels *alpha* – are those that we can readily think about and articulate. In the case of anxiety operating in an organizational setting, these metabolized alpha elements would include the identified and articulated cause of the anxiety, as well as the impact of anxiety on such critical organizational functions as personnel management, conflict-management, problem-solving, and decision-making (Bergquist, 2003).

Perhaps most importantly, alpha elements are often valid perceptions of reality and processes associated with the capacity of individuals and organizations to learn from experience (Bion, 1995). Today, in an organizational setting, we often describe this latter alpha state as the establishment and maintenance of a learning organization (Argyris and Schon, 1978; Senge, 1990). This setting is one in which there is an ongoing testing of reality and a desire to learn from organizational mistakes – and I would add organizational successes (Bergquist, 2003).

From Beta to Alpha

This is all well and good – we move beta elements to alphas individually and collectively. This is a valid description of successful metabolism among individuals and in organizational settings, based on observations and analyses offered by Bion and many other object-relations oriented therapists and group facilitators. However, this description doesn't tell us much about how metabolism takes place. How do we turn Beta elements into Alpha elements? One way to approach this question is to note the critical role played by containers – as I have already suggested when describing the nature and variety of containers.

This still doesn't do the trick as far as I'm concerned. I would suggest that Bion tends to focus on the fundamental strategies of psychoanalysis in his writing about metabolism. These include such ego-based processes as the slow and careful introduction or re-introduction of unconscious (beta) elements into consciousness, so that they might be tested against reality and either isolated or transformed into productive action (sublimation). These also include a focus on dreams, fantasies and childhood memories, with the therapist helping their client not only gaining access to this material but also determining its accuracy and more importantly its impact on current perceptions of relationships and reality, and its impact of current decisions being made and actions taken.

What about at a collective (group or organizational) level? Much as a dream is interpreted and implications are drawn regarding how the dream's content tells the dreamer something about their own wishes and fears, so beta elements in the life of an organization (or individual members of the organization) can be interpreted and can be sources of new learning. Bion is inclined to emphasize that once these elements are brought to consciousness, the members (and in particular the leaders) of an organization will be open to new learning from their continuing experiences in the organization.

When the conversion of beta to alpha is successful, learning is not distorted or dominated by unprocessed Beta elements (such as the basic group assumptions). Successful conversion for Bion involves the close alignment of learning to an accurate appraisal of ongoing experiences. Ego functions are in charge – whether this concerns the personal psyches of individuals or the collective psyche of a group or organization.

Alternative Versions of Metabolism

For Bion, metabolism often seems to be all about thinking and learning. Given this emphasis, I would suggest that we can turn to several other theorists who have more recently focused on the processes of thinking and learning.

Kahneman's System One and Two

I have often mentioned the first of these theorists, Daniel Kahneman. Kahneman (2011) is the Nobel-prize winning behavioral economist who drew an important distinction concerning the speed of thinking. He describes fast thinking as a process that builds on intuition and readily applied heuristics (such as relying on the most recent information received). Kahneman contrasts this with slow thinking, which is a stepping back from one's immediate experience, checking out the validity of specific assumptions, challenging the heuristics, and learning from both successful and failed engagements with the thinker's world. I offer Kahneman's (2011, pp. 20-21) own words in providing a summary description of these two systems:

System 1 operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control.

System 2 allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations. The operations of System 2 are often associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice, and concentration. . . .

I describe system 1 as effortlessly originating impressions and feelings that are the main sources of the explicit beliefs and deliberate choices of System 2. The automatic operations of System 1 generate surprisingly complex patterns of ideas, but only the slower System 2 can construct thoughts in an orderly series of steps.

In many ways, Kahneman's fast thinking is aligned with Bion's Beta elements --- though Kahneman tends to focus on the influence of heuristics rather than the influence of unconscious and often repressed content (the proclivity of Bion and his psychoanalytic colleagues). Kahneman's slow thinking would similarly seem to be aligned with Bion's Alpha element.

Given this at least partial alignment, how might Kahneman contribute to our understanding of Bion's metabolism? I would point to the term used by Kahneman to describe this second mode of thinking: it is about slowing down. When we slow down and refuse to jump to immediate conclusions then we are increasing the chances of metabolism. This slowing down is particularly important to engage when we are anxious (individually or collectively). We desperately want to reduce or resolve the anxious feelings. We are getting "signaled" all over the place. The alarms have rung out. We want to speed up and find quick solutions. Instead, we must slow down and determine the source and nature of the anxiety - which is not easy to do. The container, once again, is critical. This is where sanctuaries come into play. We find a place to think and feel. We pray for guidance or talk to a good friend. We step out at lunch time and go to a nearby park or

run around the indoor track at the nearby gym. We schedule an appointment with our therapist, life coach or pastor.

I would also point to a second implication to be drawn from Kahneman's description of System 1 and System 2. As noted in the passage I quoted, System 2 is dependent on System 1 for many of System 2 beliefs and choices. It is much too simple (System 1 thinking) to declare that System 2 is purely rational and devoid of distortions and assumptions. Similarly, we must remember that the content of Bion's Alpha elements come out of Beta content – so are not immune to bias or the intrusion of unconscious content. Put in broader, psychoanalytic terms, the Ego derives its energy from the Id and Superego. As a result, the Ego must always make compromises in its engagement with reality: the piper must be paid. The Id and Superego must be acknowledged if Ego is to gain its energy.

Conclusions

What does all of this mean? I have identified the need for containers and metabolic processes in helping individuals, groups and entire organizations address the anxiety that is prevalent in a VUCA-Plus environment. Furthermore, I have often noted that a leader plays a key role in managing (or mismanaging) the container and metabolism. The leader must often be the holder of the anxiety. This is a very difficult emotion to retain. It is very tempting for a leader to try directing the anxiety and attendant anger and frustration to other people inside and outside the organization. It is also tempting to try blunting the anxiety with mood-altering drugs, distracting, escapist or even self-destructive behavior, or withdrawal from the challenging leadership role.

In other words, the leader can easily become a “burned out” victim as the holder of the anxiety. It is in the role of anxiety-holder that a leader is most in need of outside support and guidance – whether this comes from a caring life-partner, an executive coaching, or a skilled psychotherapist. Later in this book, I offer several tools that might assist an organizational leader in their attempt to meet the challenges of VUCA-Plus by metabolizing and re-introducing the attendant anxiety into the organization.

Chapter Twelve

Confronting Tyranny IV: Courage and Patriotism

Up to this point, I have focused on ways in which Snyder has suggested we address the challenge of tyranny and have focused in particular (in Chapter Eleven) on the way in which we must manage anxiety while addressing these challenges. I wish to dig a bit deeper in this chapter as I approach Snyder's final two lessons regarding patriotism and courage. I find that patriotism is ultimately about something more than waving a flag and courage is about something more than taking a bold step forward. Residing underneath both patriotism and courage is a fundamental resetting of our head and heart on behalf of harmony of interest, balancing of rights and responsibility, and acting on behalf of a compelling future.

Beyond this basic suggestion that we slow down and find a time and place for reflection, there is the matter of engagement in higher order thinking and reasoning. In Kahneman's world this refers particularly to reflecting on the operating heuristics. Do we overestimate the probable occurrence of certain highly dramatic outcomes? Is there a good reason for us to rely on simply stated analyses of complex situations (prevalent in the VUCA-Plus environment)? Do we always turn to the same sources for advice and avoid perspectives that are troubling, contradictory or anxiety-producing (particularly unwelcomed when we are trying to reduce our anxiety)?

Bateson's Higher Order Thinking

I return to the guidance offered by Gregory Bateson (1972,1979), the remarkable polymath who explored many issues including what he identified as first and second order thinking and learning. First order learning and thinking concerns the ability to change and improve on what we are already thinking and doing. This form of learning and thinking is dominant in our daily life. It relates directly to Kahneman's heuristics and Bion's Beta elements. Conversely, second-order learning and thinking is about consideration of alternative actions and alternative ways of framing one's current experiences. Even more importantly, second order thinking and second order learning are about thinking-about-thinking and learning-about-learning. We pause, slow down our thinking, and consider what lies behind the way we are now thinking and what are the outcomes of our current way of thinking.

What might second-order thinking look like in an actual organizational setting? How might second order change operating in an institution. Let me turn to an educational organization with which I have consulted. It is a liberal arts college that offers undergraduate degrees in both the arts and sciences. As is the case with the faculty at most academic institutions, there is a major gulf in the way teaching occurs in these two divisions: as noted many years ago, the arts and sciences constitute two different worlds (Snow, 2012). The faculty members residing in these two worlds embrace quite different ideas about how learning takes place (other than their shared

belief in the value of lecturing). The sciences rely on learning in the laboratory, while the arts rely on learning in the studio.

It is traditionally assumed that improvement in the teaching engaged in each of these worlds requires doing a better job of designing and conducting the laboratory (for faculty in the sciences) and designing and conducting the studio (for faculty in the arts). This improvement requires first order learning and change. Rather simple heuristics can readily be applied: improve what you are already doing and/or do what you are already doing more often (or less often). First order learning and change is alive and well. Attend a workshop on new ways to demonstrate combustion in the lab. Extend the studio to two hours (or reduce the Thursday studio by thirty minutes). Meet with other members of your own department to share best practices.

What about second order learning and change? During a two-day faculty retreat, I encouraged and facilitated a somewhat “radical” process. I suggested that a pedagogical bridge be built between the arts and sciences. What would a chemistry studio look like? Could there be a painting laboratory? Perhaps we could also bring in the other humanities: what about a history studio? As I met with faculty members from both the arts and sciences, sparks of inter-disciplinary thought began to ignite a combustion of innovative thinking. A professor of Art noted that Studio learning often involves students sitting around a still life and sketching the assembled objects from different perspectives. Couldn’t physics students or history students explore a specific stellar or political event from different perspectives? What about a sculpture laboratory? Different materials could be used to create a particular sculpted work. How does each material influence the sculpting process and the outcome? This would be an interesting experimental question to address in a sculpture laboratory.

This excursion into bridge-building across disciplines exemplifies second order learning and change. Rather than doing the same thing better or more often, we are invited to do something different and to learn from this different action. In the case of the faculty at this liberal arts college, it was not only a matter of teaching in a new manner. It was also a matter of examining current practices from a fresh perspective. Faculty members in the sciences who have been engaged in laboratory teaching for many years, have now begun to appreciate and share with other faculty members the unique lessons they have learned about laboratory education over the years. A similar impact was evident among the arts faculty as they began to reflect on and share their insights about studio learning.

I would suggest that Bion’s metabolism took place in this faculty workshop. The anxiety associated with learning something new about how to design an educational experience was contained in this retreat setting—as was the anxiety that attends the building of an interdisciplinary bridge. A sanctuary and a safe play space were created. The exercise in considering science studios and art laboratories transformed this anxiety into a constructive interdisciplinary and innovative sharing of ideas and expertise “on the bridge” (as the workshop participants described this workshop experience). Metabolism was taking place—and it was not in a therapy office.

Berger and Luckmann's Constructed World

I have offered this brief excursion into the dynamics operating in a faculty workshop partially as a way to introduce another way of envisioning a process that confronts tyranny and rigidity of thought and feelings. This process involves an even deeper probing of the world we are perceiving, interpreting and acting in. It is a courageous process that is critical to our success in addressing the lessons offered by Timothy Snyder. The differing assumptive worlds in which we all live are brought to the surface. Much as I did in working with the art and science faculty members in the college where I served as a consultant.

The assumptive world in which each of us lives will vary quite a bit from the assumptive world in which other people live--especially in a VUCA-Plus environment. Tyrants wish to not only assert their own assumptive world on our society but encourage polarized views regarding other competing worlds. Elsewhere (Bergquist, 2019) I have described the primary elements to be found in the broad assumptive worlds we create and inhabit. These assumptions worlds are based in the social constructions of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). These constructions, in turn, are strongly influenced by the linguistics of a specific society (both the semantics and syntax) and the dominant paradigm(s) operating in their society or a subset of their society (Kuhn, 2012).

The assumptive worlds in which we live determine what we choose to see and what we choose to know. At a very basic level, it is about four epistemological conditions: (1) what we know that we know (whether or not this is accurate), (2) what we know that we don't know, (3) what we don't know that we know. Perhaps of greatest importance is a fourth epistemological condition: (4) what we don't know that we don't know (often self-sealed collective ignorance) (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024).

It is this fourth condition that is directly aligned with mystery-- the fourth type of issue I have identified. It is the mystery which is most closely aligned with Bion's unprocessed Beta elements. I would suggest that mysterious elements are not just those assigned to the unconscious because they are psychically dangerous--as Bion and his psychoanalytic colleagues might suggest. In many cases, these mysterious Beta elements are those which are simply too large, complex, unpredictable, vulnerable, ambiguous, turbulence, and filled with contradictions to be easily processed. In other words, welcome to the world of VUCA-Plus! It is at this level that metabolization is most challenging. It is at this level that the container --and in particular, the sanctuary --is most needed.

How specifically would metabolism work in addressing the anxiety-saturated challenging of one's assumptive worlds. I have already offered one example of a metabolic process as it operates in a faculty workshop. It is a matter of introducing an alternative frame of reference. In particular, it is about introducing perspectives held by other participants in a workshop or other people who play an important role in in one's present (or past) life. The empty chair process used in Gestalt-oriented psychotherapy comes to mind, as do many psychodrama techniques. I will be identifying many other strategies in this book; however, at this point I will briefly suggest several assumptive-world related processes before moving on to a more detailed examination.

One way to approach assumptive worlds is offered by my colleague Will Schutz (1994). He suggested that the most important question to ask is: “what do you know is NOT the problem?” As we explore what has been dismissed (or isolated), the critical assumptions we make in our life are likely to be revealed. We can similarly explore an “absurd” idea (such as being brutally honest with our enemy or being playful about a very serious matter) and reflect on the assumptions underlying this assessment of absurdity. Another approach concerns the role played by a leader in opening reflecting on their own assumptions regarding the operations of their unit of the organization. This can be done, as my colleague, Marybeth O’Neill (O’Neill and Bergquist, 2007) notes, by inviting an executive coach to facilitate this reflection in a group setting (such as a retreat).

I would suggest yet another approach. It is based on a perspective offered by object-relations therapists (such as Bion). Each of us holds multiple and sometimes contradictory emotion-loaded images and ideas (psychic “objects”). As Bion has noted, these objects can be intertwined with the basic collective assumptions operating in a group, as well as other (beta) elements of an individual’s or group’s assumptive world. Building on O’Neill’s approach to transparent executive coaching, a leader (or other members of a team) can identify (with the help of a facilitator) several contradictory elements of their assumptive world.

A dialogue can then take place with the leader (or other team members) creating a public dialogue between these contradictory assumptions. Alternatively, this dialogue can be engaged by several other members of the team, once the leader (team member) has outlined the major features embedded in each assumption. Other members of the team can then comment on their own thoughts and feelings regarding each assumption—for they are likely to be struggling with similar contradictions. I have described this very powerful process elsewhere in much greater detail (Bergquist, 2014a). It is based on a technique created by Michael Balint—another object relations practitioner. At this point, I am ready to turn to Snyder’s last two lessons regarding patriotism and courage – but from the expanded set of perspectives I have just offered.

19. Be a patriot

Set a good example of what America means for the generations to come. They will need it. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 111)

Patriotism is usually conceived (perhaps even by Snyder) as the confrontation in words and weapons of an enemy who is seeking to overwhelm our society through the engagement of force. While I agree that patriotism is often found in this type of confrontation, there are other forms of patriotism that are equally as important in confronting tyranny. I have already identified three of these forms – one being the challenge of physical force (alignment with the fight/flight assumption identified by Wilfred Bion). I turn again to Bion who points the way to two other forms: dependency and pairing (visioning).

We are patriots when we seek independence in the face of a pull toward or pervasive presence of dependency. We are patriots, as well, when we stand for a compelling vision of the future (a pairing of reality and aspirations) in the face of a pull toward or pervasive cynicism regarding the possibility of a viable future. I will approach each of these three patriotic challenges by first offering a statement commending the validity of an alternative set of assumptions. It can readily be assumed that we are inevitably dependent, that a persistent and powerful enemy will always be present and that any hope for a positive future is nothing but a pipedream.

Dependency

An unexpected statement regarding the ultimate prevalence of dependence in our society comes from a contemporary source. In a 2020 essay written in *The Atlantic*, Adrian Vermeule, a Harvard law professor, declared that citizens will inevitably form “authentic desires” for the “just authority provided by “rulers.” Here is the full quote from Vermeule, as provided by Margaret Talbot (2022, p. 41) in her reflections at the time on the impact Amy Coney Barrett will have as a recently appointed Justice on the US Supreme Court:

Just authority in rulers can be exercised for the good of subjects, if necessary, even against the subjects’ own perception of what is best for them – perceptions that may change over time anyway, as the law teaches, habituates, and reforms them. Subjects will come to thank the ruler whose legal strictures, possibly experienced at first as coercive, encourage subjects to form more authentic desires for the individual and common goals, better habits, and beliefs that better track and promote communal well-being.

I find this to be an example of profound paternalism. I don’t think it is a form of patriotism. Vermeule has somehow come to the belief that he and others of like mind know what is best for all of us. He assumes that we will eventually come to fully appreciate his wisdom. We will renew and perhaps intensify our dependency on his authority or the formal authority in our society that is aligned with Vermeule’s arrogant world view.

I am particularly disturbed because Vermeule has offered a distortion of the harmony of interests. In his world, harmony is defined and dictated by one person (the “ruler”) and the ruler’s henchmen (in this case, those in the legal profession). As someone who is offering a viewpoint that has been delivered in contemporary times, Vermeule arouses my own fear regarding a possible or even an inevitable slide to paternalism – and from there to tyranny and despotism.

Snyder is right to be calling for a patriotic stance. However, in this case, the enemy is not a sword, it is an untested assumption of someone with some status and the potential of some authority. It is a destructive assumption held by this person that they are not only right about the world, but also have the “right” to impose their right on everyone else. In a world that is filled with regressive-inducing anxiety (and the related challenges of VUCA-Plus), I believe that my own fears of this pull toward dependency are justified.

The source of this quotation from Vermeule, Margaret Talbot (2022, p. 41), chimes in at this point. Talbot indicates that a real challenge is being posed. This state of dependency can assume

dominance and remain dominant in the kind of diverse society that now exists in mid-21st Century Societies. According to Talbot (2022, p. 41), Vermeule offers “an airy dismissal of fears that his preferred regime would be dystopian for citizens of a pluralistic society who share neither his moral viewpoint nor his orientation toward authority.” Talbot offers a positive perspective. She believes that we are unlikely to buy in collectively to Vermeule’s dictum over time. In the midst of our diversity, we will push back against this gentleman’s dualism – as both Snyder and I have proposed.

Fight/Flight

I turn to the second patriotic challenge. This is the more traditional one. It holds forth in the assumptive world constructed by many people who consider themselves to be “patriots.” This assumption centers on an apparently universal desire that we (as aggressive territorial primates) must find the enemy and engage in warfare against this enemy (be the enemy real or imagined). As I have noted elsewhere in this book, human beings have the capacity to imagine in quite vivid and compelling terms the threat of a menacing enemy--what Robert Sapolsky (2004) has described as the human capacity and tendency to produce and be stressed by imaginary lions.

I offer a second version of this fight/flight assumption. It is a quotation that comes from John Stewart Mill, the noted 19th Century political philosopher:

War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse. The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself.

This quote from Mill contains some inspiring words – as do most recruitment orations. We must be willing to fight for what we believe. Otherwise, our words ring hollow, and we have sunken into an individualistic orientation toward personal welfare and away from collective welfare (and even existence). We sit back and ask other people (often of lower societal status) to fight our wars. We praise these “patriotic warriors” and especially the “wounded veterans” and those who have sacrificed their life for our country. We praise these “other” people and declare them to be “better men (and women)” than we are during national holidays. Yet, we do not wish to take their place and ensure that our own offspring avoid these patriotic acts.

Patriotism is defined by Mills and many other social observers as primarily (perhaps exclusively) a matter of our willingness to fight. If we refuse to fight, then we are relegated in Bion’s assumptive world to nothing more than flight. We are cowards and contemptible! We feel guilty about our lack of “patriotism” – but still refuse to sign up for battle. This basic fight/flight assumption doesn’t leave much room for other perspectives on patriotism. And it is ironic (and perhaps tragic) that we are being forced to give up freedom of choice so that we might protect some other form of freedom through confronting the enemy.

I offer Mill's quote as a startling alarm ringing out against the pervasive love of war and the regressive pull back to a fight/flight assumption. I point to *The Americanization of Emily*, Paddy Chayefsky's 1964 movie that dramatically portrays a dilemma regarding the allure of war. Emily (played by Julie Andrews) speaks against the celebration of war that comes with the parades. She declares that the awarding of medals to living (and fallen) war heroes only intensifies the desire of a country (such as the United States) to engage in warfare. Emily asks: why can't we somehow celebrate peace and award those who keep the peace? The yearly awarding of the Nobel peace prize is wonderful—but we need a whole lot more of this honoring if peace can hold its own against war.

It is actually much more than just the celebration of war. It is also, as Mill notes, the polarization that takes place: one is either a patriot or a coward. Dualism reigns supreme. There are clear boundaries and identities during periods of open warfare. It is no wonder that war is celebrated. We don't have to struggle with ambiguity or with uncertainty (or any of the other elements of VUCA-Plus for that matter). The regressive pull toward fight/flight is indeed strong. A courageous stand against this polarization is risky. When taking this stance, we are likely to be declared an enemy and a "miserable creature". We are either isolated or punished for our "ambivalence" and weakness. Congressional meetings are held to make public our "cowardly" or "anti-American" acts of passivism. We should look to the example offered by Emily, given this reversal of the usual patriotic position. Emily's voice must be louder than that offered many years ago by John Stuart Mills.

Pairing/Vision of Future

I turn to the third form of patriotism. It is one which builds on an assumptive world regarding hope. This is an assumptive world that resides alongside the acknowledged failure (or unwillingness) of many people to engage or support a compelling vision of the future. This is a "dreamy" form of patriotism that leans into and supports a vision of the future. It is a patriotism that focuses on a powerful pairing of forces can bring about a future in which rights and responsibilities are balanced. There will be a genuine harmony of interests. A new messiah will be appointed by the Divine power to restore society. Waters of harmony and balance will flow from the now-righteous city on the hill.

Vehement opposition to this optimistic perspective is to be found among those who warn against this optimistic perspective. Those who articulate this vision of the future are labeled "fools" and unhinged "dreamers." Or they are vilified for offering their own exclusionary vision of what a righteous city on the hill would look like. How, after all, would harmony be achieved if it is not imposed? Who is at the table to determine what a balance between rights and responsibilities would look like?

This form of patriotism is perhaps the most elusive and least often appreciated of the three. Furthermore, the opposition is often found not in the societies of our Western world — where there often is what I would consider a "misguided" orientation toward the future. Rather, the opposition often is embedded in the perspective offered by the traditional Sages of the Eastern

world. As a representative of this perspective, I turn to Shirdi Sai Baba, a renowned spiritual master of the late 19th and early 20th Century. He has conveyed the following: “What matters is to live in the present, live now, for every moment is now. It is your thoughts and acts of the moment that create your future. The outline of your future path already exists, for you created its pattern by your past.”

It is hard to argue with this quotation and with this extraordinary man (perhaps saint) who was offering his viewpoint regarding the future. Any search for a viable future is vulnerable to Bion’s third assumption that this future is only possible if there is some highly unlikely union (partnering) between two or more forces. I am reminded of the perspective offered (probably) by the Essen community that was located in the Qumran Caves near the Dead Sea. Through our discovery and review of the so-called “Dead Sea scrolls”, we know that members of this community lived with the assumption that somehow a savior would soon come. A future would soon be realized that would culminate in the birth of a New Jerusalem and the flowing of new waters from this “City of God” to the Dead Sea. The pairing of a hopeful community with a new savior would bring about nourishment and new life – a collective salvation! We only need to wait in a state of hope and belief. As Samuel Beckett would portray many years later – it is just a matter of “waiting for Godot.”

Shirdi Sai Baba is correct in noting that the future only exists (and is only realized) in our present, everyday actions. I speak directly of this need for an action-oriented leaning into the future when considering Snyder’s final (twentieth) lesson. However, we need to be careful about discarding any vision of the future as being nothing more than a regression to Bion’s third assumption. We need to recognize that a compelling vision of the future can be just as “real” as our accurate perception of the current world.

Furthermore, an articulate statement regarding the future as a valuable source of guidance can match a clearly articulated description of our present world. After all, our version of the current world is just as much a social construction as our vision of the future. Both the present and future are saturated with assumptions, hopes, fears and a heavy dose of the past. We need to hold our versions of the present, future and past in a tentative manner.

It is critical for us to acknowledge that all three notions about patriotism are actually societal constructions. They are fictions – there being nothing else (as Wallace Stevens notes). We embrace and act upon these fictions of the past, present and future, knowing full well that these are fictions. This stance resides at the heart of what William Perry identifies as an epistemological stance of commitment in the midst of relativism. The “exquisite truth” is that we are committed to advocating on behalf of one or more of these forms of patriotism while potentially seeking to diminish the allure of one or more of the other forms.

I offer one final point regarding the third form of patriotism. We are patriots of a future knowing full well that our vision of the future is subject to revision. We modify it as we take action to realize (or at least move toward) this envisioned future. This third form of patriotism (and attendant courage) comes with a cautionary note. We must recognize that a new challenge arises

if and when we ever attain the outcomes associated with our envisioned future. What do we do with the water of harmony and balance that is pouring down from the righteous city on the hill? And how do we sustain this flow of righteous water? This is a cautionary note that requires us to be that much more courageous.

In other writing, I have identified what I call the “confiscation” of our personal and collective future. When we are successful in our life it might mean that our vision of the future has become a reality. If this occurs, then we are faced with a new often confusing condition. We no longer have a compelling future to which we are directly our talents and energy. The realized future might not be as great as we thought it would be. It seems that our “New Jerusalem” is still congested, noisy and a bit dirty. The righteous water is actually a bit polluted. Furthermore, we now have to create a new future. We might be too tired to take on this envisioning task once again: “Been there. Done that. And not as great as I thought it would be.”

The answer might be to continually update our vision of the future. As Shirdi Sai Baba suggests, perhaps we should simply live for today and forget about tomorrow. I am not ready to fully embrace this perspective offered by a wise sage. I want to turn instead, one last time, to the Western perspective offered by Timothy Snyder in his twenty lessons regarding tyranny. It concerns the courage to confront that which is challenging to our personal and collective head and heart.

20. Be as courageous as you can.

If none of us is prepared to die for freedom, then all of us will die under tyranny. (Snyder, 2017, pg. 115)

In this final lesson, Timothy Snyder poses the ultimate question: for what are we willing to die? Are we willing to die for freedom? This rather dramatic (and quite daunting existential question) is tempered a bit by his label for this lesson: “be as courageous as you can.” If I combine these two perspectives, then I would rephrase Snyder’s question: “how courageous can you be on behalf of freedom?” To further refine this question, I turn to the analysis I offered regarding Lesson Nineteen. I would ask: “what form of courageous can and will you display on behalf of freedom?”

There is the courage associated with escaping the bonds of dependency. We choose to be wise, knowledgeable and skillful rather than relying on the wisdom, knowledge or skill held (or at least asserted) by other people. They purport to be “authorities” or purport to be in a position of power and control (formal “authority”). How do we find our own wisdom, knowledge and skill? How do we discern the wisdom, knowledge and skills that other people appropriately offer us?

Perhaps we are courageous in our willingness to embrace a dream (a “New Jerusalem”) in the face of cynicism and skepticism. We can be realistic about our dreams. We can keep them dynamic and ever changing as we continue to learn and grow in our pursuit of the dream. Of course, as Snyder seems to be suggesting, we can be courageous in our physical battle against

tyranny. We can demonstrate, go to prison and even (perhaps) take up arms against a menacing force and evil enemy.

Conclusions

I would go further in my refinement of the basic, existential question. We are courageous in our own way on behalf of freedom. However, I would ask: “what will you do with the freedom?” This requires a higher order of thinking. It also requires a deep re-examination of our basic assumptions regarding how the world operates and what our role should be in helping to bring about a compelling future. Effective courage requires that we be not only thoughtful but also introspective regarding what freedom really means to us—and for what are we willing to sacrifice.

When there is no longer a tyrant, are you now free to pick your own cereal or chose your own style of clothing? I have written about this trivialization of freedom in one of my earlier chapters. This trivialization is often actually an escape from the challenges that true freedom forces us to face. What then is the nature of a true form of freedom for which we are willing to be courageous? I will emphasize the role played by a compelling vision of the future in the final section of this book.

In bringing this chapter to a close, I propose that a final challenge be addressed. It concerns the fundamental reason why we should be courageous. We are courageous on behalf of the survival of democratic rule in our time and place. This challenge requires that I first invite several new guides to join us in this containment of tyranny and defense of democracy. Without this containment and successful defense, there is not much hope of realizing a desired future—let alone ever creating a society with a harmony of interest and balance of rights and responsibilities. These new guides are Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (2018). They offer important insights in their book, *How Democracies Die*. My interactions with these guides are documented in the next chapter of this book. As I have done in these four chapters on Timothy Snyder’s confrontation with tyranny, I will be offered Levitsky and Ziblatt’s insights and then share my own reflections arising from absorbing and expanding on their work. Please turn to this thirteenth chapter as I bring this section of the book to a close.

Chapter Thirteen

Protecting Democracy

I turn to the thoughtful and provocative analysis offered by Steven Levitsky and Daneil Ziblatt (2018) in *How Democracies Die* in order to build an even stronger foundation for establishing the conditions needed to ensure a society where true freedom prevails, I will be revisiting themes I have already introduced when considering insights offered by Levitsky and Ziblatt.

I begin with Levitsky and Ziblatt's key Indicators of Authoritarian Behavior.

I will suggest how these indicators point the way to a model of true freedom.

1. Rejection of (or weak commitment to democratic rules of the game

Do they reject the Constitution or express a willingness to violate it?

Do they suggest a need for antidemocratic measures, such as canceling elections, violating or suspending the Constitution, banning certain organizations, or restricting basic civil or political rights?

Do they seek to use (or endorse the use of) extraconstitutional means to change the government, such as military coups, violent insurrections, or mass protests aimed at forcing a change in the government?

Do they attempt to undermine the legitimacy of elections, for example, by refusing to accept credible electoral results?

I propose that the Constitution of the United States serves two of the functions of true freedom I have proposed in this book. First, it provides the guidelines for creating and preserving a harmony of interest—at least to the extent that a governmental institution can assist in this process. The US constitution also (to a lesser extent) provides a vision of the future. In my opinion, the Declaration of Independence (and Gettysburg Address) are better able to serve this function—as might several other venerable documents such as the Federalist Papers, sections of Lincoln's second Inaugural Address and Franklyn Roosevelt's Five Freedoms. In their own distinct way, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lincoln and Roosevelt seem to know something about the aspirations of Americans and something about what is contained in the American Dream.

This first indicator of impending authoritarian rule (in the United States) is of critical importance for the establishment and reinforcement of a harmony of interests--regardless of one's own political views and one's appointment of American hero(s). Division of the US government into three units (which is unique in the history of governance structures in the world) means that there are differing "interests" to be served by each of these three branches of government—and that there must be shared interests among those leading these three branches. As I have already noted, the differentiation to be found in any organization (or in any dynamic system) must always be

balanced off with a structure and force that provides integration and coordination of the differentiated units.

To build on what Levitsky and Ziblatt have proposed, I would suggest that American authoritarians are likely to forgo or undermine the constitution in part because they want one of the three branches of government to be dominant. This is often the executive branch, and more specifically the presidency. There certainly can often be an authoritarian dominance coming from one of the other two branches. Huey Long, for instance, dominated Louisiana governance through his control of the state legislature. Furthermore, one can justifiably argue that the judicial branch of American government (and particularly the Supreme Court) can provide a dominating, often irreversible kind of authority in American society. The lifelong tenure of federal judges supremely exemplifies potential authoritarianism.

2. Denial of the legitimacy of political opponents

Do they describe their rivals as subversive, or opposed to the existing constitutional order?

Do they claim that their rivals constitute an existential threat, either to national security or to the prevailing way of life?'

Do they baselessly describe their partisan rivals as criminals, whose supposed violation of the law (or potential to do so) disqualifies them from full participation in the political arena?

Do they baselessly suggest that their rivals are foreign agents, in that they are secretly working in alliance with (or the employ of) a foreign government – usually an enemy one?

At the heart of any barrier against a Harmony of Interests is the polarization that Levitsky and Ziblatt identify with regard to this second indicator. Polarities may begin with a simple unwillingness to listen to (let alone seek understanding of) an opposing point of view. This is the first of what Levitsky and Ziblatt identify as a four-tier process of polarization.

Tier One Polarization

This first tier can be found in the all-too-common unwillingness of many of us to tune in for very long to a cable TV station that is committed to a political view that opposes our own. I plead guilty to this crime. It is not just a case of misunderstanding or not fully appreciating this opposing viewpoint. We simply can't "stomach" the perspective and biases being offered. The speakers themselves make us ill. They are disgusting. After one minute of trying to be "open-minded" and seeking to understand this alternative reality, we turn back (with relief) to our "home station". This is first tier polarization.

Tier Two Polarization

The second tier of polarization occurs and is intensified when the opponent is siloed with stereotypes: "like all of the other people of his/her "kind" he/she is stupid, unfeeling, not patriotic, etc. Furthermore, this "Other" is biased. "Unlike me. They are closed-minded. I am open

mindful." My primary guide regarding the "Other," Bary Oshry, 2018), offers a powerful and poignant portrayal of this second tier.

1. Many cultures may look strange to us,
but not to the "others".
And our culture may look strange to the "others"
but not to us.
That simple fact is the beginning of understanding.

2. We may feel that our culture is simply
the way things have been, are, and ought to be.
The "others" likely feel the same way
about their culture.

3. We and the "others" were not born
with the rules of our cultures;
we learned them
from parents and elders,
teachers, and peers,
and media.

4. In both cultures
we and the "others" absorbed
the do's and don'ts of our cultures –
appropriate and inappropriate emotionality,
ways of speaking,
clothing,
interacting with elders and
people of different sexes,
and much more.
We were taught our culture's beliefs and values,
rites and rituals,
ways of solving problems,
seeking justice,
expressing joy, or sadness, or grief,
and much more.

5. In both cultures, these rules were taught
as the ways to live, to survive,
the ways to be in the world.

In his portrayal, Oshry offers not just reality, but also a first glimmer of hope regarding the elimination of barriers and distortions we create when encountering the Other:

6. In time, we and the “others” learn our rules so well
that we no longer experience them as rules,
they become the lenses through which we view the world.
Except we don’t see our lens
and how it shapes what we see.
Instead, we believe we see the world
as it really is.

7. Neither we nor the “others”
experience our culture as an option,
as one of many possibilities.
Each of us experiences our culture as
the way things are or ought to be.
And then we meet.

It seems that Barry Oshry agrees with Lieutenant Cable from the musical, *South Pacific*. We must be carefully taught to hate (or at least distrust) those whom our relatives hate. We must pay attention when our parents and respected members of our community identify someone or some group as the “Other.” For instance, as a child living in small-town Illinois, I was told that the people running the local store where I bought comic books were evil people who might even kill children. These store owners were Jewish. I bought my comic book at their store every Sunday after attending Sunday school because their store was the only one open on Sunday (God’s designated day). I rushed out of their store after purchasing the comic book – afraid for my life. I was “carefully taught” (not by my very caring parents but by many other adults in this community).

We also have to be carefully taught that there is only one “legitimate” and “virtuous” (perhaps God-given) society and culture. It is the society and culture in which we are currently living. Sunday is the sacred day of the week – not Saturday (as some “believers” assert). I must attend Sunday School or bad things will happen to me (such as being killed by a Jew). “Other” is not welcomed – at least not until “we meet.” For me, this meant my family’s move from Illinois to California. My three best friends were Jewish. I often attend Friday evening services. I had met the “Other” and found them to be special people with strong commitments to family and justice. One of my friends went on to become a full-time social reformer working in the slums of New Jersey. He exemplified an advocate’s alignment with collective responsibility and shared harmony of interests.

Tier Three Polarization

Levitsky and Ziblatt describe the third tier of polarization – and seem to be hinting at the fourth tier. As Levitsky and Ziblatt note, there is a declaration that one’s political opponent is an enemy. They are an existential threat to the integrity (perhaps even the continuing survival) of those of “us” who are on the right side of God, history, freedom, goodness, and integrity.

Given these third-tier concerns, the “Other” becomes someone who is not a legitimate member of “our” society. At best, these “other” people are providing the cheap manual labor that is needed in both an agrarian and industrial society. Our guide, Heather Cox Richardson (2024g, p. 195) offers us a disturbing expression of this perspective from our own American history:

In 1858, South Carolina senator James Henry Hamond explained that society was made up of two groups. Most people were ‘mudsills,’ named for the timbers driven into the ground to support gracious homes above. They performed ‘Menial duties’ and had a “low order of intellect and but little skill.” A few people made up “that other class which leads progress, civilization, and refinement.” They oversaw the mudsills’ lives and labor. Mudsills produced capital that accumulated in the hands of society’s leaders, who used that great wealth to invest in business and culture to move the country forward.

If not exploited for their cheap labor, the “Others” should be isolated (quarantined, shunned, banned, caste out). They should be given no rights that are properly granted only to those of us who are Godly and historically entitled to these rights. It is “Us” who are patriots of freedom, exemplars of goodness, and pillars of integrity and loyalty. And we continue to be “open-minded” and are (patronizing) protectors of those poor unfortunates who are “Other.”

Tier Four Polarization

We come to the fourth and final tier. This is where authoritarianism finds its most fertile ground. These “Other” people are not acting alone. They are forcing a collective alliance with other members of their oppositional “community.” This alliance is often hidden from view. It operates in a sinister underground. It operates as a Conspiracy (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). Without any public manifestation, the tier four polarization is often ungrounded and even unreal. The absence of the conspiracy can’t be proven – so it remains “real” in the heads and hearts of those who fear its oppositional force.

Borrowing (as I have done previously in this book) from the semantic differential framework of Charles Osgood (1957), we can label the conspiracy as being against our personal interests (bad rather than good). It is potentially quite threatening--since we believe that it is fully operational (active rather than passive) and potentially quite powerful (strong rather than weak). There is no evidence to disprove this assumption of bad/active/strong. Thus, the threat of this envisioned conspiracy readily triggers the individual threat reaction (amygdala based) as well as a collective threat reaction in our community. Tier Four Polarization reigns supreme and is usually attended by equally as bad/active/strong authoritarianism.

It is also important to note that Tier Four polarization can operate in many other ways. Some ways are quite destructive to a democracy that is based on equity and justice. Other ways are trivial and can even be portrayed in entertaining ways (such as the terms used by Archie Bunker in "All in the Family" when speaking about "Black" folks). As those who offer "agent-based modeling" have noted, the move to a collective polarization often begins with a few small acts. The humor of Archie Bunker, then a counter portrayal of a successful and loving Black family, then a commitment of Black families to retain their racial and ethnic identity. "White" families find this "Black identity thing" to be a mild threat. This threat increases when a Black family moves into the neighborhood. Soon, the self-organizing (neighborhood) effect is engaged.

One of the White families decides to move out of this integrated community. Other White families soon follow suit. The swarming begins and a large number of individual acts and decisions lead to a collective act. At some point in time there is a "tipping point" and virtually all white families depart. The neighborhood suddenly becomes "black." It now attracts only other Black families. Enclaves like this (often identified as "ghettos") emerge in many cities—be they Hispanic, Chinese, Slavic or French. We also find "life-style enclaves (Bellah, et al., 1985) and the creation of unplanned clustering of elderly citizens and wealthy citizens as well as planned clustering in gated communities. There are also the citizens of poverty who live in the "slums" and Tenderloin district of a city.

Finally, there is the exponentially growing communities of homeless people who are living in the parks, beside the highways, and on the streets of many cities. Often driven from their homes by high rental costs, these citizens of the streets may be employed but are still unable to afford housing. The neighborhood effect is operating here as well as in ghetto communities. One's colleague at work is now living in an encampment located on the grass beside a nearby freeway: "perhaps, this is the pathway for me to take as I try to make ends meet." Neighbors swarm with neighbors on the streets of America.

We find the same dynamic operating at a much more benign level in the beginning of the "Wave" at a baseball game. One attendee at the game stands up and waves, then another, then a small group in this section of the park and then it moves as a collective wave across all sections of the ballpark. At some point it stops and anyone still standing is now "out of place." They will soon sit down. An even more powerful and poignant "wave" took place in the country of Estonia during the time when the Soviet Union was collapsing. At a major song fest, one Estonian coral group sitting in the amphitheater began to sing an Estonian anthem (rather than the required and enforced Russian songs). Soon, the entire Estonian audience broke out in song—singing the Estonian anthem. This wave has been called the "singing revolution." It led to Estonia freeing itself from Russian rule without anyone being injured or arrested.

All of these dynamics are a product of and/or accelerator of polarization. It is either/or. Do you or don't you join your working colleague in the tent community beside the freeway? Is this encampment legal or not? Is it justified or not? Do you join in a protest against housing prices or do you "mind your own business" and settle in for life in the encampment? Do you stand and wave at the ballgame or don't you? Does a "loyal" fan stand as a sign of support for their team—

or do they remain seated so that they might (as “loyal” fans) concentrate on the game. Who are the good guys and who are the bad? When do the sitting fans feel compelled to stand?

Do you sing the Estonian National Anthem or don't you? If you remain silent, are you simply being a good citizen who is conforming to the existing Soviet laws (and informal Soviet norms) or are you an Estonian patriot who courageously defies the laws and norms, singing a cherish song from their childhood at the top of their lungs? What if you are one of the many residences of Estonia who was transported from Russia (often against their will) to help fill a job in the Soviet master plan that was designated for a Russian immigrant? Do you sit and listen to the singing of your neighbors? Are you suddenly and painfully aware of your “otherness” – now being a “stranger in a strange land.”? As a Russian, are you aware that the norms are changing and that the power is shifting? As either an Estonian or Russian are you now more fully aware that polarization exists? Can you appreciate that polarization is being collectively enacted and reinforced right before your eyes? Tier Four Polarization is a poignant and often painful indicator of authoritarianism – and it is rampant in an authoritarian society (such as was to be found in Soviet-era Estonia).

I believe that anything past Tier One polarization makes it quite hard to find Harmony of Interests. Where is communality when some members of one's society are identified as stupid or even tractorist. Where is harmony when entire communities within one's society pose a collective, existential threat to oneself. The challenge of finding communality is even greater when the polarization builds on a tugging match between collective responsibility and individual rights.

What happens if collective responsibility is abandoned when it comes to the welfare of a specific sector or community within one's society? What is to be done when individual rights are being trampled by a push toward tipping point compliance? What kind of a stance do we take when agent-based modeling is in full operation—when neighbors follow neighbors? There is no harmony when we consider “Other” people to be unworthy of our care and concern. Rights and responsibilities are out of balance when we force someone to wave, sing or stay out (or stay in) our neighborhood. Under such conditions, it is unlikely that we will find common ground to address shared challenges. More importantly, it is tempting under such conditions to look toward some authoritarian leader to determine which interests receive attention and which challenges are to be addressed.

3. Toleration or encouragement of violence

Levitsky and Ziblatt ask several fundamental questions regarding actions taken:

Do they have any ties to armed gangs, paramilitary forces, militias, guerrillas, or other organizations that engage in illicit violence?

Have they or their partisan allies sponsored or encouraged mob attacks on opponents?

Have they tacitly endorsed violence by their supporters by refusing to unambiguously condemn it and punish it?

Have they praised (or refused to condemn) other significant acts of political violence, either in the past or elsewhere in the world?

The answers to these questions at one level are quite straightforward. We are asked to observe actual behavior—not just attitudes or predicted behavior. If any of these violent actions take place, then democracy is in jeopardy. Authoritarian rule has already begun. The room is being cleared so that the authoritarian ruler can step into this virulent role without opposition.

While there are obvious answers to these questions, there are related questions that yield less clear and much more complex answers. These questions concern the criteria for determining not only that violence has occurred but also what makes for the creation of an “armed group, paramilitary force, militia or guerrilla band.” When does an ugly shout become a deadly shot? How many shots does it take to provoke deep concern for the viability of democratic institutions? When does a kick become a knife wound and when are multiple knife wounds being administered to the extent that we need to be alarmed? The noted songwriter, Bob Dylan, asks a similar set of questions when he asks:

. . . how many times must the cannon balls fly

Before they're forever banned

. . . how many deaths will it take till he knows

That too many people have died

In this song, he asks an important related question regarding the point when we begin to pay attention to the violence occurring around us—and the outcomes of this violence:

. . . how many times can a man turn his head

And pretend that he just doesn't see

. . . how many ears must one man have

Before he can hear people cry

Dylan even makes the connection that I am trying to make throughout this book: all modes of authoritarianism (and certainly violence) produce a loss of or inability to find true freedom:

. . . how many years can some people exist

Before they're allowed to be free

Dylan concludes that the answer to these questions might be quite elusive:

. . . The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind

The answer is blowin' in the wind

Unfortunately, in our contemporary, ever challenging world, we can't just leave this matter as something that is "blowin' in the wind." At least Levitsky and Ziblatt don't believe that we should respond in a passive manner. As I have noted at several points in this book, an epistemological stance must be taken that recognizes the relativity of knowledge. There is the difficulty of determining when something bad that has occurred is "too much" and a threat to democratic functioning. Fortunately, there may be a partial answer to a question regarding the point when we need to invoke something more than a passive observation of that which is "blowin' in the wind." This partial answer resides in the analytic tool already mentioned: agent-based modeling.

It is through the modeling of dynamics operating in a system that we can predict when a set of individual events (in this case violent acts) become a collective event (in this case, formation and enactment of a violence-oriented group). There is a tipping point when a group of desperate (and often dangerous) individuals become a terrorist cell. Using the tools of agent-based modeling, we can do a pretty good job of determining when a collective becomes dangerous. Returning to Osgood's semantic differential, this modeling helps us determine when someone becomes not only bad (against our interests and welfare) and active (taking observable violent acts) but also strong (the power of collective planning and enactment).

I can offer one example regarding my own work with a specific group of people who were concerned about the behavior of people they are supervising (I must keep the details of this work confidential given the sensitive work being done by those with whom I have been working). My clients had done very careful training of their subordinates regarding the way they were to treat those they had captured on a battlefield. All of the conventions regarding the humane treatment of prisoners were to be obeyed. However, within a few months of being out in the "field", these subordinates were found to be operating in a very inhumane manner. Why and how did this occur?

We found that the freshly trained subordinates were in a minority when placed in the field. At some point, there was a tipping point when they abruptly shifted their attitude and subsequent behavior. In their immediate interaction on a day-to-day basis, they had begun to shift the way they viewed those in their custody. Their prisoners had now become the unclean, not really human "Other." They now could be treated without respect as an object rather than a person. Apparently, the newcomers had begun to work closely with the old-timers and had grown to respect them (the neighborhood effect). The "newcomers" to this battlefield were influenced by their informal interactions with and observations of these "old-timers" in their treatment of the prisoners.

The newcomers "tipped" and became part of the violent group. Their training "back home" was now far behind them. There is a polite, "scientific" to describe what has occurred: new members of the team had become "socialized" by the dominant group. They were now part of the team that was about to "convert" the next group of newcomers. Agent-based modeling has taken place. The beat goes on. The violence is repeated and intensified within a vicious feedback loop. The

answer was not to keep training new subordinates, but to work directly with the “agents” already in the field (“old-timers”) who were doing the “real” orientation.

We can extract an important lesson from my consulting experience. Levitsky and Ziblatt are correct in warning us of collective violence. This violence is not just more of the same thing (individual violence). It has “morphed” on the battlefield and during the interrogation practices into something much more dangerous--and in Osgood’s terms, much stronger. The collective planning and enactment of violence comes with recruitment and socialization of new members. Embedded in a vicious feedback loop, collective violence will not only increase. It will increase at an exponential rate. Specifically, the growth of collective violence will emulate Nassim Taleb’s (2010) “power law.” It may quickly become one of Taleb’s unexpected and quite destructive “black swan” – and create a horrific “rogue event” (such as occurred during the interrogation of prisoners during the Gulf War). It is no wonder that Levitsky and Ziblatt identified collective violence as a third indicator of the way in which democracies will die.

As I suggested in working with my client who was working in the interrogation business, the answer is not to “inoculate” the newcomers and those who are not prone to violence, The answer is to get one’s hands dirty and begin to work directly (and often one-on-one) with those now in the midst of a violent swarm. This is done through engagement of several tools I have introduced elsewhere in this book – specifically confronting people with their own cognitive dissonance, helping people manage polarities, and appreciatively “catching people when they are doing it right.” I will have more to say about the use of these tools in the final chapter of this book.

4. Readiness to curtail civil liberties of opponents, including media

Have they supported laws or policies that restrict civil liberties, such as expanded libel or defamation laws, or laws restricting protest, criticism of the government, or certain civic or political organizations?

Have they threatened to take legal or other punitive action against critics in rival parties, civil society, or the media?

Have they praised repressive measures taken by other governments, either in the past or elsewhere in the world?

Our guides, Levitsky and Ziblatt, are describing the condition that system theorists identify as a “closed system.” This is a system with impermeable and powerfully enforced boundaries. Nothing of importance moves in or moves out of a closed system. In the case of a tyrannical government, this means, as Timothy Snyder suggests, that open communication is curtailed. Action that might conflict with the government’s priorities is also blocked. The closed system in this case is specific to governance and law enforcement.

Any nation must remain at least somewhat open to trade with other nations. We see this operating today in the Kleptocracy of Putin’s Russia. The system of governance in Putin’s Russia appears to be completing closed to outside influence. However, those oligarchs who reside inside Putin’s

inner circle operate in a very open and disturbingly permissive world of international finance. Their economic holdings are substantial and spread across many enterprises in many countries. This interconnecting of a close governance system with an open finance system is particularly troubling.

I suggest that Snyder's fourth lesson should be expanded to include this interconnection. When he mentioned the threat of legal action and the control of media, it is important to ask where is the funding for these legal threats and control of the media? The funding comes from the international financial outreach. While we are seeing some restriction in the use of the oligarchs' funds (and even confiscation of these funds) in response to the invasion of Ukraine, it is unclear whether or not this financial boundary is being successfully closed—especially given the openness of China, North Korea and other “renegade” countries to the financial dealings of these Russian oligarchs.

There is a second important point to be made about closed systems. They operate through the engagement of many positive feedback loops. As I mentioned previously, a positive loop is one where one action (or piece of information) reinforces and empowers another action (or piece of information). Governance systems operate as closed systems in large part because they are immune to and have placed many barriers up to prevent the introduction of any negative actions (or pieces of information). These negative feedback loops would serve as correctives to the positive feedback loops which exist in conjunctions with actions (and distorted information) that saturate these authoritarian governance systems. Actions being taken and information being disseminated are continually reinforced inside a closed governance system.

Technically, a closed system is not viable. This system can't endure—for it ultimately needs resources from outside the system. Even more importantly, a system with nothing but positive feedback loops will soon “burn up” with exponential growth that eventually becomes malignant and self-devouring. Like cancer in a human body, the positive feedback loops in a closed government will soon kill its host nation. Yet, depletion of resources and burn out don't seem to be happening in many contemporary close, tyrannical governments.

That is because these systems are open in domains other than governance. The financial system remains open as does the informal but powerful “black market” system. If these open systems are suddenly and permanently closed, then we can anticipate that a tyrannical nation will soon dry up or burn out. There is hope. We can apply systems theory to closed, tyrannical governments. We can anticipate that barriers can be erected that disrupt the international financial affairs of these governments. These barriers may bring about the collapse of these governments.

We can also apply systems theory and our knowledge of positive and negative feedback loops in a more constructive manner. We can identify the key role that negative feedback loops play in the maintenance of an open governance system in a democracy. For Levitsky and Ziblatt, these negative loops are to be found in gatekeeping and guardrail functions and the role played by referees in democratic systems. Levitsky and Ziblatt noted that gatekeeping and guardrails have

played a very important role in all democracies. The American constitution is filled with many gatekeeping roles—in particular the provision of three, independent functional branches of government (executive, legislative and judicial). This is a distinctive feature of the American government. Most governments combine the executive and legislative functions. They also may provide much more legislative or executive oversight over the judicial branch. The interplay between these three branches of government in the USA provides important correctives (negative feedback loops) regarding the potential for abuse (or closing of doors) by any one of the three branches.

When one of the three branches dominates the other two branches, then the threat of tyranny in the United States has often arisen. Huey Long of Louisiana provides a wonderful (and disturbing) example of tyranny. He was able to control both the legislative and executive functions of his state. He posed the potential of doing the same as a successful candidate for the US Presidency during the troubling years of the 1930s. In his case, the “negative feedback loop” consisted of a bullet residing in his chest. If Huey Long had not been assassinated, tyranny might have reigned supreme—at least for a while in the United States.

We need look no further than a man that Huey Long greatly admired. This man was Mussolini, the tyrannical leader of Italy. Along with other Fascist leaders (such as Peron in Argentina), Mussolini found a violent way to sustain a closed governance system for many years. Violence and repression accelerated (as a result of positive loops), resulting in the profound damage that was inflicted on his own citizens and the citizens of many other countries. Negative, correcting feedback loops were finally engaged in a successful (but equally as violent) manner. Mussolini’s government collapsed with the Allied victory, resulting in his own brutal execution. It seems that Fascist rule is often terminated only by the overthrow of a government and the death of its tyrannical leader.

What about the guardrails that Levitsky and Ziblatt extol? These guardrails are found in the code of conduct (rules of deliberation) to be found in the formal (and informal) governing rules of a legislative body. This code includes the “Rules of Order” that operate in this body, as well as the more elusive assumption of conviviality that should be held and honored by those operating in this body. Competing parties can push against one another. However, they should stop short of taking actions that do harm to the other party or to the public that is being served by both parties.

These guardrails, in turn, require what I have often introduced in this book: a harmony of interests. There must be something that is valued by all parties and by all citizens. If this harmony doesn’t exist, then doors are slammed shut and each party becomes a closed system. Minimal constructive interaction takes place with those from the “Other” perspective. As Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, p. 112) note, politics without guardrails yields “a cycle of escalating constitutional brinkmanship.” This cycle (positive feedback loop) might include budgetary stalemates, failure to pass timely legislation, and the direction of all communication to outside constituencies rather than one’s fellow legislators. Ultimately, this positive feedback looping leads to a collapsed

democracy. The tyrant can knock on the door, be welcomed in and clear up that mess called “democracy.”

I have offered dramatic examples of the way in which both democracies and tyrannical governments can live and die. However, the existential threat to both systems is not often readily apparent. As Levitsky and Ziblatt observe, the closing of a system can often take place slowly and subtly over time. I have often turned in this book to insights offered by Bertrand Gross (1980) regarding *Friendly Fascism*. I propose that we can easily slip into tyranny by making small, expedient decisions that reduce the power of gatekeepers. Friendly fascists can gently and graciously close the doors to honest debate and open elections. We end up with an “illiberal democracy” and a long-term dictator.

Levitsky and Ziblatt write about “smoke-filled rooms” where decisions are made outside the glare (negative loops) of public scrutiny. As I noted in following the lessons of Timothy Snyder, it is tempting to close our own personal doors by being highly selective regarding the cable news channel we watch and the social media to which we subscribe. Some citizens who are in positions of wealth take even bigger steps toward support for a close tyrannical system. They sell their mega-mansion (at an inflated price) to oligarchs or approve the alliance with an energy-producing company located in an autocratic nation. They declare that they are just being “thoughtful” and “pragmatic” leaders of business. The doors are closing.

Before we declare the inevitable defeat of democracy and recognize that greed and the quest for power and control will always win the day, we can turn to another functional role in democracies that provides negative, corrective feedback. Levitsky and Zimblat (2018, p. 78) identify the important role that referees play in the preservation of democracies. This function can blunt the impact if not defeat the demons of greed and power. As in a game of basketball or baseball, the referee provides an important (hopefully impartial) corrective to the intense competitive engagement in the game by both teams.

While members of some amateur teams (and teams in schools) might referee their own games, this is less likely to work when the stacks are high (in professional sports). It seems that the more powerful and energized the loops operating in any system, the greater is the need for equally as powerful (and officially authorized) referees. They provide brakes that are necessary to keep the system from exploding or collapsing. Referees wield considerable power precisely because they engage authority at critical moments during the game.

They don’t just call balls and strikes or ordinary fouls. They make judgements regarding close plays and home runs during baseball games. They assign technical fouls (and even authorize ejections) during basketball games. In system theory (e.g. Meadows, 2008), the powerful role played by a referee is often identified as one of “leverage.” The US Supreme Court is supposed to provide this breaking function and insert their leveraged authority at critical times to preserve the fair and equitable operations of our federal government. When this court fails to provide this critical function then our democracy is in jeopardy. Tyranny is waiting at the door.

While praising the role played by referees, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, p. 78) offer a cautionary note:

It always helps to have the referees on your side. Modern states possess various agencies with the authority to investigate and punish wrongdoing by both public officials and private citizens. These include the judicial system, law enforcement bodies, and intelligence, tax, and regulatory agencies. In democracies, such institutions are designed to serve as neutral arbiters. For would-be authoritarians, therefore, judicial and law enforcement agencies pose both a challenge and an opportunity. If they remain independent, they might expose and punish government abuse. It is a referee's job, after all, to prevent cheating.

Here is where the cautionary note is introduced:

But if these agencies are controlled by loyalists, they could serve a would-be dictator's aims, shielding the government from investigation and criminal prosecutions that could lead to its removal from power. The president may break the law, threaten citizens' rights, and even violate the constitution without having to worry that such abuse will be investigated or censured. With the courts packed and law enforcement authorities brought to heel, governments can act with impunity.

Our two guides (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, pp. 78-79) go further in describing the vulnerable role played by referees:

Capturing the referees provides the government with more than a shield. It also offers a powerful weapon, allowing the government to selectively enforce the law, punishing opponents while protecting allies; Tax authorities may be used to target rival politicians, businesses, and media outlets. The police can crack down on opposition protest while tolerating acts of violence by progovernment thugs. Intelligence agencies can be used to spy on critics and dig up material for blackmail.

Most often, the capture of the referees is done by quietly firing civil servants and other nonpartisan officials and replacing them with loyalists.

It seems that the role of referee is both critical and fragile when consideration is given to the preservation of a democracy. We can once again look to system theorists for guidance regarding the way this form of leverage can be engaged on behalf of democratic rule. These theorists note that there are actually four levels of leverage. The first level is engaged when specific actions are taken by "referees" that block "wrongdoing" on the part of specific (often powerful) players in a democratic society. This form of leverage is engaged by the basketball referee when assigning a technical foul or ejection from the game. This seems to be the level being addressed by Levitsky and Ziblatt.

Three other levels are less obvious but even more important. There is first the leverage that occurs when there is a shift in behavior patterns. The referee identifies and calls out a pattern of disrespectful behavior and suggests ways to change this behavior. This is often described as

“process consultation” (Schein, 1998). This refereeing role is played by the owners of professional sports teams—usually in consultation with the players union. This level of leverage occurs with changes in such rules as the time taken between pitches (baseball) or extent to which one player can disrupt the movement of another player (basketball).

At a third level, we find leverage embedded in the basic structure of the system. It is not just a case of the tax authority, judicial system and law enforcement agencies ensuring that citizens are obeying the laws. It is also the case that a referee function is engaged when the laws themselves are being passed. It is at this structural level that Levitsky and Ziblatt house their caution. What keeps the authoritarians from taking over the government? What prevents minority rule from becoming the given in a supposedly “democratic” society. Voting rights must be enforced and fraudulent governing processes must be investigated and thwarted (the negative feedback function provided by referees at this third level). Owners of sports team once again play an important leverage function at this level. They implement policies (such as salary caps) that keep the game competitive for all teams (regardless of their financial resources).

The fourth level of leverage provides the foundation for all three of the other levels. Referees are needed in a democracy who will identify and challenge fundamental mental models of government. Serving as historians and social critics, these “referees” help to guide the way in which democracy is operating in a specific society. I offer the guides for this book (such as Anne Applebaum and Heather Cox Richardson) as exemplars of this fourth level of leveraging. This brings us back immediately to the elements of true freedom that I have been exploring throughout this book. A referee of democracy must point out when the balance between individual rights and collective responsibility has been disrupted. This referee might be making use of the polarity management tool I have introduced in this book.

It is interesting to note that polarity is present within all professional sport. It exists between the goal of winning games and providing entertainment (which brings in fans and produces revenue). A team that always wins will not be entertaining. Fewer people will pay to watch this dominant team always crush their opponent. Yet, on the other hand, a game is to be won and it certainly would not be appropriate (or legal) for one team to purposefully lose a game--so that “entertainment” is somehow increased. The owners of sports teams who serve as referees at this fourth level are always managing this polarity.

A referee operating in government is confronted with a different set of polarities. These reside not only in the push and pull between rights and responsibility but also in the conflicting interests of the various constituencies being served. Governmental referees must assist in the ongoing search for a harmony of interests to be found among all of the participating constituencies in their diverse society. Through their analyses, authors and bloggers such as Applebaum and Richardson can help to maintain the ongoing review and updating of this harmony as the world of VUCA-Plus continues to operate in mid-21st Century life.

Most importantly, a referee of democracy should be among those who are actively seeking out and helping to articulate a compelling vision of the future. This vision anchors and energizes the

balance between rights and responsibilities. It points toward the interests that are now or soon could be in harmony. Leverage at all four levels is needed if a democracy is to be preserved – and if true freedom is to be achieved for all those who are “blessed” with this democracy. It doesn’t hurt also to have referees at sporting venues and at meetings of the team owners

Hope and Concern

In bringing their identification of authoritarian rule indicators to a close, Levitsky and Ziblatt offer a mixed message of hope and concern. Their message of hope (for American readers) comes from the past American history of turning back the threat of authoritarianism (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 143):

America's democratic institutions were challenged on several occasions during the twentieth century, but each of these challenges was effectively contained. The guardrails held, as politicians from both parties—and often, society as a whole—pushed back against violations that might have threatened democracy. As a result, episodes of intolerance and partisan warfare never escalated into the kind of "death spiral" that destroyed democracies in Europe in the 1930s and Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s. .

However, there is absolutely no reason for complacency according to our two guides. They point in particular to Faustian tradeoff between the presentation of some form of democracy and the loss of freedom and equity for those Southerners who were neither white nor male (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 143):

We must conclude with a troubling caveat, however. The norms sustaining our political system rested, to a considerable degree, on racial exclusion. The stability of the period between the end of Reconstruction and the 1980s was rooted in an original sin: the Compromise of 1877 and its aftermath, which permitted the de-democratization of the South and the consolidation of Jim Crow. Racial exclusion contributed directly to the partisan civility and cooperation that came to characterize twentieth-century American politics.

Levitsky and Ziblatt point to the neighborhood effect and the swarming of bigoted Southerners. As in the case of those interrogating the prisoners, there was a tipping point. “Decent” people had become violators of human rights. Individual attitudes had coalesced and were transformed into a solid voting block:

The "solid South" emerged as a powerful conservative force within the Democratic Party, simultaneously vetoing civil rights and serving as a bridge to Republicans. Southern Democrats' ideological proximity to conservative Republicans reduced polarization and facilitated bipartisanship. But it did so at the great cost of keeping civil rights and America's frill democratization-off the political agenda.

Before leaving our two guides with their hopes and concerns, I wish to turn briefly to their subsequent reflections on democracies. I relate these reflections to a major tension I have identified in this book. This is the tension between a collective perspective and set of values, on the one side, and an individualistic perspective and set of values on the other side.

Collectivism vs. Individualism

It might be difficult to achieve a “harmony of interests” in a society that is highly diverse and occupied by citizens who hold often contradictory goals. This process, however, is somewhat eased if a *Harmony of Norms* can be established. Norms have to do with the way in which people relate to one another. Members of a society—particularly those engaged in the business of governance—might differ in the ways in which they prefer to communicate with one another, resolve conflict, solve problems, and make decisions. These are the key components of what I have described as the “empowerment pyramid (Bergquist, 2003). However, they should be able to agree on an underlying assumption about how they will relate to one another in the midst of communicating and engaging in conflict-management, problem-solving and decision-making.

The theme of Harmony has appeared in several different forms in this book. I have referred not just to the harmony of interests and now to the harmony of norms, but also to harmony as it is beautifully displayed in a piece of music. I believe that the metaphor of musical harmony is once again applicable. As I previously noted, harmony is achieved not by having everyone (voice or instrument) singing or playing the same note or tone. It is achieved by playing or singing different notes at the same time. These different notes resonated with one another. They are in the same tonal cluster.

There are differences in the sounds presented by each performer and difference in each configuration of notes. However, these differences are contained within the confines of a single composition. Everyone is reading off the same score. All are aligned with a single purpose, which is creation of a sublime harmonically rich sound. Similarly in the case of a harmony of norms we find that different actors with different agendas and different ways of operating share dedication to a single outcome. They all acknowledge (often informally) that there is an appropriate way of being with one another that is embraced on behalf of this shared outcome. When these norms are not present, then democracy is in jeopardy. Tyranny lingers close by.

Forbearance

Levitsky and Ziblatt offer an extraordinary insight at this point in describing the important role played by norms in the maintenance of any democracy. They use an old (hence quite powerful) term to describe this basic norm. The term is *Forbearance*. Specifically, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, p. 133) describe the way in which forbearance operated as a foundational element of the United States Senate for many years:

Norms of forbearance . . . operate in Congress. Take the U.S. Senate. As a body whose original purpose was to protect minorities from the power of majorities (which, the founders believed, would be represented by the House), the Senate was designed, from

its inception, to allow deliberation. It developed a range of tools-many of them unwritten—that enabled legislative minorities and even individual senators, to slow down or block projects put forth by the majority. Prior to 1917, the Senate lacked any rules limiting discussion, which meant that any senator could prevent a vote on (or "filibuster") any legislation indefinitely by simply prolonging debate.

The engagement of forbearance for Levitsky and Ziblatt operates as a negative feedback loop. As I have often noted in this book, a negative loop keeps a system (in this case a governance system) from spiraling out of control—as occurs when there are only positive feedback loops. I would also suggest that the negative loops must be small in number and engaged sporadically. When negative loops are in abundance and when these loops are prominent (as in the filibuster rules of the US senate) then the governing process is likely to stagnate and freeze. Balancing between positive and negative loops is imperative.

As Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, p. 133) note:

These informal prerogatives are essential checks and balances, serving as both a source of protection for minority parties and a constraint on potentially overreaching presidents. Without forbearance, however, they could easily lead to gridlock and conflict.

Despite major differences among the two major political parties (each of which periodically held a majority position in the US Senate), Forbearance has provided this balance of positive and negative feedback loops. Reframed as a harmony of norm that is aligned with and based on a "harmony of interests" these informal prerogatives of the US federal governance bodies have allowed it to operate for many years with relative effectiveness. At least until today . . .

In keeping with my own somewhat pessimistic perspective, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, p. 167) are not very sanguine about the presence of forbearance in our current US Senate (and House of Representatives) – or more generally in American political life:

If, twenty-five years ago, someone had described to you a country in which candidates threatened to lock up their rivals, political opponents accused the government of stealing the election or establishing a dictatorship, and parties used their legislative majorities to impeach presidents and steal supreme court seats, you might have thought of Ecuador or Romania. You probably would not have thought of the United States.

Why then do we now nominate the United States as a country that is in trouble? Why do we fear that tyranny may be invading our country?

Forbearance and Schismogenesis

Our guides, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, p. 167) propose that the loss of forbearance and threat of tyranny reside primarily in the preponderance of polarities in contemporary government (as least in the United States).

Behind the unraveling of basic norms of mutual tolerance and forbearance lies a syndrome of intense partisan polarization. Although it began with the radicalization of the Republican Party, the consequences of this polarization have been felt through the entire American political system. Government shutdowns, legislative hostage-taking, mid-decade redistricting, and the refusal to even consider Supreme Court nominations are not aberrant moments. Over the last quarter century, Democrats and Republicans have become much more than just two competing parties, sorted into liberal and conservative camps. Their voters are now deeply divided by race, religious belief, geography, and even "way of life."

The pull (and push) toward polarization can, in turn, be traced back to the concept of schismogenesis that I introduced earlier in this book. As Gregory Bateson (1972) noted, this polarization can produce an escalation on the part of both parties or an increasing appeasement of one party that allows the other party to become even stronger and more demanding. While Bateson was basing his analysis on the "primitive" tribes he was observing elsewhere in the world, he might just as well have been sitting on and observing the schismogenetic workings of the contemporary US government.

We see escalating polarization in the attempt of one political party to outdo the other in bringing about rules and processes that increase votes of this one party and decrease votes of the other party. The appeasement is found in the willingness to tolerate the threat of a filibuster on one issue, while hoping that somehow the other party to be willing to compromise on other issues. Wearing his field observation attire (complete with recording device), Bateson is likely to predict that this appeasement won't work and that the filibuster will be used even more frequently. Bateson would usually be proven accurate in his cultural anthropological predictions.

It is not hard to link Levitsky and Ziblatt's notion of forbearance to several of the other fundamental and polarizing tensions offered in this book—especially the tension that exists between a push toward collectivism and a pull toward individualism. Forbearance requires that we lean into collectivism and collective responsibility. We give up a bit of our individual right to disagree with and subsequently block the actions taken by other people. It is tempting to fall back on Bion's assumption that the person (or group) with which we disagree is the enemy who must be defeated. Alternatively, as Levitsky and Ziblatt suggest, it is possible for us to "grow up" and manage the polarities. We are invited to act more mature--or in psychodynamic terms, we are requested to allow our "Ego" to rein in our "Id" and "Superego".

Grace in the Commons

From an economic perspective, we can consider forbearance to be the foundation of a smart collective decision to be made. This decision concerns the "common area" in which we all reside when serving as representatives of a specific community. In the past, this meant forgoing our individual economic interests (raising a maximum number of cattle) on behalf of a greater collective economic interest. This common interest resided in managing jointly held pastureland where all members of a community can raise a limited number of cattle so that the common

grazing area can be sustained. When one actor failed to abide by the norm of shared grazing with a limited number of cattle, then the harmony of norms was shattered. Forbearance falls to the side. Harmony turns to dissonance. All members of the community now engage their individual right to raise a maximum number of cattle. The common land is soon overgrazed, and all members of the community suffer the loss of starving cattle. An economic collapse takes place:

An analogy is often drawn between this “tragedy of the commons” (Hardin, 1968) and the current global environmental tragedy. This current ecological tragedy offers ample and disturbing evidence of lost forbearance. This loss might ultimately be of even greater importance than the death of one democratic society. This is the death of the global commons where we all live. Furthermore, with the looming prospect of a dying planet (or at least a dying human race) comes a compelling reason to polarize about diminishing resources and to look for a strong, autocratic leader to somehow clean up the ecological mess.

We might also search more deeply and move beyond economic and ecological analyses. We can bring in the spiritual domain. We might suggest that forbearance requires us to dedicate ourselves to a higher good—a higher power. As I have noted, Erich Fromm identifies love as the basis for a blending of rights and responsibilities. Love is perhaps a basis for enduring forbearance. Other writers I have referenced speak of the *Grace* that comes from a divine presence or from a shared commitment to community. This grace comes in two related forms.

Collective Grace resides in an all-embracing and sustaining sense of collective purpose. This form of Grace is coupled with recognition of the divine worth to be found in each distinctive person. This is *Personal Grace*. While some form of Personal Grace is to be found in most religions, it has recently found a more secular home in the emergence of Positive Psychology with its emphasis on hope, aspirations, courage and other manifestations of human dignity (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This perspective is particularly to be found in the early formulation of what is now known as Appreciative Inquiry (Srivastva, Cooperrider and Associates, 1990). I propose that we will find personal grace in the articular appreciation other people provide us regarding our own distinctive strength and character (Bergquist and Mura, 2011). I will have more to say later in this book regarding this appreciative perspective as it relates to creating a compelling image of the future.

With regard to Collective Grace, I re-introduced Paul Tillich’s (1948) and his insights regarding this form of grace. Tillich suggests that Collective Grace is found and based in relationship that exist between one another in society. For Tillich, collective grace is embedded in a full appreciation for all aspects of human history (including its atrocities). He would undoubtedly support the recent introduction of revisionist history regarding the role played by slaves in the flourishing of an agrarian economy in the Southern US states. Stirring up major controversy and creation of yet another pro-slavery version of this history, creators of the *1619` Project* and authors of other related books and monograms have argued that:

... the landing of the Black slaves, traded for supplies by the pirates who had stolen them from another ship, marked "the country's very origin" because it "inaugurated a barbaric

system of chattel slavery that would last for the next 250 years." From slavery "and the anti-black racism it required," the editors claimed, grew "nearly everything that has truly made America exceptional: its economic might, its industrial power, its electoral system, its diet and popular music, the inequities of its public health and education, its astonishing penchant for violence, its income inequality, the example it sets for the world as a land of freedom and equality, its slang, its legal system and the endemic racial fears and hatreds that continue to plague it to this day." (Richardson, 2024g, p. 165)

This account is certainly filled with the kind of painful grace that Paul Tillich has introduced. It is only with the recounting and re-learning of lessons from this founding wound in the American soul that we will begin to find a path toward self-forgiveness and toward "a more perfect union" – and more perfect future.

Perhaps, the forbearance offered by Levitsky and Ziblatt requires this recognition of the good and bad in the history of one's society as an important element of forbearance. Slavery made our country strong and economically prosperous but at a great cost. The United States became a much more diverse society with the introduction of African people and African cultures into American society – but this only occurred because these people and their culture was forcibly moved in chains on death-inducing slave ships to the American shores. Forbearance requires that we recognize the hard-won contributions of African Americans to the economy and culture of the United States, while making a strong commitment to full installation of justice and equality for all its citizens. Forbearance is to be secured in a country where the chains of slavery still haunt its citizens.

Collective grace for Tillich even moves beyond this acknowledgement of history. It is not enough to acknowledge that which has been "right" and "wrong" in our society. Ultimately, in a true democracy, we must assume a position of relativism. We must acknowledge that each side has made mistakes – therefore no one is always in the "right" while the other is in the "wrong." Most importantly, according to Tillich, we must engage our society. We must seek the reform and improvement of human society. We must engage in an active life that is guided by a commitment to the greater good. This engagement moves us past a relativistic view of past goods and bads to an active commitment in the midst of relativism.

In sum, I would suggest that forbearance serves as a critical corrective for the fragile balance between collective responsibility and individual rights. Forbearance (and a harmony of norms) also serves as part of the foundation for finding and sustaining a harmony of interests. The common grazing land exemplifies a harmony of interest (the raising of cattle in a sustainable environment). This harmony would not be possible without shared norms and a commitment to Levitsky and Zimblatt's forbearance.

Commonwealth and Commuality

Our guides introduce yet another old term when addressing a second tension that populates this book. This term is *Commonwealth*, and the tension identified by Levitsky and Zimblatt is between

a desired communality of shared concerns in mid-21st Century communities and the often more realistic assessment that there is a major divergence of societal concerns among residents of these increasingly diverse communities.

The term Commonwealth was originally used in the 15th Century to describe English political communities that are founded for the common good. We later find this term being used in several American states that were among those created out of the original colonies. These are the Commonwealths of Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia (as well as the Commonwealth of Kentucky which is a state established later). This designation is still to be found (as a point of pride and reference to historical precedence) in the titles of these states.

While the term commonwealth has been watered down in its use (now often related to such societal arrangements as treaties, alliances, charters and compact agencies), the *Spirit of Commonwealth* still holds some secular (and even sacred) weight as a representation of shared commitment to public welfare—and the search for a harmony of interests (or at least a communality of concerns).

Levitsky and Zimblatt, 2018, p. 125-126) find the spirit of commonwealth (accompanied by an emphasis on tolerance) in a specific 19th Century document that influenced American governance systems. It is aligned with the processes of forbearance:

Mutual toleration . . . encouraged forbearance. By the late Nineteenth century, informal conventions or work-arounds had already begun to permeate all branches of government enabling our system of checks and balances to function reasonably well. The importance of these norms was not lost on outside observers. In his two-volume masterpiece, *The American Commonwealth* (1888), British scholar James Bryce wrote that it was not the U.S. Constitution itself that made the American political system work but rather what he called "usages": our unwritten rules.

When the spirit of commonwealth prevails, the structures and processes of government becomes collaborative (and I would suggest filled with Collective Grace) (Levitsky and Zimblatt, 2018, pp. 125-126):

By the turn of the twentieth century, then, norms of mutual toleration and institutional forbearance were well-established. Indeed, they became the foundation of our much-admired system of checks and balances. For our constitutional system to function as we expect it to, the executive branch, Congress, and the judiciary must strike a delicate balance. On the one hand, Congress and the courts must oversee and, when necessary, check the power of the president. They must be democracy's watchdogs. On the other, Congress and the courts must allow the government to operate. This is where forbearance comes in. For a presidential democracy to succeed, institutions that are muscular enough to check the president must routinely underuse that power.

Then there was a “falling from grace” (Levitsky and Zimblatt, 2018, p. 126):

In the absence of these norms, this balance becomes harder to sustain. When partisan hatred trumps politicians' commitment to the spirit of the Constitution, a system of checks and balances risks being subverted in two ways. Under divided government, where legislative or judicial institutions are in the hands of the opposition, the risk is constitutional hardball, in which the opposition deploys its institutional prerogatives as far as it can extend them—defunding the government, blocking all presidential judicial appointments, and perhaps even voting to remove the president. In this scenario, legislative and judicial watchdogs become partisan attack dogs.

Tyranny finds a fertile ground for growth in a one-party system (Levitsky and Zimblatt, 2018, p. 126):

Under unified government, where legislative and judicial institutions are in the hands of the president's party, the risk is not confrontation but abdication. If partisan animosity prevails over mutual toleration, those in control of congress may prioritize defense of the president over the performance of their constitutional duties. In an effort to stave off opposition victory, they may abandon their oversight role, enabling the president to get away with abusive, illegal, and even authoritarian acts.

We can apply Bateson's analysis of schismogenesis once again. We find in Levitsky and Zimblatt's scenario that one party triumphs (for a limited period of time). The spirit of commonwealth is abandoned. Forbearance is not to be found. Collective Grace dries up.

Viable Future: Vision or Disillusionment

The third tension that I have often introduced in this book concerns how we react to and what we do to embrace a collective future. Is it truly possible – or even advisable – to spend our life “leaning into the future” and following Otto Scharmer's (2009) advice to “learn into the future”? Are we only dreamers who are escaping from the VUCA-Plus challenges of mid-21st Century life if we spend time envisioning a compelling future?

In addressing this third tension, I set up a hypothetical setting, making use of words written by Levitsky and Zimblatt. Furthermore, I invite Anne Applebaum to join Levitsky and Zimblatt at my hypothetical table. They deliberate about the future of democracy and the envisioning of a future that is compelling yet realistic.

Vision of a Viable Future

I turn first to Levitsky and Zimblatt and ask them about the basis for being optimistic about the future. They offer the following response (Levitsky and Zimblatt, 2018, p. 213):

The strength of the American political system, it has often been said, rests on what Swedish Nobel-prize winning economist Gunnar Myrdal called the American Creed: the principles of individual freedom and egalitarianism. Written into our founding documents and repeated in classrooms, speeches, and editorial pages, freedom and

equality are self-justifying values. But they are not self-executing. Mutual toleration and institutional forbearance are procedural principles—they tell politicians how to behave, beyond the bounds of law, to make our institutions function. We should regard these procedural values as also sitting at the center of the American Creed—for without them, our democracy would not work.

At this point, Anne Applebaum (2020, p. 144) chimes in. She offers a positive note and references another noted visionary (from another century). This person is Thomas Jefferson:

From the very beginning [in establishing a unique American society], there was . . . a conviction that this new nation would be different from others. Thomas Jefferson believed that democracy in America would succeed, even when it had failed in France, because the unique history and experiences of Americans had prepared them for it. He thought Americans, "impressed from their cradle" with the belief in democratic self-government, were special precisely because they were isolated from Europe and its cycles of history—"separated from the parent stock & kept from contamination."

Applebaum (2020, p. 144) then brings in two additional sources. Each comes from a quite different era and holds a quite different perspective:

Others, from de Tocqueville to Reagan, reinterpreted this "exceptionalism" to mean different things. But what really made American patriotism unique, both then and later, was the fact it was never explicitly connected to a single ethnic identity with a single origin in a single space. Reagan's 1989 "shining city on a hill" speech, remembered as the peak moment of "American greatness" and "American exceptionalist" rhetoric, clearly evoked America's founding documents and not American geography or an American race. Reagan called on Americans to unify not around blood and soil but around the Constitution: "As long as we remember our first principles and believe in ourselves, the future will always be ours."

The conversation at our table takes on a more somber tone as I contribute my own thoughts. I note that substantial skepticism and disillusionment is to be found among many people living in mid-21st Century societies. I discovered this when interviewing my colleagues in Estonia following the collapse of the Soviet Union. I would include many residents of the United States when considering this widespread skepticism and disillusionment.

Anne Applebaum adds her own observation. She notes that skepticism, disillusionment—and downright anger—has existed throughout American history. It has existed at both ends of the political spectrum in the United States and is often found within a pronounced political polarization. She points back to the dismissal of a distinctive American future that was manifest in the departure of British Loyalists at the end of the Revolutionary War. She also references the separation of Southern states from the Union that led to the Civil War.

Applebaum points to this disillusionment as it was widely manifest in the riots and demonstrations of the 1960s and 1970s. She also mentions the divergent political discourses of the

1990s that arose in part from fragmentation of the public media. We all agreed with Anne Applebaum that polarization has always been present in American society. We also reluctantly agreed that polarization at the present time contributes to and is exacerbated by a sense of betrayal on the part of both polarities. I ask Anne Applebaum to describe the source of this polarization and nature of disillusionment at each end of the political spectrum.

Disillusionment of the Left

Applebaum identifies several sources of left-wing reactions to our current situation in the United States. For these left-wingers, the future looks anything but bright. She looks to the past in describing the impassioned reactions offered by American anarchists such as Emma Goldman. Many student activist groups of the late 20th Century were also identified. They protested many elements of American life – ranging for its inclinations toward war and international domination to the abused rights of women and people of color. Applebaum particularly focused on the writings of the “underground” Weathermen group of the turbulent 1960s and early 1970s (Applebaum, 2020, p. 147):

In their most famous statement, *Prairie Fire*, they wrote of the "deadening ideology of conformism and gradualism," which "pretends to reassure the people" by spreading conciliatory, centrist ideas. This "reformism"- by which they meant the normal activities of democratic politics "assumes the essential goodness of U.S. society, in conflict with the revolutionary view that the system is rotten to the core and must be overthrown." The Weathermen did not assume the essential goodness of U.S. society. They believed the system was rotten to the core. Sharing Lenin's contempt for elected politicians and legislatures, they were frustrated and bored by the idea of building constituencies or seeking votes.

The level of frustration, disillusionment and anger was particularly directed at what this leftist group called the absurd notion of American exceptionalism that had been voices in several different forms throughout American history.

This left-wing group was joined later by Howard Zinn (2015) who wrote a troubling, revisionist history of America that first appeared in 1980. Applebaum (2020, p. 147) focuses on this important dynamic:

[The Weathermen] were even more angered by the notion of "American exceptionalism," which they denounced, in *Prairie Fire*, by name. In their minds, America could not be special, it could not be considered different, it could not be an exception. The iron laws of Marxism dictated that, sooner or later, the revolution would arrive in America too, bringing to an end America's pernicious influence on the world. Their anger at the very word exceptionalism has its echo in the language found in a part of the political left today. The historian Howard Zinn, the author of a history of America that focuses on racism, sexism, and oppression, has gone out of his way to denounce the "myths of American exceptionalism."

I can imagine Levitsky and Ziblatt agreeing with Applebaum. Her observations are quite accurate and telling. This leftish perspective is aligned in many ways with Levitsky and Ziblatt's own concerns about tyranny. Along with Applebaum, they are likely to express appreciation for the fact that action was being taken by the Weatherman. The Weathermen exemplified commitment in relativism. They sought to bring about reform rather than residing in the safe confines of Relativism. These radicals believed that many relativistic academics and social observers offering nothing but a watered-down and passive criticism of American society.

A cautionary note is likely to accompany Levitsky and Ziblatt's appreciation for the work done by the Weathermen. We are likely to find that Levitsky and Zimblatt join Applebaum in expressing concern about lingering in the often quite violent and counterproductive world of the left-wing underground. The revisionary history of Zinn is fine – but not the bombs. The clarity and understanding that comes from relativistic historical accounts (such as offered by many of our guides) provide essential roadmaps toward constructive societal reform.

Disillusionment of the Right

At this point, I ask my colleagues to turn their attention to concerns voiced by those on the far right of the political spectrum. All three of my guides are relieved to move away from the left extreme to extremes of the right. This right-wing disillusionment resides at the heart of the matter when consideration is given to the death of democracies (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2021) and the twilight of democracy (Applebaum, 2020). While all three authors would agree that tyranny and autocracy can arise at the extreme left (one need only point to Stalin and Mao), they believe that the threat offered by the right wing is particularly notable today (especially in Western democracies).

Applebaum (2020, p. 148) points specifically to one form of right-wing disillusionment that is virulent right now. This is the evangelical right-wing that brings together the "perfect storm" of political and religious passion and fundamentalism:

There is [a] group of Americans whose disgust with the failures of American democracy has led them to equally radical conclusions, and these also have an echo today. If the left located its gloom in the destructive force of capitalism, the power of racism, and the presence of the U.S. military abroad, the Christian right located its disappointment in what it perceived as the moral depravity, the decadence, the racial mixing, and above all the irreversible secularism of modern America.

Applebaum (2020, p. 148) focuses on a critical analysis offered by one person inside the evangelical Christian movement:

The writer Michael Gerson, an evangelical Christian as well as an acute, critical analyst of "political" Christianity, has argued that a part of the evangelical community now genuinely believes that America is lost. Gerson, a former George W Bush speechwriter who is another person now estranged from former colleagues, describes the views of his former friends like this: "A new and better age will not be inaugurated until the Second

Coming of Christ, who is the only one capable of cleaning up the mess. No amount of human effort can hasten that day, or ultimately save a doomed world." Until Judgment Day itself, in other words, there is no point in trying to make society better, and indeed it is probably going to get worse.

As Applebaum notes, this perfect storm includes a compelling vision of the future (Judgement Day) that makes any secular vision of the future pale by comparison. A frightening, redemptive future, backed by "official" (sacred) text (Revelations), will always soundly triumph over a much more forgiving future that is backed only by "unofficial" (secular) authors.

Applebaum is not yet done. She speaks (writes) about the powerful role played by contemporary right-wing media. I note that right-wing sources include not only traditional print-based modes of communication (newspapers, magazines, books) but also many digital modes, are creating a closed, positive-feedback-looped system (what I have identified throughout this book). Furthermore, according to Applebaum (2020, p. 149):

This strand of deep right-wing pessimism about America is not entirely new. A version of these same views has been offered to Americans repeatedly, over a period of three decades, by many other speakers and writers, but most famously by Patrick Buchanan. Buchanan is not an evangelical Protestant, but rather a Catholic who shares the same apocalyptic worldview. In 1999, Buchanan announced that he was resigning from the Republican Party and running for the presidency at the head of the Reform Party. In his announcement speech, he lamented the loss of the "popular culture that undergirded the values of faith, family, and country, the idea that we Americans are a people who sacrifice and suffer together, and go forward together, the mutual respect, the sense of limits, the good manners; all are gone."

At this point, there is a knock at the door. Another of our guides, Heather Cox Richardson, asks to join us at the table. She heard that we were discussing the matter of disillusionment and polarization. There was another perspective to be offered regarding the right-wing version of disillusionment and polarization. In this case, it was an artificially generated polarization brought about by the disillusioning prospect of lost support for the right-wing cause. Called "positive polarization," this political strategy was formulated and first proposed during the 1970s. Richardson (2024g, p. 44) offers the following historical account:

Before the midterm elections of 1970, it was pretty clear to Nixon's advisors that they needed a Hail Mary plan to rally voters around the increasingly beleaguered president. Patrick Buchanan and Lee Atwater quite deliberately turned against what they called "the media, the left, [and] the liberal academic community," drawing voters to Nixon by accusing their opponents of being lazy, dangerous, and anti-American.

They called their strategy "positive polarization" because it stoked the anger they needed voters to feel in order to bother to show up to vote, a development they saw as good. Buchanan wrote a memo to Nixon urging him to manipulate the media and warning: "We

are in a contest over the soul of the country now and the decision will not be some middle compromise-it will be their kind of society or ours."

All of us at the table welcomed Richardson's intriguing (and disturbing) account and agreed that it is important to reiterate that disillusionment on both ends of the political spectrum has been alive and kicking throughout the history of the United States. While sitting at the table and listening to the thoughtful and sometimes provocative comments made by Levitsky, Zimblatt and Applebaum, I found myself pondering an outrageous idea. Does one image of the future have to be destroyed before another one can take root? At least, do we have to be disillusioned with the current offerings regarding the future before a new image can emerge? Closely related is a question concerning the setting (container) in which constructive dialogues can be sustained. How is a thoughtful conversation possible when it concerns anxiety-saturated considerations of viable futures? I will address these questions in my final chapter.

Ingredients and Prediction of a Viable Future

In bringing my hypothetical forum on the future to a close, I turn one last time to Levitsky and Zimblatt. I ask them why we need to be deeply concerned about the viability of democracy when looking to the future. Furthermore, in the midst of this concern, what are the ingredients of a viable future that resides miles away from tyranny and close to true freedom? Here is their response (Levitsky and Zimblatt (2018, p. 231):

The egalitarianism, civility, sense of freedom, and shared purpose portrayed by E. B. White were the essence of mid twentieth-century American democracy. Today that vision is under assault. To save our democracy, Americans need to restore the basic norms that once protected it. But we must do more than that. We must extend those norms through the whole of a diverse society. We must make them truly inclusive. America's democratic norms, at their core, have always been sound. But for much of our history, they were accompanied indeed, sustained- by racial exclusion. Now those norms must be made to work in an age of racial equality and unprecedented ethnic diversity. Few societies in history have managed to be both multiracial and genuinely democratic. That is our challenge. It is also our opportunity. If we meet it, America will truly be exceptional.

I offer Anne Applebaum (2020, pp.185-186) the final word and invite her to predict the future. On the one hand, she reaffirms her pessimism by returning to the powerful role being played by "clerics" as the barrier to a new future and preservers of authoritarian rule. These are "the writers, intellectuals, pamphleteers, bloggers, spin doctors, producers of television programs, and creators of memes who can sell [an authoritarian's] image to the public." (Applebaum, 2020, p, 17)

On the other hand, Applebaum (2020, p. 185) finds hope in some interesting places (including international cooperation regarding the Corona virus and the reality of illness and death associated with this virus):

It is possible that we are already living through the twilight of democracy; that our civilization may already be heading for anarchy or tyranny, as the ancient philosophers and America's founders once feared; that a new generation of *clerics*, the advocates of illiberal or authoritarian ideas, will come to power in the twenty-first century, just as they did in the twentieth; that their visions of the world, born of resentment, anger, or deep, messianic dreams, could triumph. Maybe new information technology will continue to undermine consensus, divide people further, and increase polarization until only violence can deter mine who rules. Maybe fear of disease will create fear of freedom.

She pauses and offers a more optimistic perspective regarding the fate of democracies and our world:

Or maybe the coronavirus will inspire a new sense of global solidarity. Maybe we will renew and modernize our institutions. Maybe international cooperation will expand after the entire world has had the same set of experiences at the same time: lockdown, quarantine, fear of infection, fear of death. Maybe scientists around the world will find new ways to collaborate, above and beyond politics. Maybe the reality of illness and death will teach people to be suspicious of hucksters, liars, and purveyors of disinformation.

Anne Applebaum (2020, p. 186) concludes by acknowledging that both the positive and negative images of the future are justifiable:

Maddeningly, we have to accept that both futures are possible. No political victory is ever permanent, no definition of "the nation" is guaranteed to last, and no elite of any kind, whether so-called "populist" or so-called "liberal" or so-called "aristocratic," rules forever. The history of ancient Egypt looks, from a great distance in time, like a monotonous story of interchangeable pharaohs. But on closer examination, it includes periods of cultural lightness and eras of despotic gloom. Our history will someday look that way too.

I thank all three of our guides for reflecting on the nature of the future. We all leave the table, as Anne Applebaum notes, with maddeningly recognition that we will have to wait on the ultimate (and existentially important) outcome. We are stuck in a state of Relativism. Is there any way out of this epistemological state?

Conclusions

This hypothetical forum on the future opens the door to the topic on which I focus in the final section of this book. I pull everything together and summarize what I envision to be the fundamental ingredients of a viable future for American society – and hopefully other societies in our mid-21st Century world. As I note in my reflections on the forum deliberations, I am particularly interested in the settings (containers) in which constructive dialogues can be engaged.

I call in one of my guides to assist in the design of the container – and identification of parameters for this envisioning process. This guide is Riane Eisler. She speaks of the Chalice as a replacement for the Blade in creating a new future of true freedom. I look to her guidance in the fourth section

of this book where I seek out fragments of a viable future founded on true freedom. This future can only be envisioned and created within a chalice of safety and support.

Section Four

Fragmented Visions and Pathways to True Freedom

Chapter Fourteen

The Chalice of True Freedom

We are arriving at our destination in this fourth section of the book. We are turning away from the confrontation of tyranny and the accompanying protection of democracy. I will be on the offensive and will move beyond protection. I will be envisioning fragments of a compelling future where true freedom resides. This more proactive step is being taken because I believe that the protection of democracy is more than just the absence of tyranny — just as like the establishment and maintenance of peace is more than just the absence of war. As the protagonist noted in *The Americanization of Emily*, there must be something just as exciting as a parade and the awarding of medals, if peace is to prevail.

There must be a compelling image of the future, if democracy (as a vehicle for this future) is to prevail). Something must fill the gap and provide us with a compelling argument that leads us away from the rabbit hole and the comforts of Serenity. We must identify and anchor an attractive (perhaps existential) alternative to an established line of authority. We must find a reason to turn away from a regressive retreat to dependency, fight/flight and pairing. Whole-hearted rationality must defeat the slick allure of fast thinking and fast answers.

A Compelling Vision of the Future: Is It Possible?

What would this future look like? At the very least, it would look quite different from what most present-day societies now look like. Thus, a first step to take in crafting a compelling future is to acknowledge what now exists and why it is no longer (perhaps never was) tenable. Kamila Harris, Vice President of the United States offers her own perspectives on the present state of American society in celebration of Juneteenth on June 10, 2024,

Across our nation, we witness a full-on attack on hard-fought, hard-won freedoms and rights, including the freedom of a woman to make decisions about her own body; the freedom to be who you are and love who you love openly and with pride; the freedom from fear of bigotry and hate; the freedom to learn and acknowledge our nation's true and full history; and the freedom that unlocks all others: the freedom to vote.

The second step is to identify the new elements of one's society that will help replace the existing values, perspectives and practices with new values, perspectives and practices. I return to two possible components of the new image of the future that I have mentioned throughout this book. These components are (1) a balance between and integration of individual rights and collective responsibility and (2) a harmony of interests based on a harmony of norms and a communality of concerns.

Is such a vision possible? Can we collectively build and sustain a world in which there is true freedom, based on equality? Could there be a New Jerusalem, a New Tokyo or a New Chicago. Could new waters of virtual and care flow from this “City of Grace” to the Dead Sea, Pacific Ocean or Lake Michigan? The pairing of a hopeful community with a new personal or collective savior would bring about nourishment and new life—a shared salvation! Perhaps we only need to wait in a state of hope and belief. Or we might need to make a commitment to engage in actions that will help bring about the New City of Grace.

Looking to the Past

A recent book suggests that this “city of grace” (or perhaps a “community of grace”) was to be found in the past – and in societies that have often escaped historical analysis. David Graeber and David Wengrow propose that we have pretty much gotten it all wrong with regard to the history of humanity. Specifically, we have viewed human history primarily through the lens of Western culture. We have not done a very good job of listening to and learning from other sources of history. In particular, we have failed to gain insights about human society that come from people who are indigenous to the Americas (as well as Asia and Africa).

Like Pierre Clastres, Graeber and Wengrow are particularly intrigued with perspectives and practices offered by the aboriginal societies of the Americas. Early in their account, this anthropologist and archeologist write about ways in which many of the North American tribes organized and operated their communities. The accounts offered by representatives of these tribes and from European observers of these tribes are often startling (and perhaps disturbing). These accounts speak directly to the presence of equality and freedom of expression and action in these societies.

For instance, Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 42) provide an account of observations made by a Jesuit priest (Lallemant). These observations are based on his own extended time spent with a specific tribal nation (the Wendats). Emphasis was placed in Graeber and Wengrow’s account on the challenges (both threatening and fascinating) that were posed not only for Jesuits but also many other Europeans (who were accustomed to authoritarian rule):

Lallemant's account gives a sense of just how politically challenging some of the material to be found in the Jesuit Relations must have been to European audiences of the time, and why so many found it fascinating. After expanding on how scandalous it was that even murderers should get off scot-free, the good father did admit that, when considered as a means of keeping the peace, the Wendat system of justice was not ineffective. Actually, it worked surprisingly well. Rather than punish culprits, the Wendat insisted the culprit's entire lineage or clan pay compensation. This made it everyone's responsibility to keep their kindred under control. 'It is not the guilty who suffer the penalty,' Lallemant explains, but rather 'the public that must make amends for the offences of individuals.' If a Huron had killed an Algonquin or another Huron, the whole country assembled to agree the number of gifts due to the grieving relatives, 'to stay the vengeance that they might take'.

This account speaks to values that are inherent in many collectivist cultures. The murderous act is seen as a collective rather than isolated, individual act of violence. A “harmony of interest” is founded on a shared belief that murder is a bad thing and that everyone should seek to prevent its occurrence (especially those in a clan who are closest to the potential murderer).

Graber and Wengrow (2021, p. 42) go on to comment on how the Wendat nation addresses the issue of authority – especially as it relates to a sense of shared responsibility for the welfare of all members of the community (further exemplifying a harmony of interest):

Wendat 'captains', as Lallemand then goes on to describe, 'urge their subjects to provide what is needed; no one is compelled to it, but those who are willing bring publicly what they wish to contribute; it seems, as if they vied with one another according to the amount of their wealth, and as the desire of glory and of appearing solicitous for the public welfare urges them to do on like occasions.' More remarkable still, he concedes: 'this form of justice restrains all these peoples, and seems more effectually to repress disorders than the personal punishment of criminals does in France,' despite being 'a very mild proceeding, which leaves individuals in such a spirit of liberty that they never submit to any Laws and obey no other impulse than that of their own will.'

Have these residents of North America found a path to true freedom? Through their policies and actions, do the Wendats challenge the assumption that coercion and the threat of punishment are required for any society to retain a modicum of order?

Finding Shared Responsibility at Red Top

I am reminded of my personal experience in confronting a society in which shared responsibility is the norm. This society has been constructed by the Gulla people who live on islands off the shore of the Carolinas. The Gulla are represented in several novels – most notably *The Water is Wide* (by Pat Conroy) (later presented as a movie, *Conrack*). It has often been reported that the Gulla represent a Black-American culture that most closely resembles that of an African culture. I'm not sure if this is the case, but I do know that I witnessed a remarkable example of shared responsibility when visiting a Gulla church in Red Top, North Carolina.

I was helping to lead a conference held in nearby Charleston and was invited to attend a church service by my colleague, J. Herman Blake, who had served as Provost of Oakes College at UC Santa Cruz and was a renowned scholar of African American culture. The church service was held at Red Top, South Carolina (a Gulla community). I was delighted and honored to be invited by my esteemed colleague to attend this service. I was accompanied by another of my African American colleagues (an administrator at the prestigious Spellman college). This very special service provided an opportunity for me to observe a “Shout.” This is a spirited dance (“stomp”) offered by members of another Gulla church to honor their fellow congregants at the church I was attending. I witnessed the richly textured harmony of music, dance and appreciation. But it did not end here.

Following the Shout, the pastor came before his congregation and announced that a member of their congregation (Sister Stuart) had lost everything last night when her home burned to the ground. He asked members of the congregation to come forward and donate money to help rebuild Sister Stuart's home. A card table was placed in the aisle and members of his church came forward placing a large amount of money on the card table. This was particularly impressive because Red Top is one of the poorest communities in the United States. Yet, money was being given freely. There was shared responsibility. I thought to myself that here is a community where there is no need for fire insurance. I reminded myself that insurance is only needed because we don't trust other members of our community (let alone our family) to lend a hand (financially) when we are ill, when we grow old, or when our house burns down.

My African American colleague from Spellman began to cry. I asked her what was wrong. She wiped away her tears and told me that this was very emotional for her because as a child, living in Philadelphia, she had been told by her grandmother that this type of giving was commonly found in African American communities. She reported to me, this is no longer found in most of these communities – except now in this poor Gulla community. For her, this was a particularly sad and disturbing observation. As with the Indigenous populations of the Great Lakes region, there was a firm and enacted sense that all members of a community are responsible for all other members. There is no need for insurance or social welfare agencies in such a community. A harmony of interests is alive and well. A harmony of norms has been established and informally enforced. Collective responsibilities are engaged through the actions taken by individual donors.

Distribution of Wealth

I return to the disruptive history of humanity offered by Graeber and Wengrow. They report that the Wendat found a way to ensure equality and the distribution of wealth (and even challenge Western assumptions of what constitutes “wealth”). This is particularly important and challenging. Graber and Wengrow (2021, p. 43) offer the following report:

Wealthy Wendat men hoarded such precious things largely to be able to give them away on dramatic occasions . . . Neither in the case of land and agricultural products, nor that of wampum [strings and belts of clam shells] and similar valuables, was there any way to transform access to material resources into power - at least, not the kind of power that might allow one to make others work for you, or compel them to do any thing they did not wish to do. At best, the accumulation and adroit distribution of riches might make a man more likely to aspire to political office (to become a 'chief' or 'captain' - the French sources tend to use these terms in an indiscriminate fashion); but as the Jesuits all continually emphasized, merely holding political office did not give any one the right to give anybody orders either. Or, to be completely accurate, an office holder could give all the orders he or she liked, but no one was under any particular obligation to follow them.

I have known of this distribution policy in my own encounter with a similar policy operating in another North American nation – the forementioned Kwakiutl of the Pacific Northwest. Members of this nation resided in an environment that was especially verdant – awash with ample stocks

of fish, plants, and edible animals. This meant that it was fairly easy to begin accumulating wealth (furs, crafted objects, household goods ornaments, etc.). The Kwakiutl handled this accumulation of wealth in a manner that was similar to that of the Wendat. They held what was called a "Potlatch" where objects owned by one family were given away in splendid ceremonial fashion to other people attending the Potlatch. In this way, no one family or clan became too rich or too poor. Honor was bestowed not by accumulating wealth, but instead by giving away wealth.

The Potlatch ceremony was also deployed to honor specific people in the community (through the offering of "coppers"), as well as acknowledge the coming-of-age among young members of the community. Dance, music and storytelling fleshed out the ceremonies (which might go on for many days - or even a month). This intermixing of economic exchange, honoring of individuals, and display of culture ensured a deeply felt harmony of interests. The Kwakiutls and Wendat might not label their ceremonies as "religious" or even "sacred" since these were simply "the way things are being done." As citizens of the secular 21st Century, we might easily apply the term "sacred" to their practices - as opposed to assignment of the term "profane" to any practices that are purely economic (such as the distribution of money) (Eliade, 1959).

Today, we might point to the "profane" practice of some very wealthy people (such as Warren Buffet or Melinda Gates) to give away large sums of the money they have earned. However, this "exchange" occurs at a much later point in the accumulation of wealth. Those who are distributing the wealth have a much greater say in how the wealth is distributed. Furthermore, the noneconomic components of the exchange process that were found in the Potlatch ceremonies and celebrations have been absent in the contemporary distribution of money among the super-wealthy. Very little "harmony" is to be found in the fully secular policies of those who have made a great deal of 20th Century and 21st Century money.

The original Potlatch tradition is one that I personally find very interesting and important. In large part this is because I participated for many years in a weeklong program that was patterned after this tradition. It began with a one-time meeting I helped to plan that addressed the need for coordinated efforts among faculty members in Western Canada community colleges. These faculty members were all engaged in a specific faculty development initiative called the Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW). It so happened that this initial meeting was held at a remote (retreat) location near Vancouver where the original Potlatch ceremony was often held. In recognition of this history, the retreat site (a boy's camp during the summer) was called "Camp Potlatch."

This initial meeting was a great success. Its success led to the initiation of a second weeklong ISW program at another location. It was informally called the "Potlatch" meeting. A third weeklong program was then held - followed by program held for one week each summer at a retreat site (Naramata) near Penticton (British Columbia). The Potlatch heritage was now taken seriously. There was a ceremony during the final evening of the program where stories were told, songs were sung, and individuals honored (with an ISW copper plate). Most importantly, this ISW program was a place where participants shared their "best practices" in the field of faculty

development. The sharing went well beyond the ISW program. As with the original Potlatch (and Wendat) gift-giving practices, status and appreciation were gained by participants at Naramata. With generosity and candor, they shared their own perspectives and practices regarding faculty development initiatives being engaged back at their collegiate institutions.

Participants soon came to this exceptional Potlatch program from not only other Canadian provinces but also the United States. Faculty members (and administrators) also came from four-year colleges and major universities. This Potlatch inspired program ran for twenty years. It still stands as one of the longest-running and most productive inter-institutional professional development programs ever run in North American postsecondary education. In essence, we “potlatchers” created a temporary setting each summer for 20 years where many of the original Potlatch traditions were not only honored, but also engaged.

An open and welcomed exchange of “gifts” took place. Innovative educational practices served as the entity of “wealth.” A “sacred” climate was created and sustained through the coupling of gift-giving with song, ceremony and honoring. Could this temporary setting be modeled on other occasions? Could gifts of many types be exchanged in a climate of appreciation? Could a collaborative inter-institutional and international community be established and reestablished over many years that is based on a harmony of interests? It happened in Western Canada. Why not in other locations--engaged on behalf of a wide variety of societal benefits?

To establish such a community, those of us living in the Western World will have to introduce a new Harmony of Norms. We were able to do so at Naramata – but it took hard work and some soul searching. I have something to say in this regard. They offer the following summary of the way in which the Wendat insured social equality and contrast this with the way in which European societies (and in particular French Society) operates (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, p. 54). They rely on the critique offered by a noted Wendat sage (Kandaronk): “the whole apparatus [according to Kendaronk] of trying to force people to behave well would be unnecessary if France did not also maintain a contrary apparatus that encourages people to behavior badly. That apparatus consisted of money, property rights and the resultant pursuit of material self-interest.”

For Kandaronk and other members of his indigenous community, there is no need for money or individually owned property. This perspective might easily be labeled and dismissed as an early (and primitive) form of communism. However, it helps us identify several components of a compelling vision that need not be (and would not be) based on communist assumptions. At this point, I can re-introduce insights offered by George Lodge who definitely is not a communist. He is a main-stream American politician from conservative Cabot and Lodge roots who served for many years as a professor at Harvard Business School (when not running for office). He would suggest that Kandaronk’s wisdom could be applied in building a communitarian society that balances individual rights and collective responsibility. (Lodge, 1995).

Obviously, the original North American societies were created by people residing in quite different settings from what exists today in North American countries (and most other countries in our mid-21st Century world). Our indigenous forebearers dwelled in a world where there was

not a massive population (overcrowding) and where the environment was not being destroyed. Though we can't re-create the settings in which those offering Potlatch ceremonies resided, we can at least design and offer our own versions of the Potlatch.

We can't easily create a new envisioned future. George Lodge's communitarian dream is not easily realized. Even an exceptional doctrine such as articulated in the Declaration of Human Rights that was formulated soon after the founding of the United Nations is not enough. As the primary architect of this Declaration, Elenor Roosevelt was focusing on the lost (or never granted) rights of people throughout the world who were homeless, starving and destitute. It was certainly appropriate to assert their rights to shelter, food and opportunity. Yet, I would suggest that this was not enough. Someone had to propose and draft a Declaration of Human Responsibility which would be directed toward those of us who are not homeless, starving or destitute. Do we not have responsibility for addressing the dehumanizing conditions in which these people live. Is it enough to assert rights without accompanying it with a call to action among those who should take some responsibility.

I would suggest that we assume responsibility by engaging in an appreciative process. We can identify moments when elements of the new future are manifest – and when balance of rights and responsibilities has been achieved (at least for a moment). We can reflect on and learn from occasions (like Potlatch) when a societal harmony of interests has been achieved. We can glimpse at the elements of a desirable collective future through our experiences in a temporary setting. We can help to create a learning society in which this reflection and learning takes place. We can, in turn, use this appreciative learning to begin our journey to the future. This perspective seems to be aligned with what Otto Scharmer portrayed as “learning into the future.”

Transition Point

Perhaps, now is the time for a new collective future to emerge. We might be at a transition point. There might be some good news associated with this potential for change. One of our guides, Heather Cox Richardson, borrows from a comment made by Ernest Hemingway that bankruptcy happens in two stages. First, gradually and then suddenly. Richardson (2024d) proceeds from this Hemingway reference:

That's how scholars say fascism happens, too—first slowly and then all at once—and that's what has been keeping u up at night.

But the more I think about it, the more I think maybe democracy happens the same, too: slowly and then all at once.

At this country's most important revolutionary moments, it has seemed as if the country turned on a dime.

As a renowned American historian, Richardson documents her claim about slow then fast by reviewing events in American history that range from British loyalty and then disloyalty following the French and Indian War during the 1700s to the Supreme Court decision on Abortion and the reactions against this legal decision. I would add to Richardson's list, the profound,

existential challenge of the COVID-19 virus. We wandered slowly all over the place in trying to make sense of and treat this virus. I would also point to the massive invasion of one nation by another nation. We have acted slowly and in a confusing manner regarding this most destructive European encounter since WW II.

Even slower and confusing strategies have appeared regarding the massive intrusions of great destructive forces in Africa (such as Rwanda), the Mid-East (such as Gaza). Many of the destructive forces are less visible than the European invasion. We in the West act slowly and with little direction when addressing the concerns and needs of those countries that are not aligned with our own culture or physical appearance. Is something about to happen. Will the slow and confusing changes and adjustments made up this point in the 21st Century become a large-scale fast change as Heather Cox Richardson seems to be suggesting.

In reading Richardson's analysis, I find myself returning to the Dithering phenomenon. As you might recall, the neural biologist, Karl Pribram, suggested that there is always dithering just before a major cell firing. Perhaps the slow phase of a major social revolution is constituted of the kind of dithering and oscillations I have often identified in this book. Then the big change occurs – with a bang (as opposed to the whimper that occurs alongside a dithering process). This could mean that we just need to be patient. We wait for the fog to clear, the dithering to cease, and conditions to emerge for engaging the greater good. Perhaps our future is at hand . . .

Chalice and the Blade

In seeking to further flesh out a viable and compelling vision of the future and exploring the essence of true freedom, I turn to yet another guide, Rianne Eisler, who offers us the vision of a world that is situated inside a nurturing chalice rather than being forged and maintained by the blade. Like Graeber and Wengrow, Eisler (1995, xvii) looks to older cultures (that have often been ignored) for guidance about what a society of equity and freedom might look like:

. . . [T]he original direction in the mainstream of our cultural evolution was toward partnership but that, following a period of chaos and almost total cultural disruption, there occurred a fundamental social shift. The greater avail ability of data on Western societies (due to the ethnocentric focus of Western social science) makes it possible to document this shift in more detail through the analysis of Western cultural evolution. However, there are also indications that this change in direction from a partnership to a dominator model was roughly paralleled in other parts of the world.

The shift back from a feminist model of partnership to a male-based model of hierarchy and control is considered by Eisler (1995, p. xviii) to be particularly disturbing at this moment in our history:

Today we stand at another potentially decisive branching point. At a time when the lethal power of the Blade-amplified a millionfold by megatons of nuclear warheads-threatens to put an end to all human culture, the new findings about both ancient and modern history reported in *The Chalice and the Blade* do not merely provide a new chapter in the story

of our past. Of greatest importance is what this new knowledge tells us about our present and potential future.

For millennia men have fought wars and the Blade has been a male symbol. But this does not mean men are inevitably violent and warlike. Throughout recorded history there have been peaceful and nonviolent men. Moreover, obviously there were both men and women in the pre historic societies where the power to give and nurture, which the Chalice symbolizes, was supreme. The underlying problem is not men as a sex. The root of the problem lies in a social system in which the power of the Blade is idealized-in which both men and women are taught to equate true masculinity with violence and dominance and to see men who do not conform to this ideal as "too soft" or "effeminate."

Eisler (1995, p. xviii) suggests that the shift back to a model of partnership will not be easy – but it is essential:

For many people it is difficult to believe that any other way of structuring human society is possible--much less that our future may hinge on anything connected with women or femininity. One reason for these beliefs is that in male-dominant societies anything associated with women or femininity is automatically viewed as a secondary, or women's, issue--to be addressed, if at all, only after the "more important" problems have been resolved. Another reason is that we have not had the necessary information. Even though humanity obviously consists of two halves (women and men), in most studies of human society the main protagonist, indeed often the sole actor, has been male.

It is in the studies done by and reports prepared by Riane Eisler, as well as by Graeber and Wengrow, that we find not only evidence for the viability of an alternative society model but also hints at what a future might look like in which this envisioned partnership model is engaged.

The Chalice

Eisler (1995, p. xviii) sets up the distinction between sword and blade:

If we stop and think about it, there are only two basic ways of structuring the relations between the female and male halves of humanity. All societies are patterned on either a dominator model-in which human hierarchies are ultimately backed up by force or the threat of force-or a partnership model, with variations in between. Moreover, if we reexamine human society from a perspective that takes into account both women and men, we can also see that there are patterns, or systems configurations, that characterize dominator, or alternatively, partnership, social organization.

It is with the blade that we dominate and with the chalice that we form partnerships (Eisler, 1995, p. xvii):

I call the dominator model, is what is popularly termed--either patriarchy or matriarchy – the ranking of one half of humanity over the other. The second, in which social relations are primarily based on the principle of linking rather than ranking, may best be described

as the partnership model. In this model-beginning with the most fundamental difference in our species, between male and female-diversity is not equated with either inferiority or superiority.

Feminist activists such as Gloria Steinem, have clearly and articulately described the chalice of collaboration that is needed to bring about balance of rights and responsibilities as well as a harmony of interests. And this chalice must be in place throughout the world. Richardson (2024g, p. 99) offers the following historical observation:

At the Women's March, activist Gloria Steinem, who had been central to the women's movement in the 1970s, said: "We are here and around the world for a deep democracy that says we will not be quiet, we will not be controlled, we will work for a world in which all countries are connected. God may be in the details, but the goddess is in connections. We are at one with each other, we are looking at each other, not up. No more asking daddy."

"We are linked," she said. "We are not ranked."

I would take the distinction between blade and chalice a step further by reintroducing the object relations concept of container. It is in a chalice that we contain our anxiety and our fears. By contrast, the blade cuts and separates. It is used to increase fear and anxiety regarding power and retribution.

At this point, Eisler turns her attention to the sheltered and incomplete narratives regarding the Western world that are offered by most historians (Eisler, 1995, pp. xviii)

As a result of what has been quite literally "the study of man," most social scientists have had to work with such an incomplete and distorted database that in any other context it would immediately have been recognized as deeply flawed. Even now, information about women is primarily relegated to the intellectual ghetto of women's studies. Moreover, and quite understandably because of its immediate (though long neglected) importance for the lives of women, most research by feminists has focused on the implications of the study of women for women.

In conclusion, Eisler point to the distinctive focus to be found in her book (that has led to the widespread distribution and influence of her account of the chalice and the blade): (Eisler, 1995, p. xviii-xix)

This book is different in that it focuses on the implications of how we organize the relations between the two halves of humanity for the totality of a social system. Clearly, how these relations are structured has decisive implications for the personal lives of both men and women, for our day-to-day roles and life options. But equally important, although still generally ignored, is something that once articulated seems obvious. This is that the way we structure the most fundamental of all human relations (without which our species could not go on) has a profound effect on every one of our institutions, on our

values, and as the pages that follow show-on the direction of our cultural evolution, particularly whether it will be peaceful or warlike.

It is in Eisler's Old Europe and its feminist (partnership) orientation that we find evidence of a strong societal container. It is in role of a chalice as a strong container that we find a safe, holding environment that can help us navigate the stormy waters of a mid-21st Century VUCA-Plus world.

A Mid-21st Century Container

Is such a container possible in a VUCA-Plus world?

Yes – but the more likely outcome is the creation and engagement of multiple containers – each serving challenges associated with specific VUCA-Plus challenges. Are multiple containers available to us and what do they look like. The answer is “yes,” These containers have been available and engaged in many societies and in many forms throughout human history. We are now ready to identify a chalice of true freedom.

Two key questions must be addressed when considering the nature of a chalice that holds true freedom. First, what is the nature and dynamics of a chalice that can provide the safety needed for the emergence of true freedom. Second, what is the nature and dynamics of a collaborating venture that is required if diverse communities are to be honored and protected in this container? The simple answer to these two questions is to be found in Rianne Eisler's focus on partnership. In the midst of a VUCA-Plus, relativistic world, we can freely commit to a pathway to true freedom “with a little help from our friends”? What then is the mindset required within each of us to accept assistance from other members of our community without losing our individual freedom? Ultimately, as I have suggested throughout this book, it is all about finding a harmony of interests and finding a way to balance individual rights and collective responsibility. All of this is to be done on behalf of a shared, compelling vision of the future.

Potential Pathways

How then does all of this take place and what might a compelling image of the future look like in our mid-21st Century? Such an image may be quite hard to envision given the fragmented world in which we now live. In the United States, we are faced with the prospect of governance by crisis, a judicial system that is being asked to provide guardrails for a society that is bent on self-destruction, and a technology that is not only contributing to the polarization but also creating its own “existential” threats. In a global context, we find the shattering of any unifying narrative (even if imposed via colonialization and Western media dominance), the imposition of one nation on another, and the emergence of many threats and counter-treats by many global forces (some being national leaders and others being powerful lone actors).

While our current condition provides conditions of doubt regarding formulation of a compelling image is possible, it is also a time for potentiality. As Martin Luther King declared in a speech delivered just before he was assassinated, “only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars.” In alignment with this fragment of optimism, I might turn to a systemic insight offered by Karl

Pribram, a prominent Stanford-based neuroscience, who suggested in an informal session I was privileged to attend, that major change in any system might usually (perhaps always) be preceded by a brief moment of rapid oscillation or “dithering.”

In this state we might be most likely to find an emergent image of the future that is compelling to at least a portion of those living in a troubled and troubling society. At old image is disintegrating, leaving us in a state of confusion. We no longer know what to believe or how to act on behalf of a better future. Fred Polak (1973, p. 183) puts it this way:

. . . part of the disintegrating process lies precisely in this, that we can no longer interpret the messages which our own images of the future give us. We thus find ourselves caught in a vicious circle. We do not understand and respond to the degeneration of our images of the future because we do not understand their function; our lack of understanding and response hastens the silent death of our visions. We might say that the future speaks a foreign language to us today.

Several pathways open up for us at this moment. The first pathway leads us to denial. We simply stick our head in the sand and fail to see the collapse of a dominant image of the future. Taking a “realistic” stance, we are likely to proclaim that there is no need for any thoughts about the future. According to Polak (1973, p. 221), someone taking this path is:

. . . scarcely aware of this pitiful collapse. He believes himself to be still standing with both feet firmly planted in the present. He does not know that he is standing on an earth fault which is ready to shift and split wide open at any moment.

If this “realistic” stance is not acceptable to us. If we are painfully aware of the chasm, then we must find a new image that speaks a language we can understand. Several images present themselves for our consideration as we “dither” back and forth--looking to make a decision and close the chasm. We can simply revert to Perry’s multiplicity – picking up those fragments of several different images that are “convenient” or “expedient” for us to embrace. Instead, we can quit “dithering” by embracing Dualism. We seek out the “right” vision of the future that is offered by someone in authority. The third option is Relativism. We acknowledge that there are multiple valid images, and simply choose to do nothing – remaining in a frozen (though often anxiety-ridden) state.

The fourth option offered by Perry is to make a commitment to a specific, emerging vision of the future and act in accordance with the values and purposes embedded in this image. Which path do we choose when living in a fragmented, VUCA-Plus saturated world?

Fragments of an American Future

Given the potential of successful envisioning in the midst of fragmentation – and the potential of choosing an alternative path, I wish to turn briefly to another time in which the society of American was fragmented and deeply polarized – this being the mid-19th Century. Heather Cox Richardson identifies this as a time in American life when we were moving slowly and then quickly. Furthermore, this was a time when societies in many other parts of the world were in the

midst of fragmenting breakup of traditional cultures and challenging of long-standing autocracies. In offering this perspective on the past, I continue to borrow from the recent insights offered by Richardson. I also turn to observations made by Kenneth Clarke, the noted British historian of culture, and Daniel Boorstin, a prominent chronicler of the American Experience.

By the middle of the 19th Century, American society had still not lived up to the promise conveyed by its Declaration of Independence. All men (and certain all women) were not treated as equals. Furthermore, the Industrial Revolution was creating a new class of wealth (the “industrialists”) that was not beholden to anyone—including the US government. It was in this setting of inequality that *The Harmony of Interests* was penned by Anonymous (1849). It was also in this setting that the dream of an alternative society was created in American—a dream of “manifest destiny” that would enable those with no power and little freedom to find freedom and their own power (at the expense of nature and the native population of the United States) by moving West.

Vision of Freedom

The culture of American in the middle of the 19th Century has been portrayed by Daniel Boorstin (1973) the American historian as best represented by three themes. Each of these themes relates directly to reaction against the oppression of Eastern industrialists and the creation of a new compelling image of the future: (1) manifest destiny, (2) a go-getting orientation, and (once again) (3) community.

Manifest destiny: In many ways, the theme of manifest destiny could be said to exist when the Puritans were escaping from England to find a new world created by God for the Puritans to colonize. This theme, however, is usually assigned to the culture of Western America. However, as was the case with the Puritans, manifest destiny was driven by religion. This image of the future provided a God-given justification for “conquering” the West (and its indigenous inhabitants) and creating a new heaven on earth. The American West was considered a newly reawakened Jerusalem.

With the manifest destiny in place, man was pitted against not just “godless” and savage Native American populations, but also nature itself. A Biblical theme held sway. Moses came down from Mt. Sinai to find his minions worshipping a symbol of nature (the golden calf) which Moses destroyed. Like Moses, new God-fearing inhabitants of the American West were to cast out any nature-loving perspectives that might be found among the Indigenous population or (God-forbid) those settling in this region. No one was to fraternize with the native population, “dance with the wolves” or spend too much time out in nature. Today, these people are called “tree-huggers”. In the West of a previous era, these people would likely have been run out of town (or worse). It is a God-given right for mankind to conquer nature (along with the native population).

The Go-Getters: This term was used by Boorstin (1973, p. 3) to describe the attitude and perspective of many men—and we would suggest many women—who were attracted to an image of the future that resided in the American West:

The years after the Civil War when the continent was only partly explored were the halcyon days of the Go-Getters. They went in search of what others had never imagined was there to get. They made something out of nothing, they brought meat out of the desert, found oil in the rocks, and brought light to millions. They discovered new resources, and where there seemed none to be discovered, they invented new ways of profiting from others who were trying to invent and to discover.

In other words: “Go west young man” and “Go west young woman.” Break free from the traditional and reinforced social class structures of Europe and Eastern USA! In the West, everyone was allowed to speak to whichever God they wished to worship—and the message from God was always (or almost always) the same: “It is your destiny to tame this wild land and to bring my [God’s] way to all who dwell in this land.” Put in more contemporary terms: “This land is your land [though not the land of the Native Americans who first dwelled on this land].”

Community: Boorstin (1973, p. 1) begins his remarkable book on the America experience with the following statement:

Americans reached out to one another. A new civilization found new ways of holding men together—less and less by creed or belief, by tradition or by place, more and more by common effort and common experience, by the apparatus of daily life by their ways of thinking about themselves.

Boorstin (1973, p. 19) soon applied the term “go-getter” to those who emulate this distinctly American characteristic and compelling image of the future. Boorstein further believed that these Americans often been found this characteristic and shared image in the American West:

The west was a good place for the refugee from older laws, but it offered no refuge from community. E.g. cattle drive to meet the railroad at Abilene or Dodge City (cowboys had to behave themselves in these towns) Even when they were on the trail “men had to suppress their personal hatreds, confine their tempers, and submit to the strict law of the trail, otherwise they might find themselves abandoned or strung up or sent off alone hundreds of miles from nowhere.”

There was a powerful drive for respectability (lawfulness) that was matched by the drive for continuing freedom (lawlessness). Boorstin considers this ambivalence about lawfulness to be a key element of Western culture in America. The title of this chapter in Boorstin’s (1973, p. 34) history of America was titled “lawless sheriffs and honest desperadoes.” This title reflected the confusing and conflictual nature of roles played by lawfulness and lawlessness in these communities. Boorstin (1974, p. 40) reported that: “The gallery of Good Bad Men and Bad Good Men . . . could be lengthened indefinitely. It would include every shape and mix of good and evil.” This list included such legendary “Bills” as Buffalo Bill, Bill Hickok, and Billy the Kid

The ambivalence also shows up in the flourishing of and simultaneous repression of certain “evils” in many Western communities. The most notable of these evils was gambling—an enterprise that later played a central role in the creation and flourishing of Las Vegas, Nevada

(aided by the cheap electric power provided by Hoover Dam) and, to a lesser extent, Reno, Nevada. Boorstin lumps in another human action that some people consider to be “evil” – this being the quick divorce (which made Reno even more famous than did its offering of gambling). The allure and prohibition of liquor (and today many other mind-altering drugs) certainly fits this pattern of ambivalence.

While gambling, divorce and booze thrived in the new American West, they were widely condemned not only by the Eastern American culture of Puritan restraint, but also by many citizens of the West who were intent on crushing these “evils”. They represented a variety of religious orientations as well as some secular interests. The evils they identified and sought to suppress included the prohibition of virtually all stress-reducing sources of intoxication.

Nightly camaraderie at the local tavern or a good night out on the town were frowned upon – as were many forms of entertainment such as theater, music and even dance. Secular interests also came to play in the West. There were strong entrepreneurial forces bent on taming this region of North America and making it “family friendly.” This was good business, At the same time, those entrepreneurs who were running the gambling, divorce and liquor businesses acquired fortunes and built major empires in the West. Both the Good guys and the Bad guys struck it rich in the American West.

Vision of Equality

It was also from this setting that the American Civil War emerged – and that Abraham Lincoln emerged as not only a great American leader but also the dreamer of a great dream. He offered a vision of the future that hopefully would be created at the end of domestic hostilities in the United States. Thus, what better place to begin in portraying a vision of the American future in the midst of fragmentation, then with some words offered by President Lincoln.

Abraham Lincoln: It was at Gettysburg and the “consecration” of land where many soldiers had fallen (on both sides of the conflict) that Lincoln offered a vision of the future that would become the ideology of Lincoln’s fledgling Republican Party. Our guide, Heather Cox Richardson (2023d) provides the following insightful quote from President Lincoln:

The prudent, penniless beginner in the world, labors for wages awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land, for himself; then labors on his own account for another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him. This, say its advocates, is free labor--the just and generous, and prosperous system, which opens the way for all--gives hope to all, and energy and progress, and improvement of condition to all.

It is in Lincoln’s vision of all “men” being free of slavery that we find not just equality, but also a robust economy (one that is superior to the slave-based economy of the American South).

In such a world, everyone shares a harmony of interest. What is good for the individual worker is, ultimately, good for everyone. There is no conflict between labor and capital; capital is simply "pre-exerted labor." Except for a few unproductive financiers and those who wasted their wealth on luxuries, everyone is part of the same harmonious system.

The protection of property is crucial to this system, but so is opposition to great accumulations of wealth. Levelers who want to confiscate property would upset this harmony, as Hammond warned, but so would rich men who seek to monopolize land, money, or the means of production. If a few people were to take over most of a country's money or resources, rising laborers would be forced to work for them forever. At best, they would have to pay exorbitant prices for the land or equipment they need to become independent.

Harriet Beecher Stowe and Advocates of Justice: At about the same time in American history, other prominent observers of American society – coming from quite different perspective--offer their own fragments of a vision. These are fragments related to the matter of equity and justice. I once again offer a quote from Heather Cox Richardson (2023a) regarding the writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe. For Stowe and other “suffragette” women of the time, the clarion call for equity and justice was often based on their own personal experiences:

The principles of liberal democracy made nineteenth-century writer Harriet Beecher Stowe turn her grief for her dead eighteen-month-old son into the best-selling novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which showed why no mother's child should be sold away from her. It made Rose Herera sue her former enslaver for custody of her own children after the Civil War. It made Julia Ward Howe demand the right to vote so her abusive husband could not control her life any longer.

The call for equity and justice was not unique to mid-19th Century women. We find it, of course, in the actions taken by Abraham Lincoln as President of a nation that went to war over the matter of equity and justice. Lincoln's rhetoric also spoke volumes regarding the nature of equity as a fully rational and desirable outcome for all members of a society:

In the 1850s, on a fragment of paper, Lincoln figured out the logic of a world that permitted the law to sort people into different places in a hierarchy, applying the reasoning he heard around him. "If A. can prove, however conclusively, that he may, of right, enslave B.-why may not B. snatch the same argument, and prove equally, that he may enslave A?" Lincoln wrote. "You say A. is white, and B. is black. It is color, then; the lighter, having the right to enslave the darker? Take care. By this rule, you are to be slave to the first man you meet, with a fairer skin than your own. You do not mean color exactly? You mean the whites are intellectually the superiors of the blacks, and, therefore have the right to enslave them? Take care again. By this rule, you are to be slave to the first man you meet, with an intellect superior to your own. But, say you, it is a question of interest; and, if you can make it your interest, you have the right to enslave another. Very well. And if he can make it his interest, he has the right to enslave you." (Richardson, 2022a)

Richardson (2022a) comments on this insightful statement by Lincoln about enslavement and equity:

Lincoln saw clearly that if we give up the principle of equality before the law, we have given up the whole game. We have admitted the principle that people are unequal and that some people are better than others. Once we have replaced the principle of equality

with the idea that humans are unequal, we have granted approval to the idea of rulers and ruled. At that point, all any of us can do is to hope that no one in power decides that we belong in one of the lesser groups.

Clarion calls also came from many men and over many years (Richardson, 2023a):

It made Black mathematician and naturalist Benjamin Banneker call out Thomas Jefferson for praising liberty while denying it to Black Americans; Sitting Bull defend the right of the Lakota to practice their own new religion, even though he did not believe in it; Saum Song Bo tell The New York Sun he was insulted by their request for money to build a pedestal for the Statue of Liberty when, three years before, the country had excluded people like him; Dr. Hector Garcia realize that Mexican Americans needed to be able to vote in order to protect themselves; Edward Roberts claim the right to get an education despite his physical paralysis; drag king Storme Delarverie throw the first punch at the Stonewall riot that jump-started the gay rights movement.

It seems that hardships and even violence may have to accompany any construction of a society in which a vision of equity and justice is realized. Is a viable future always hammered out on the anvil of despair, hardship and struggling advocacy? Must John Lewis' "good [necessary and righteous] trouble" always be required when seeking to establish true freedom?

Contemporary Times

In seeking out other fragments of a compelling and viable future, Heather Cox Richardson offers yet other quotations and historical renderings.

Nancy Pelosi: One of the historical renderings (Richardson, 2022f) comes from Nancy Pelosi on the day when she left the long-held speakership of the American House of Representative:

Pelosi began her speech to her colleagues by remembering her first sight of the U.S. Capitol when her father, Thomas D'Alesandro Jr., was sworn in for his fifth congressional term representing Baltimore. She was six.

She called attention to the Capitol in which they stood: "the most beautiful building in the world-because of what it represents. The Capitol is a temple of our Democracy, of our Constitution, of our highest ideals."

"In this room, our colleagues across history have abolished slavery; granted women the right to vote; established Social Security and Medicare; offered a hand to the weak, care to the sick, education to the young, and hope to the many," she reminded them, doing "the People's work."

"American Democracy is majestic-but it is fragile. Many of us here have witnessed its fragility firsthand-tragically, in this Chamber. And so, Democracy must be forever defended from forces that wish it harm," she said, and she praised the voters last week who "resoundingly rejected violence and insurrection" and "gave proof through the night that our flag was still there." Despite our disagreements on policy, she said, "we must

remain fully committed to our shared, fundamental mission: to hold strong to our most treasured Democratic ideals, to cherish the spark of divinity in each and every one of us, and to always put our Country first."

She said it had been her "privilege to play a part in forging extraordinary progress for the American people," and noted pointedly-because she worked with four presidents-"I have enjoyed working with three Presidents, achieving: Historic investments in clean energy with President George Bush. Transformative health care reform with President Barack Obama. And forging the future-from infrastructure to health care to climate action-with President Joe Biden. Now, we must move boldly into the future."

"A new day is dawning on the horizon," she said, "And I look forward-always forward-to the unfolding story of our nation. A story of light and love. Of patriotism and progress. Of many becoming one. And, always, an unfinished mission to make the dreams of today the reality of tomorrow."

Joe Biden: Richardson (2023c) turns also to the vision offered by Joe Biden, our outgoing president. She sets up the historical context and then quotes Biden:

[Biden noted in a 2023 speech] that while the nation's postwar vision was centered on majority-white countries, he emphasized that the modern world must include everyone. "[T]here's a whole lot at stake, he said, "And I think we have an opportunity. And one of the ways we make life better for us is make life better for the rest of the world. That's why I pushed so hard for the Build Back Better initiative to build the infrastructure in Africa... and in Latin America and South America."

Biden noted that the strength of the U.S. is in its diversity. "I said when I got elected I was going to have an administration that looked like America." He noted that there are a higher percentage of women in his Cabinet than ever before-more than the number of men-and that he had appointed more Black appellate court judges to the federal courts "than every other president in America combined." He did this for a simple reason, he said: "Our strength is our diversity. It's about time we begin to use it."

"[T]he whole world is changing," Biden said, "But if we grab hold," he continued, "[t]here's nothing beyond our capacity."

Richardson (2023f) turns to another speech offered in 2023 by President Biden:

In his speech, Biden. called Senator McCain a man who always put country above party, above politics, above his own person. "This day reminds us we must never lose that sense of national unity. So, let that be the . common cause of our time: let us honor September 11 by renewing our faith in one another."

There is yet another insightful (and inspiring) historical account and quotation offered by Richardson (2023g) in her attention to the vision offered by Joe Biden:

Biden listed the "fundamental values and beliefs that unite us as Americans." First, we believe the vote in America's sacred, to be honored, not denied; respected, not dismissed; counted not ignored. A vote is not a partisan tool to be counted when it helps your candidates and tossed aside when it doesn't." "Second," he said "we...stand against political violence and voter intimidation." "We don't settle our differences... with a riot, mob or a bullet or a hammer. We settle them peacefully at the ballot box." Third he said, "we believe in democracy. . . .History and common sense tell us that liberty, opportunity, and justice thrive in a democracy, not in an autocracy."

"At our best," the president said, "America is not a zero-sum society where for you to succeed, someone else has to fail. A promise in America is big enough... for everyone to succeed Individual dignity, individual worth individual determination, that's America, that's democracy and that's what we have to defend."

Richardson (2023c) concludes her reflections on and quotes from President Biden by offering the following comment:

If I were writing a history of the Biden administration 150 years from now, I would call out this informal talk as an articulation of a vision of American leadership, based not in economic expansion, military might, or personalities, or even in policies, but in the strength of the institutions of democracy, preserved through global alliances.

I find several ingredients in President Biden's vision of the future to be particularly inspiring – and essential elements of any viable image of the future. They include diversity in government, setting of country above party affiliation, and ultimate setting of global equity about national interests. A compelling image of the future must also incorporate Biden's dedication to the preservation and continuing revision of a remarkable societal experiment – called the American democracy.

Fragments of a Global Future

We return to the mid-19th Century. The traditional hierarchical structures of authority were collapsing. A new middle class was emerging that turned away from established sources of knowledge and guidance. The church no longer ruled the hearts and minds of those who had left the land to set up businesses and engage in commerce. Those working in factories found little "godliness" in the machines they were operating nor much "godly" virtue among the titans of industry who controlled their life. Fred Polak (1973, p. 228) suggests that this secularization: "left a queer vacuum. There was no longer any superhuman power present, as far as man could see, to guide the course of events, and human power was not quick enough or able enough to guide events in the right direction."

At the same time that American society was struggling with the matter of slavery and created a new (unrealized) image of a just future, similar struggles were being engaged in other parts of the world. Slavery had become a major issue in many European societies, as well as in Asian societies (usually presented as a criticism regarding the traditional caste system). We see repeated

instances of civil unrest (and even revolution) among those who have been enslaved. We also find unrest among those who have been caught up in the grinding wheels of the wide-spread industrial revolution. God was nowhere to be seen.

A new secular world was proclaimed. A new vision was extolled that primarily was framed in negative terms: the absence of repressing poverty and the absence of repressive governments. Polak (1973, p. 140) suggests that the shared vision (at least in North Europe and America) during the mid-19th Century was diminished in size (and perhaps made trivial):

The Industrial Revolution combined with a nationalistically oriented . . . optimism to produce an unprecedented "wealth of nations" and the successive material flowering of England, Germany, and the United States. Particularly in the United States, one special kind of active, expectational optimism---eudaemonism (the ethical doctrine establishing happiness as the highest moral good)--shrank utopia down to eu-topia and enshrined it in the euphoria of the "American Creed" and the "pursuit of happiness."

Polak pushes it further:

. . . as a part of the same picture, the ideas of national and imperialistic expansion . . . came to dominate the images of the future of all the "young" nations and races of the world. These ideas were rapidly translated into the destruction of the old political equilibria, the formation of new power-blocs, and world wars. While science and technology were busy spanning the earth and welding ail men on it into one dehumanized mass-man, the new spatial dimension of the image of the future simultaneously reduced the ideal of a world community in which every man is every man's neighbor, into a series of tight little compartments labeled national self-interest.

One might even declare that the vision had moved from one that was shared collectively by all members of society to one that was personally held. It became a psychologically based vision ("happiness") rather than residing in a broader societal context ("justice", "liberty" or perhaps "equality"). Freedom became a matter of personal liberty rather than any form of collective liberty. Furthermore, freedom was mostly envisioned as something different ("anything different") from what now exists. This could even mean embracing an authoritarian leader who promised to be on the side of the oppressed. This could be a new Napoleon in Europe or Hong Xiuquon in China. While Karl Marx offered a more detailed portrait of what a new future could look like, his vision was embraced primarily by a fringe group of intellectuals. The general public would only embrace a wildly distorted version of Marx's vision in the early years of the 20th Century.

Kenneth Clark (1969) framed the issue of polarization and fragmentation during the mid-19th Century in more artistic terms. It is in the domain of the artistic disciplines that we are likely to find a more expansive and compelling portrait of the future. As Polak (1973, p. 173) has noted, coherent (particularly utopian) visions of the future are not often to be formulated or even motivated by those in the visual arts or music. These coherent visions are portrayed more often in a compelling manner by authors and narrative poets. However, it is the immediate vision of a

frightening or beautiful future that might linger with us after visiting an art gallery. It is the stirring sound of a march or nationalistic piece of music that leaves us eager to change the world or restore our heritage.

There is one distinctive function served by the arts regarding a vision of the future. We often find that the arts are the domain in which battles are pitched between visionaries (who focus on the future) and realists (who focus on the present). There is the ongoing tension between harmony and dissent in not only political literature but also music, paintings and poetry. We find this struggle being waged even within each form. Do we portray the struggles and potentials to be found in our contemporary world or “escape” to a world that does not now exist—and will probably never exist? Some in the arts would say that being mired in the mud of present-day life leaves one little room for creative expression. Others would say that reality (and reform) require that we wallow a bit in the mud.

As someone preparing next year’s concert schedule in 1854, do I appeal to the tiered businessperson who wants to attend a “pleasant” concert or to those seeking a more “cutting edge” musical presentation. As a consumer of art in 1847, what should I be reading? Perhaps a “novel of sensibility.” Maybe a romantic narrative or portrait of civility and gallantry (that probably never actually existed)? A book by John Keats is waiting on the table by my bed. Do I savor his rich imagery. Or will it “do me good” if I pick up a book that portrays a dystopian world? Perhaps I will read a short novel about the dispossessed in my society! Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* is sitting there on my table. Do I absorb myself in this long and depressing tale?

Clarke (1969, p. 218) portrays an even deeper divide that existed in the arts during the middle years of the 19th Century (particularly in Europe and North American). He suggested that a broad chasm existed between the emerging middle class that was nourished by the Industrial Revolution (at the expense of the lower class) and the established artistic class (who were heirs to the Romantic movement). Romantic visions of the future (often saturated with nostalgia for some fantasized Past) might have been compelling for those of the middle class who attended a performance of works by Liszt or Wagner. Their compositions spoke (or sung) to this nostalgic past. However, these concert attenders didn’t have time in their actual daily life to do anything about somehow enacting this vision. Furthermore, since this was vision often rooted in the past, there was actually not much to do about reformation other than reminiscing about a mythic past. Nevertheless, a bit of Liszt can certainly stir up my 19th Century blood!

Being more realistic and anchored in present-day conflicts, the middle-class was more influenced in practical terms by the artistic portrayal that another element of the artistic community offered. These portraits concerned social inequality. Much as in the case of Harriet Beacher Stowe in the United States, reformist authors such as Charles Dickens were able to place their hands on the scales of justice and produce a widespread appeal for social reform. Perhaps I should pick up *Les Misérables* and attend to issues of poverty and social unrest in my own community.

Clarke (1969, p. 329) suggests that the Humanitarian outlook of many 19th Century artists was the most “civilizing achievement” of this century (at least in Europe). While this humanitarian vision

of an alternative future was compelling, it was once again mostly addressing what should NOT be part of a more just societal future. Furthermore, it was easily distorted with paternalistic control of the means by which the “oppressed” were granted charitable benefaction. Even words such as “handicap” were derived from the image of someone asking for a “handout” which was to be placed in the cap they held in their hand. Rather than true social reform taking place, guilt was assuaged. Humanitarian concerns were addressed primarily through charitable contributions and acts--that were soon managed by churches and nongovernmental, nonprofit agencies (such as the Salvation Army after 1865).

We find something similar operating in Asia, with the application of Confucius philosophy to a collective perspective regarding the honoring of all members of a community. The traditional Confucian focus on family is expanded to include the broader “family” to be found in community. Collective “harmony” only exists when the welfare of all members of a community is considered. Once again, this vision of a harmonious community is defined primary by what is NOT present (that which creates social “disharmony”). Harmony was still sustained by preserving the dominant social order and by treating those from the less privileged classes with a patronizing sense of beneficent privilege: “you should be grateful for what you are getting, even if it is far less than I receive every day.”

A New Era: As I have proposed, this is not the “end of history”. We live in a curved and dangerous world (Smick, 2008) – not the flat and collaborative world first portrayed by Thomas Friedman (2007). How do we respond to the challenges of this dangerous world. Our guide, Heather Cox Richardson (2023b) recently shared comments made at the Brookings Institute by Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor:

“The world needs an international economic system that works for our wageearners, works for our industries, works for our climate, works for our national security, and works for the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries,” Sullivan said. That means replacing the idea of free markets alone with “targeted and necessary investments in places that private markets are ill suited to address on their own.” Rather than simply adjusting tariff rates, it means international cooperation.

And, Sullivan said, “it means returning to the core belief we first championed 80 years ago: that America should be at the heart of a vibrant, international financial system that enables partners around the world to reduce poverty and enhance shared prosperity. And that a functioning social safety net for the world's most vulnerable countries is essential to our own core interests.”

For Sullivan, the key is not the invention of a new system of government and finance. It is rather a consistent commitment to principles and ideals that have been long held in American society. He reminds us of President Kennedy’s rising tide that lifts all boats:

This strategy, he said, “is the surest path to restoring the middle class, to producing a just and effective clean-energy transition, to securing critical supply chains, and, through all

of this, to repairing faith in democracy itself." He called for bipartisan support for this approach to the global economy.

Sullivan noted that the phrase "a rising tide lifts all boats" came from President John F. Kennedy, not from later supply-side ideologues who used it to defend their tax cuts and business deregulation. "President Kennedy wasn't saying what's good for the wealthy is good for the working class," Sullivan said, "He was saying we're all in this together."

Sullivan quoted Kennedy further: "If one section of the country is standing still, then sooner or later a dropping tide drops all the boats. That's true for our country. That's true for our world. [And] economically, over time, we're going to rise-or fall-together."

"And that goes for the strength of our democracies as well as for the strength of our economies."

Richardson (2023e) provides excerpts from a speech given by Secretary of State Anthony Blinken a few months after Jake Sullivan offers his vision of a global future:

In a major speech today [September 11, 2023] at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Secretary of State Antony Blinken explained the place at which the United States finds itself in both foreign and domestic affairs. He told the audience that the end of the Cold War, a period of competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, along with their respective allies, ushered in "the promise of an inexorable march toward greater peace and stability, international cooperation, economic interdependence, political liberalization, human rights." That postwar period did, indeed, lift more than a billion people from poverty, eliminate deadly diseases, and usher in a period of historically low conflicts between nations, despite challenges such as the 2008 global financial crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, and regional conflicts like those in Rwanda and Iraq.

Blinken makes a telling point at this point (Richardson, 2023e):

"But," Blinken said, "what we're experiencing now is more than a test of the post-Cold War order. It's the end of it."

The relative geopolitical stability of the post-World War II years has given way to the rise of authoritarian powers, he said. Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine is the most immediate threat to "the international order enshrined in the UN charter and its core principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence for nations, and universal indivisible human rights for individuals." But the People's Republic of China "poses the most significant long-term challenge," he said, "because it not only aspires to reshape the international order, it increasingly has the economic, the diplomatic, the military, the technological power to do just that."

As partners, "Beijing and Moscow are working together to make the world safe for autocracy," Blinken warned. . . . As the competition between the two systems ramps up,

many countries are hedging their bets, while the influence of nonstate actors-international corporations, public service nongovernmental organizations, international terrorists, transnational criminal organizations-is growing. At the same time, the sheer scale of global problems like climate change and mass migration is making cooperation across borders more difficult.

Blinken then offers a more psychologically based insight (Richardson, 2023e):

The international economic order of the past several decades is flawed in ways that have caused people to lose faith in it, Blinken explained.

Technology and globalization have hollowed out entire industries and weakened workers, while laws protected property. Inequality grew dramatically between 1980 and 2020, with the richest 0.1% accumulating the same wealth as the poorest 50%. "The longer these disparities persist," Blinken pointed out, "the more distrust and disillusionment they fuel in people who feel the system is not giving them a fair shake. And the more they exacerbate other drivers of political polarization, amplified by algorithms that reinforce our biases rather than allowing the best ideas to rise to the top."

Blinken would seem to be suggesting that little harmony of interest is to be found in our current world order. It has been more than 150 years since Anonymous delivered this dictum. Our current world appears to be no more harmonious-or wiser—than it was in mid-19th Century. Democracies are under threat, Blinken said. "Challenged from the inside by elected leaders who exploit resentments and stoke fears; erode independent judiciaries and the media; enrich cronies; crack down on civil society and political opposition. And challenged from the outside, by autocrats who spread disinformation, who weaponize corruption, who meddle in elections.

Blinken portrays a world that in some ways looks like that of the 19th Century. Technology has once again led to alienation and a sense of helplessness. Greed continues to hold sway over the better interests of social equality and justice. The loss of faith is portrayed by Blinken as global and deeply rooted. We face quite a challenge in constructing a world that is no longer polarized and no longer filled with despair. Yet, according to Blinken there is hope of a new era (Richardson, 2023e):

The post-Cold war order is over, Blinken said. "One era is ending, a new one is beginning, and the decisions that we make now will shape the future for decades to come."

The U.S. is in a position of strength from which it seeks to reinforce a rules based international order in which "good ideas, and individuals can flow freely and lawfully across land, sea, sky, and cyberspace, where technology is used to empower people-not to divide, surveil, and repress them," where the global economy is defined by fair competition and widespread prosperity, and where "international law and the core principles of the UN Charter are upheld, and where universal human rights are respected." Such a world would serve humanity's interests, as well as our own, Blinken said; its principles are universal.

"[O]ur competitors have a fundamentally different vision," he said. "They see a world defined by a single imperative: regime preservation and enrichment. A world where authoritarians are free to control, coerce, and crush their people, their neighbors, and anyone else standing in the way of this all consuming goal."

They claim that the norms and values that anchor the rules-based international order are imposed by Western nations, that human rights are up to nations themselves, and that big countries should be allowed to dictate to their smaller neighbors.

"The contrast between these two visions could not be clearer. And the stakes of the competition we face could not be higher—for the world, and for the American people."

Blinken explained that 'the Biden administration has deliberately integrated domestic and foreign policy, crafting industrial strategy to rebuild the U.S. and to address the wealth disparities that create deep political resentment, while aligning that domestic strength to foreign policy. That foreign policy has depended-on strengthening alliances and partnerships, building regional integration so that regions address their own interests as communities, closing the\ infrastructure gap between nations, and strengthening international institutions-rejoining the Paris Climate Accords and the World Health Organization, working to expand the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and so on.

Blinken said that such investments will lead nations to stand up to "the Beijings and Moscows of the world" when they claim this system serves the West and try to tear it down, and answer back: "No, the system you are trying to change is our system; it serves our interests." At the same time, such investments will offer new markets for American workers and businesses, more affordable goods for American consumers, more reliable food and energy supplies, more robust health systems to stop deadly disease, more allies to address global challenges.

Looking back from the future, Blinken said, "the right decisions tend to look obvious, the end results almost inevitable. They never are. In real time, it's a fog."

"We must put our hand on the rudder of history and chart a path forward, guided by the things that are certain even in uncertain times—our principles, our partners, our vision for where we want to go," Blinken said, "so that, when the fog lifts, the world that emerges tilts toward freedom, toward peace, toward an international community capable of rising to the challenges of its time."

What do these global fragments tell us about our possible — or even desired — future? At the very most, these fragments present only one side of the picture. The leaders of other countries will offer a vision of the future that differs in many important ways from what Secretary of State Blinken has offered. The challenge is to find some image of the future that can be embraced by all nations. Writing from the perspective of someone from the Netherlands who is emersed in the cold war of the late 20th Century, Fred Polak (1973, p. 303) has the following to say about the

challenge of finding a shared vision – while finding some optimism about finding this shared vision by looking back in history:

Although much of our thinking about the future today is inevitably in terms of choosing between the two competing images of the future which the East and the West have set before us, we must in the long run pass beyond these dichotomies which paint the future in black and white. Neither Russia nor America alone can spawn the future. The image of the future, at its best, has always been universal in character, a vision to serve and foster the growth of all mankind. At a time when the lack of such a vision seems to be driving us to self-destruction, it is well to remember that one of the most potent and enduring visions in the history of man has been that of a Thousand Years' Reign of Peace. This is a vision which is never entirely absent from the hearts of men and women who come together to bear children and build a home. If the man leaves home and wife and child to go forth to war, as he has so often done in the past, it is only that he may in the end return and continue building in peace. If the woman endures hardship bravely and finds ways to survive when there seems to be no hope of survival, it is only that the child of her womb may live to build a better world. The sparks of this universal vision lie in every human spirit in every land. A vision of the future which falls short of this universality will in the end leave the earth a smoking ruin. The same tool cannot serve simultaneously as sword and ploughshare, and the scope of the vision will determine the final use to which the tool is put.

It is in this final quote from Fred Polak that we come back around to the challenge posed by Riane Eisler. Will our future be dictated by the sword or by the chalice? Will we look to the feminist perspective of ploughshare and peace, or to the all-too-common masculine perspective of sword and conflict? Could an assemblage of societies, cultures and political perspectives found in an organization such as the United Nations ever arrive at a vision that is not only articulated (such as the UN Charter) but also enacted?

Conclusions

The brief review I have just offered suggests that it will require even greater intellect, vision and commitment to create a coherent vision of the future that doesn't immediately or soon self-destruct as a utopian dream. Having identified these fragments, I will suggest, in the final chapter in this book, ways in which we might collectively come to a vision that is harmonious, balanced and just.

Chapter Fifteen

Architecture of the Future

Visions of the futures must be frequently renewed, reimagined and revamped. We must serve as architects in our envisionment and building of this future. In this final chapter I propose ways in which, as architects, we can design, create and maintain a Coherent and Viable Image. Perspective and practices are offered that address the challenges inherent in the creation of this future—midst the conditions of VUCA-Plus. I provide even more detailed guidance in four appendices that I have attached which focus on each of the six VUCA-Plus conditions through one of two lenses (the Lens of Essentials and the Lens of Essence).

The Unique and Potential Challenges in 21st Century Life

I have already devoted a fair amount of time and attention to the unique challenges posed by the six VUCA-Plus conditions of mid-21st Century life. I need not return to them at this point. I will instead identify several of the other major issues to be addressed at this point in time, as well as identify some unique issues that might unexpectedly emerge during this century. Each of these expected and unexpected issues make the establishment of true freedom that much more difficult—and that much more important.

In providing an overview of these expected and unexpected issues, I bring in several temporary guides. These are nine editors of *Scientific American* who identified 12 events in 2010 that “will change everything.” (Choi, et. al., 2010). While their futuristic projections are now a bit old, they are concerned about potential events that may occur quite a few years in the future—so I think their projections are still relevant. I also bring in some of the futuristic guides I have referenced previously in this book as well as offering some of my own reflections on expected and unexpected events. I couch this brief analysis of 21st Century challenges in the dichotomy I offered previously in this book between an external and internal locus control.

External Locus of Control

There are some external events that are likely to occur (high probability) or could occur (low probability) during the remaining years of this center. Many of these events have not only been emphasized by the *Scientific American* (SA) authors but also by other authors who identify themselves as Futurists.

Over the years, there have been essentially three camps of futurists. One camp consists of those who author science fiction books. They often focus on the big external events that can occur via space travel or the arrival of aliens. The SA authors were a bit more anchored in this appraisal of big external events. However, John Matson did suggest that we could find a way to communicate with extra-terrestrials (or they find a way to communicate with us). George Musser wrote about

the discovery of a fourth dimension and the impact of this discovery on all of the physical sciences.

More common is the prediction by futurists (and the SA authors) of large natural events that could be disastrous for “normal” human existence. These include Katherine Harmon’s anticipation of a major Pacific Ocean earthquake (and accompanying tsunami) that could destroy many cities along the Pacific rim, as well as Robin Lloyd’s portrayal of the earthly collision of an asteroid. I would add to this disturbing list, the potential, catastrophic eruption of the volcano that resides beneath the large caldera in Northwest Wyoming or eruption of the now-reemerging Krakatoa volcano off the coast of Indonesia. All of this is enough to keep us awake at night – though none of these events are eminent. However, each of them at some point could be used to justify the imposition of temporary martial law or even used as justification for establishing a more controlling and emergency-ready government.

Internal Locus of Control

There is both good and bad news as we shift our attention to big events over which we have some (or entire) control. It is reassuring to know that we are not powerless; however, it is not reassuring to recognize that our history has not been very positive with regard to addressing these major issues prior to their often-deadly impact.

The most obvious of these big, controllable events is human engagement in a nuclear war – which Philip Yam described for SA. Somewhat less disastrous would be the initiation by multiple nations of a non-nuclear war that involves the death and displacement of many people. We can also place the human enactment of genocide on this list, alongside the enactment of policies that deprive people of shelter, food and water. We are all too familiar with the ongoing appearance of these activities and outcomes – and the fostering of these activities and outcome by authoritarian rulers.

There are also more positive events to be identified. Thomas Friedman (2007) has famously identified a flat earth in which there is extensive communication and interaction between people from all members of the global community--though Friedman wrote later about a world that is hot as well as flat (Friedman, 2008). There is also the counter narrative offered by David Smick of a world that is curved and dangerous. I have referenced both Friedman’s and Smick’s image of the world several times in this book – primarily because each of these images holds major implications for the way in which we find and maintain true freedom in our own society.

While Friedman and Smick tend to focus on the dynamics of politics and economies in our contemporary world, most of the members of this second camp tend to focus on technology (though both Friedman and Smick consider the impact of communication technologies on the world they portray). This second, optimistic camp is filled with those who believe that we will find technologists to solve many of our problems or will make scientific discovering that will significantly improve human life. One of the SA authors (Michael Moyer) writes about superconductors as a major new energy source. Moyer also suggests that we will make major inroads in the use of fusion energy.

There is also the matter of geo-engineering. This highly controversial set of current or envisioned initiatives involved taking ambitious technologically based steps to alleviate some of the major environmental challenges facing our world. For instance, in a recent *Atlantic Monthly* article, Ross Andersen (2024) describes projects that address the critical problem of melting ice caps. One project involves freezing the ice caps by covering them with large sections of an insulating fabric. Another project would focus on draining the water that resides under specific ice packs. Without this intermediate water, the ice pack remains frozen and is less likely to move. Several even broader geo-engineering strategies are reviewed by Benjamin Twining (2024) that have to do with the broader problem of excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere – which contributes big time to our global warming. Twining focuses in part on the iron fertilization of the ocean. This would encourage growth of microscopic algae which in turn eat carbon dioxide and having consumed a large amount of this gas, they sink to the bottom of the ocean.

As both Andersen and Twining note, it is hard to predict exactly what will happen if a major intervention is made in our oceans or ice caps. We are tampering with what Twining admits are “vast and dynamic” systems. To reiterate a phrase used by Jay Forrester: don’t just do something – stand there!” Fortunately, there are computer-based planning and prediction tools that can accompany the envisioning done by the geo-engineers. These tools include those created by Forrester and his colleagues at M.I.T. As is the case when envisioning and modeling other fragments of a viable future, geo-engineers can identify the key “agents” and parameters associated with their planned intervention and place them on a modeling platform that spins out the potential interaction among these agents based on this set of parameters. While the output of this modeling process does not create “reality” or “truth,” it does provoke review, revision (and even abandonment) of the project if there are unanticipated outcomes – especially if “things go wrong”

Large-scale engineering is not confined to the environment in which we live, it is also applied to the bodies in which we live. Bio-engineering initiatives are to be found in the field of genetic engineering – involves the use of artificial tissues, organs or organ components to replace damages of absent parts of one’s body. One of the SA authors (David Biello) suggested that “life synthetic biology” might radically change present day medical practices, while another of the SA authors (Charles Choi) proposed that we may soon find cloning of a human being

Finally, there is the truly BIG event (or series of events) that is receiving full-throated attention in all media today. This is Artificial Intelligence. At a “mild” level, AI is being currently engaged to improve our use of language, to guide our cars, and to provide breakthrough analyses of medical conditions – among many other things. The BIG question emerges. Can we control AI or will it eventually control us? One of the SA authors (Larry Greenemeier) offered the troubling possibilities that machines will become self-aware. Could this be the alternative to the invasion of an alien entity? What implications does this self-awareness of a “machine” hold and how might a self-conscious AI align with an authoritarian leader to ensure human/machine control of human behavior and societal functioning?

Hybrid: External and Internal Locus of Control

There is a third camp of Futurists. These are the scientists and environmental advocates who point not just to our dire environmental condition but also to the need for human beings to take action in addressing this condition. This is a hybrid of external and internal locus of control because it involves forces operating outside us (external locus) that MUST ultimately be controlled (at least partially) via human enterprise (internal locus).

Specific environmental issues are the favorites among many futurists and SA authors. They include the melting of ice caps, heating of the world's atmosphere and oceans, and polluting of the world's bodies of water. We have seen two of these environmental issues (ice caps and warming) addressed by Andersen and Twining. In recent years, attention has also turned to the accumulation of plastics in the oceans, the impact of environment changes on migrant patterns, and the denial of climate change by many citizens in the USA (and elsewhere).

Each of these long-term favorites and emerging favorites holds major implications for the formulation and enforcement of public policies as well as the more fundamental priorities of societal values. We find that authoritarian regimes in the mid-21st Century tend to favor either the denial of environmental problems or the application of specific technologies to immediately "solve" these problems. Even for those citizens who are environmentally sensitive, there often is disdain for the complex, sloppy and protracted deliberations of their democratic government regarding the resolution of environmental issues. A bit of authoritarian rule can be attractive to those who face the prospects of global environmental collapse.

As we turn to our SA authors, we find that David Biello describes the impact which a polar meltdown would have on our global population. Another SA author (Katherine Harmon) wrote about the invasion of a virus-based pandemic that would be even greater than COVID-19. These two major environmental disasters were predicted more than fifty years ago. There would soon be the collapse of our global environment (accompanied by the climate crisis) and the shattering of spatial boundaries (with viruses easily travelling between nations).

It soon became clear (to most people) that these "natural" disasters are at least partially man-made—hence the hybrid label (both an external and internal locus). Much of this clarity came from Jay Forrester and his system dynamics colleagues, using the computer technologies available at MIT and Dartmouth College. Forrester and his colleagues were among the first system-thinkers who recognized that the interconnectivity of various sectors in our global system (such as population, pollution, and global warming) increased the rate at which each of these systems is likely to change (Meadows, et al., 1972). Positive feedback loops are found everywhere in our global system. Acceleration increases because of interconnectivity. Taleb's exponential growth was anticipated at M.I.T. and its recognition helped to increase prophetic awareness of the impending environmental crisis in our 21st Century world.

While as I have already mentioned, these computer-modeling can aid the geo-engineers in their planning and prediction, they can also be engaged to advocate for the use of alternative, non-engineering approaches to creating a viable future. As mentioned in *Limits to Growth* (Meadows,

et. al., 1972; Meadows, et. al., 2004)) their original commissioned study of the global environment, “THE answer” to the global environmental challenges resides in much more difficult changes in the human heart and mind. Non-renewable resources must be preserved, population must be controlled, and new priorities must be established regarding quality of life and the use of renewable resources. This includes resources that enhance learning and protect diversity and equity (Meadows and Randers (1992).

There is a somber observation to introduce at this point. Many of the futurists who focused on human-caused disasters have tended to be quite pessimistic regarding the future of humankind. As a result, many programs that focused on the future were short lived. There was not much of a future for future studies programs. The many strategies I have introduced in this book are meant to counter, in part, the sense of helplessness and hopelessness that often accrue to the study of future life (at least for human beings).

What then about the rest of us – who don’t purport to be futurists or don’t have a large mainframe computer on which to do our planning and predictions? Do we also lose heart and either remain frozen in place or find the nearest rabbit hole and entrance to a world of distorted Serenity? Do we find the courage to engage in this very challenging 21st Century world? Do we find the knowledge and wisdom to envision and prepare for a viable future? I am about to provide some guidance in this regard (relying once again on my guides). However, before doing so I need to offer several cautionary notes about enduring challenges associated with what I have called “leaning into the future” and what our guide, Otto Scharmer, has called “learning into the future.”

The Enduring Challenges

These cautionary notes require that we dig even deeper into the challenges associated with this leaning and learning into the future. We need to keep these cautions in mind when setting the stage for becoming competent architects of the future. I turn once again to the wisdom offered by two of our guides: Wilfred Bion and Fred Polak.

Bion’s Paradox

As I have noted, Wilfred Bion (1961) suggests ways in which members of a group gain credibility as leaders by exhibiting (or being assigned) wisdom, courage or vision). It is also important to acknowledge what happens during transitional periods in the life or group and its leader(s). One of these important points concerns the point when a group and its visionary leader actualizes this vision. As architects, we are standing in front of the building we have designed and helped to construct. Now what? An envisioned city on the hill is established and waters of equity and justice are flowing down to the sea. How does it feel to be living in a utopian city? Is it as good as everyone hoped it would be?

We have frozen the ice cap or successfully drained water from under the massive sheet of ice. While we can linger on this geo-engineering feat for a short while, we must redirect our attention to what will follow in the reaction of our vast and dynamic ocean (and globe) to this successful

intervention. We have made effective use of bio-engineering to lengthen the human life span. Now we have many older adults who no longer work and no longer give birth to children. What do we do about economic viability and a declining birth rate? Our world is becoming increasingly flat. We are in constant contact (via digital media) with people throughout the world. How do we now deal with differences in perspectives and practices? How do we behave in an open and genuine manner with people who are quite different from ourselves?

Are there important trade-offs that come with a perfect city. Is there any room for deviance? I used to spend a fair amount of time teaching in the city/state of Singapore. In many ways, this is a perfect city. It is exceptionally clean. All of the cars are new (can't own a car more than 10 years old). There are no traffic jams (hard to own a car of any age in Singapore). Days are set aside for elections and all elections take place over a short period of time (rather than being drawn out for several years). I noticed one man living on the street. He was virtually naked and acted in a bizarre manner. I asked one of my colleagues from Singapore if this man was specifically assigned to be the "crazy" person in Singapore. My colleague laughed – and then but took a moment to respond. Apparently, mental illness is quite rare in Singapore. Yet . . . there are high levels of anxiety among those living in this city/state.

One of my colleagues, Richard Lim (2018) has written about this lingering anxiety, suggesting that it exists in the social unconscious of Singapore. As citizens of a country that was "expelled" from the Malaysian Federation in 1965, there is a sense of being unwanted. As a very small country situated in a part of the world where many conflicts have been engaged over the past century, there is also a sense of being insecure. Singapore would seem to be "perfect" because someone who is unwanted and insecure has to do everything "right." Lim found that the quest for perfection keeps Singaporeans working late into the evening. Perfection also keeps the streets clean and the citizens "sane." There is a cost that comes with actualizing a collective vision.

There is an additional challenge that emerges when all or even part of the future is realized. We have been guided and motivated by this vision of the future. Now it has been achieved. What comes next. We have re-engineered the ice caps and our withered arm – now what? In my own work as a consultant (to organizations) and coach (to leaders) I often speak about "confiscating the future." We have removed a big "to-do" from our list of daily or monthly goals. Do we just "rest on our laurels" or do we create a new vision of the future or revise and expand our current vision.

There is also the matter of regret that comes with the achievement of an envisioned future. It is all well and good that we are now living in a world for which we have fought hard. Many sacrifices were made along the way. Subsidiary goals were set aside on behalf of a higher order set of goals. We have found a way to bio-engineer a healthy body; however, this has been at the expense of reforming healthy habits. Our efforts to reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere have been somewhat successful, but the floor of our ocean is filled with carbon-absorbing microscopic algae. Now, we have to worry about the impact these algae will have on the sea life dwelling at the bottom of our seas.

Sacrifices and forfeitures are always difficult to retain. I was recently working with older women at a major medical school in the United States who were real pioneers as female faculty members in American medical education and as leaders in their area of medical specialization. These remarkable women had achieved everything that they had originally set out for themselves. However, I found that the theme on which they wanted to work concerns their regrets. They had set aside many priorities in order to be successful in their career. Many had never had the “time” to marry or have children. These women often felt lonely and were uncertain and anxious about their life as they approached retirement. In order to achieve our dreams, we must often set aside important parts of a “normal” waking life.

Finally, there is the matter of a vision of the future never being achieved. While according to the behavioral scientists, regret is often a stronger emotion than loss – the latter emotion can still be quite powerful. We hate to lose, especially when this loss comes after an expenditure of a large amount of time, energy (and money). Our future has been confiscated when we have been successful. Our future has disappeared or faded away when we finally realize that this future will never be achieved. The ice caps can’t be saved. Parts of our body are not easily replaced. Our flat world is now and will remain “forever” curved and dangerous.

The credibility of our visionary leader is thrown into doubt. Geo and bio engineering are condemned and declared the perpetrators of our personal and natural disasters (much as laboratory scientists in China and Dr. Fauci were identified as the creators of Covid). Targets are identified for the assignment of blame (beyond just the mess created by our incompetent leader). Skepticism increases regarding future envisioning – and especially future “engineering.” There is often regression to William Perry’s Multiplicity. No one is to be trusted with regard to the truth, reality or virtue – certainly not the scientists, engineers or government officials! Our collective (and probably personal) aspirations have collapsed. We are left with only our ability to be adjustable and opportunistic in a world that is void of any hope, purpose or meaning.

Such are the challenges faced in particular by a society in which a vision of the future plays a central role. It is when we are enamored with engineering that we are most vulnerable to disillusionment regarding either bio or geo-engineering. We are most likely to be skeptical regarding democratic governance when we are most reliant on the leaders of this government’s investment in the future: “I have a dream!” “I have a five-year plan!” “I wish to enact a Great Society.” This appraisal by Bion is truly paradoxical. We envision a future and are vulnerable to this future whether or not it is realized . . .

Polak’s Dilemma

Visions of the future that have been at least partially realized have always proved to be less than what was originally envisioned. In most instances – as realized “utopias” – these visions have collapsed under the weight of unrealistic expectations, unresolved matter of control, and simply the challenge of meeting diverse human needs (Maslow’s hierarchy and Schein’s anchors). Polak (1973, p. 139) suggests that visions of the future – and particularly utopias – tend to collapse when they are physically located somewhere. They might be doing fine when envisioned in theory.

However, they shrivel away when actually realized – or even just hypothetically located in physical space.

Polak (1973, p. 225) goes even deeper in proposing this challenging dilemma. Making use of Hegel's historical model of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, Polak proposes that utopias (and other visions of the future) have their own internal destruct codes.

. . . historical images of the future have contained an autodestructive force which was a part of the very nature of the historical images; this effect can therefore not fully be explained by the fact that the historical images of the future have not worked (the "disillusionment theory") inasmuch as their ultimate decay was implied in their fulfillment. There is then, after all, a dialectical process but a dialectic of drastic self-liquidation, a dialectic of thesis and antithesis without synthesis.

Fred Polak (1973, p. 225) almost seems to be applying a homeostatic framework to his assessment of the self-destructive mechanisms that are inherent in images of the future:

The historical images of the future contain a double charge: they propel the present into the future-which is their obvious function and they provide the successors which they themselves have reared with a built-in time-bomb. Not only have they eliminated themselves for the sake of later redemption through newer images of the future, but they have already in their own operations and partial realization worked against their successors, setting in motion a process which ends in the exclusion of all images of the future. This puts an end to all renewal in time of current images of the future.

As time moved forward, the images of the future also leapt ahead, in consonance with their historically relative character. This was particularly true of the utopian images, but even eschatology was subject to continued revision and reorientation, in spite of its shell of absolutistic dogma.

I would suggest that an alternative auto-destruct and auto-correcting dynamic is operating in the human society that Thomas Hobbes describes during the 17th Century. As John Gray (2023, p. 35-36) notes:

When Thomas Hobbes described life in a state of nature as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short," he penned one of the most celebrated sentences in the English language. The 17th century philosopher asserted that without "a common power to keep them all in awe," human beings fall into a state of nature – a condition of anarchical warfare and lawless predation.

Hobbes' analysis resonates powerfully at the present time, when states are failing in many parts of the world, leaving chaos and crime in their wake. Increasingly, his pessimistic vision seems vindicated by a far-reaching decline in the security human beings need in their everyday lives.

Yet, with all of this pessimism regarding the human condition, Hobbes identifies a corrective dynamic that also can be found in human societies. I return to Gray's (2023, p. 36) historical analysis:

From one point of view, Hobbes can be read as a liberal who illuminates the loss of freedom in our time. From another, he highlights some fundamental deficiencies of liberalism. He aimed to found the authority of the state on a minimal morality that could be accepted by all. For him that meant treating self-preservation as the supreme value. The dominant human impulse was not love of power but fear of death—above all, death at the hands of other human beings. Hobbes knew that people are ready to die for pride and reputation. Even so, he was confident that the urge to avoid a violent end was strong enough to defeat other human impulses and support sovereign that delivered peace.

I would offer a way in which to address Polak's dilemma and Hobbes's corrective proclivity in human societies. Building on the remarkable insights offered by Peter Sterling (2020) regarding the dynamic allostatic operations of biological systems, I would suggest that human systems operate as Polystatic entities. There is not a return to homeostasis (traditional democratic rule) when a human system has been disrupted by the invasion of autocratic and tyrannical rule. Rather, baselines regarding the role of authority and of self-rule are adjusted. Multiple options (poly) are entertained in the establishment of a new more viable social structure (stasis).

Lessons are learned regarding the "deficiencies" of traditional democratic rule. A new set of expectations is enacted. New norms of forbearance are established and maintained. A new vision is portrayed. Alternative societal narratives are constructed. A new model emerges that may lead to a better balance between individual right and collective responsibilities. A new search for harmony of interest becomes of central importance. Differences in values, perspectives and practices are set aside, at least temporarily, on behalf of the commonwealth and the community of Grace.

There is not a built-in time bomb if the polystatic system is continually adjusting its image of the future. As I mentioned with regard to "confiscation of the future," one can personally or collectively continue to revise an image of the future. The image is not only kept "up to date" (given ongoing changes in one's environment). This image remains compelling ("newly tailored for a new population"). Polystasis and ongoing revision prevail because members of society are open to new learning and agile adaptation.

The Response

How do we create and facilitate collaborative ventures and images of the future in which true freedom is being engaged? How do we open the doors and windows to new learning. How do we remain agile? How do we create and maintain a community of heart (and head)?

I specifically propose that collaborative ventures and future envisioning require the knowledge of a social architect (structural expertise), skill of a team facilitator (process-related expertise), and dedication of a social reformer (expertise related to attitudes). These three roles relate, in turn, to

what Goodwin Watson (Watson and Johnson, 1972) proposed many years ago: effective functioning of a project, organization or society require attention to three dimensions: structure, process and attitude.

The first dimension (structure) contains the formal elements of a project, organization or society: the organization chart and reporting relationships, buildings, technologies, official strategic plans, etc. The structures are visible and can readily be articulated. They are the stable, enduring “snap shots” of the organization. The second dimension (process) contains the ongoing way in which people inside the structure operate. This dimension is best conveyed not through a static snapshot, but rather through a movie that documents the behaviors taking place. The process dimension includes behaviors related to the fore-mentioned Empowerment Pyramid--including such critical interpersonal functions as communication, conflict-management, problem-solving and decision-making (Bergquist, 2003).

The third dimension (attitude) identified by Watson can't be seen or viewed either as a snapshot or movie. Attitude is felt but not seen. As we have already noted, Chris Argyris and Don Schon (1974) offer a comparable distinction between “espoused theory” (what we say) and “theory in action” (what we do). Attitude is inferred from the ways in which members of a project, organization or society communicate with one another, manage conflicts, solve problems, and make decisions. Attitudes are seen but rarely articulated. As the old saying goes: “Watch what they do rather than what they say.” This saying can even be directed toward our own attitudes: “Watch what I do rather than what I say.”

Attitude concerns how members of an organization or society feel about working in the existing structure and engaging other members of the organization through the use of specific processes. It is important to note that Watson conceives of “attitude” as a dimension of human life that encompasses the dynamics of character and culture. For Watson, attitude includes anything that can't be directly observed (as is the case with structure and process).

If Watson is accurate in his assessment of the key dimensions in any project, organization or society, then diverse sources of expertise are needed to create and maintain a community – be it temporary or permanent – in which learning (head) and agility (heart) play a central role. Knowledge regarding structure must be coupled with the facilitation of processes and dedication to specific attitudes. If this expertise is effectively engaged on behalf of temporary systems (as well as permanent systems) then it will have a multiplier effect: specific collective expertise is engaged that enhances the acknowledgement and use of other, collective forms of expertise. Given this hopeful appraisal regarding creating and maintaining communities of learning and agility (communities of head and heart) we turn to some specific examples (and recommendations) regarding how structures, processes and attitudes can be effectively engaged. I begin with structures that enhance the recognition and use of collective expertise.

Structures that Provide a Pathway to True Freedom

In order to provide an informed pathway to true freedom, we must find other like-minded people who will join us in our collaborative learning and leaning into the future. We find these people in many settings—especially in the organizations with which we work and the communities in which we live. We also find (or create) settings that are comparable to those identified by de Tocqueville in his description of communities where habits of the heart prevail. Equality of opportunity, knowledge and status exists in the community. No one person has all the answers or all the authority. Collective wisdom is encouraged and honored.

We find the existence of these heart-felt societal structures in many ancient civilizations. Graeber and David Wengrow (2021) identify these special settings existing during specific seasons among many aboriginal tribes in North America:

The key text here is Marcel Mauss and Henri Beuchat's (1903) 'Seasonal Variations of the Eskimo'. The authors begin by observing that the circumpolar Inuit and likewise many other societies ... have two social structures, one in summer and one in winter, and that in parallel they have two systems of law and religion. In the summer, Inuit dispersed into bands of roughly twenty or thirty people to pursue freshwater fish, caribou and reindeer, all under the authority of a single male elder. During this period, property was possessively marked and patriarchs exercised coercive, sometimes even tyrannical power over their kin But in the long winter months, when seals and walrus flocked to the Arctic shore, there was a dramatic reversal. Then, Inuit gathered together to build great meeting houses of wood, whale rib and stone; within these houses, virtues of equality, altruism and collective life prevailed. Wealth was shared, and husbands and wives exchanged partners under the aegis of Sedna, the Goddess of the Sea.

We find this same duality of structures operating in contemporary times. There is the traditional, hierarchical structure that is engaged most of the time in an organization; however, there is a “collateral” structure that operates in a manner that promotes equality, altruism and collective life” much as was done in the Inuit society.

Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 351) point to a similar duality operating among the Kwakiutl in the Pacific Northwest:

Around the same time that Marcel Mauss was combing French libraries for everything that had ever been written about the Inuit, the German ethnologist Franz Boas was carrying out research on the Kwakiutl, indigenous hunter-gatherers of Canada's Northwest Coast. Here, Boas discovered, it was winter - not summer - that was the time when society crystallized into its most hierarchical forms, and spectacularly so. Plank-built palaces sprang to life along the coastline of British Columbia, with hereditary nobles holding court over compatriots classified as commoners and slaves, and hosting the great banquets known as potlatch. Yet these aristocratic courts broke apart for the summer work

of the fishing season, reverting to smaller clan formations - still ranked, but with entirely different and much less formal structures. In this case, people actually adopted different names in summer and winter - literally becoming someone else depending on the time of year.

For the Kwakiutl, there was a special time of year and a special celebrative format (called the Potlatch) that provided an opportunity for many societal functions to be fulfilled – including the honoring of specific members of the tribe, the transition of young Kwakiutls into adulthood and the retelling of historical moments in the past life of the tribe. As I will also mention shortly, the Potlatch ceremony provided another critical function: it enabled wealth to be distributed equitably among members of the tribe. This was quite a multi-purpose collateral organization that contrasted sharply with the “normal” hierarchical functioning of the Kwakiutl.

As de Tocqueville observed in early American society and Graeber and Wengrow observed in Aboriginal North American tribes, collateral settings can be created in which vivid and sustained dialogue, celebration and exchange can be found in abundance. Constructive societal engagements are based on shared interests. Reasons to sustain mutual support are identified and celebrated. Emphasis is placed on experience-based (historical) and useful (ceremonially re-enacted) collective societal actions. Most importantly, these collective actions are based on an abiding belief regarding the enduring role of humans in a sustainable environment and a shared sense of greater purpose in life.

Sanctuaries

I suggest that the ancient term “sanctuary” captures the essence and heart of these settings and sanctuaries are still alive and well! We can successfully create sanctuaries in our challenging VUCA-Plus world (Bergquist, 2017). We can find constructive dialogue, appreciative celebration and equitable exchange in such a setting. Specifically, Sanctuaries are collateral systems that exist alongside traditional societal structures. Sanctuaries are places, times or situations (which are created for us, or which we create for ourselves), in which we can drop out of the busy conditions of life for a few moments. We gather ourselves together in this setting. We restore our integrity and our energies. We focus again on our highest priorities and deepest yearnings. Sanctuary is where we “come home,” where we can love and care for ourselves deeply – and therefore care for others. It is where habits of the heart are likely to prevail.

The Need for Sanctuary: Every civilization has had some kind of sanctuary system. In medieval Europe, there were feast days when no one worked – and all fighting stopped. This was called “The Peace of God.” The church or cathedral was itself a sacred sanctuary. It was forbidden to kill someone who was in a cathedral. In ancient Hawaii, the *heiau* was a place of sanctuary. During a time of war between the tribes, if a man could get to a *heiau*, he was allowed to stay unharmed for three days. You can still see the *heiau* called “The City of Refuge” on the Big Island. There is a hunger for sanctuary: a hunger to talk about it, a hunger to know about it, and most of all a hunger to find it. It is almost as if, in our intense search for all the many kinds of well-being, we have nearly lost one of the most precious kinds of well-being of all. We have

lost our ability to find sanctuary—real, true, healing, transforming, and deeply comforting sanctuary—in our lives.

Sometimes the sanctuary is in a small corner of our house; an alter with a crucifix, or a puja table in India with flowers, incense, and a picture on it, or a prayer window looking out into a garden. Sometimes it is a time and a ritual, like evening prayers for the Jew or one of the five times of prayer for the Muslim. Sometimes it is a practice, like stopping in the park to feed pigeons on the way home from work at the end of the day or having a quiet cup of coffee in the staff room of a busy corporation. Not always, but often enough to keep us engaged, these moments take us to a place we call our true home. We are rested and renewed. We say, “Now I am more myself again.” Sanctuary enables us to stop, hide, get away, rest, and become “more myself again.”

In many ways, sanctuaries are more important today than they were fifty years ago. There is a constant need for sanctuary throughout the history of any society. In most societies and at most times, there are a sufficient number of forms and occasions for sanctuary to meet the needs of society. However, there may be periods of change in which the normal forms of sanctuary are not available, and new ones have not yet been instituted within a society.

During these periods, there will be a felt need for finding new forms, or recovering old forms, of sanctuary. A study of any society may in the future show that there are cycles involving the renewal of old forms of sanctuary and the invention of new forms. There seems to be a great need for sanctuary at times of rapid change, between eras, or in times of turbulence. We certainly seem to be operating in such a world at the present time.

What Sanctuary Does: The need for sanctuary seems to be established deep within our instinctual lives, in our DNA, deep within our bones, as it were. Every life form, including the planet Earth, lives in cycles (sometimes we call them circadian cycles). As the writer of Ecclesiastes noted, and the folk singer sang: “For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven; . . . a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; . . . a time for war, and a time for peace. [Ecc.3.1-11]” What then are the appropriate seasons for sanctuary and what functions are served by sanctuary when it is found?

First, sanctuary enables us to stop, hide, get away, rest. We all need to stop. We need to stop physically, mentally, emotionally, and perhaps spiritually. Animals seem to spend a lot of time resting. They know how to stop physically. Children do too. So do adults who live near the equator. We northern (or southern) hemisphere adults seem to be the only creatures who have trouble learning to stop and rest. . . at least until we are forced to by illness or age.

Our bodies give us natural times of resting, and these (with a stretch of the imagination) could be called mini-sanctuaries or even nano-sanctuaries. The heart rests between beats, the lungs between breaths. Our days are interwoven with moments of rest, and hopefully reflection. When the day is over, we go into a major physical sanctuary called sleep. We also need to stop being quite as conscious sometimes. We need mental rest. Some call it “veg’ing out,” or “zoning out,” or just “checking out.” But whatever it is, we are “out.”

Second, sanctuary enables us to heal, repair, re-group, and recover. While we are resting our bodies, minds, emotions, and spirits, we often also heal. Hospitals are great public sanctuaries for healing in the Western world. Originally in many parts of the world (including the USA) hospitals served as refuges for the poor and downtrodden. Nuns and nurses ministered to the nutritional and spiritual needs of the have-nots, as well as their physical needs. While the mission of most hospitals has changed in recent times, there still are separate rules for hospitals. There are boundaries. There are expected behaviors. There are ranks and protocols. We know when we are in a hospital.

People also come to a sanctuary when they have been defeated. Perhaps, there is a renewed interest in sanctuary because we are, in some sense, a defeated society. Sanctuary is clearly and historically a place for defeat. That is where you go to lick your wounds to either come out and fight again or adjust to your defeat. As we have noted, the heiau (city of refuge) in Hawaii was established as a place to stop and rest in time of war. The King's peace in Medieval Europe accomplished the same purpose. The rule against killing within a Cathedral or church (Murder in the Cathedral), or at other holy places reflects the same issue. When a politician is defeated, or a business leader is fired, they go to a sanctuary to pull their life together again. While their defeat or firing provides an opportunity for grieving and regret, it also can be a place for renewal and re-invention.

Third, sanctuary enables us to find our deep center and reorient to our own deeper compass again. At the heart of sanctuary for many people is the sense of a place, time or situation where the conditions of ordinary living are suspended for a time. This makes sanctuary different from all other parts of life in time, space, and situation. In these suspended moments, the demands of ordinary life are set aside as are the rules of ordinary life. The heavy weight of blame, guilt, danger, limitations, and sanctions is lifted. Several uplifting forces are added, including (certain kinds of) freedom, openness, possibility, empowerment.

In sanctuary there is the real possibility for renewal and healing at a deep level: nurturance, body, mind, interpersonal, spiritual, situational. There is a real possibility for introspection: seeing oneself as one is (introspection); seeing a situation as it is (extrospection); seeing others as they are, and so forth. There is a real possibility for creative new thinking, being open to new possibilities, being able to envision oneself in new possibilities. There is a possibility of some kind of coming home to one's own truth. There can be a kind of coming to oneself.

Finally, sanctuary enables us to grow by engaging and encountering something inner or other, and then return. There is a close relationship between sanctuary and learning. We have identified sanctuary as refuge, yet sanctuary can also mean challenge and learning. Learning occurs both within the context of what is to be learned, and apart from it. One has to have direct experience, but also reflection from a place of disengagement. The place of disengagement is a temporary sanctuary.

There is a key insight to be offered at this point. We are most likely to be aligned with and benefit from the opportunities offered in a sanctuary when challenge and support are balanced. This is

the balance that Nevitt Sanford suggested many years ago: we learn and thrive in settings that allow not only for the presence of difficult issues but also for resources that are adequate to resolve these issues (Sanford, 1980). Similarly, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has suggested that work and life in an organization or community need not be boring or profoundly anxiety provoking. It is in the threshold between boredom and anxiety that we find rich occasions for personal and collective learning.

It seems that deep, significant personal and collective learning, in particular, involves a balance between support and challenge. Challenge occurs in the process of engaging an issue. Support often means the provision of physical, emotional, social, or intellectual resources. Challenge is added in small manageable increments at a speed with which the learner is able to cope. The learning environment can be engaged in a full-blown sanctuary, or it can be created in a mini sanctuary in which the full demands of the new learning are not yet applied.

Most importantly, sanctuary is a place where failure can occur—and where learning from this failure can also take place. Sanctuary provides safety. It allows important learning to enter. Publicly identified sanctuaries—places and times labeled as sanctuaries—provide the circumstances in which certain kinds of deeper learning, healing, integrating, meaning-making, and self-communication can take place. One could argue that all learning takes places in some sort of sanctuary-based setting, and that the most important integrative and developmental learning we do as adults occurs both in settings that are embedded in our immediate world) and in sanctuary settings (away from this world).

The Nature of Sanctuaries: Sanctuaries are as old as the human race. Humans, and even animals before them, seem to have always had sanctuaries of one kind or another. At least within a single animal family or species, there are time and places, seasons and locations, when animals of the same species will not hunt or kill each other. Primitive humans have always had their holy spots, their stone enclosures, their sacred trees, within the bounds of which you were safe, no one could harm you, and to which you also went for healing.

Long before the great European cathedrals were built, there were sacred spaces. There were times and seasons when warfare stopped, and healing could occur. Similarly, there were days (“the feast of fools”) when traditional hierarchies were turned on their head and alternative roles could be explored (not unlike our emerging use of Halloween as a day of pretend and altered roles for adults in many contemporary organizations) (Cox, 1969).

A sanctuary is three things: a place, a time, and a state of mind. A sanctuary is a place of safety or healing or transformation, usually a holy place. Sanctuary is a time when warfare or strife stops. It is a time and place when enmity can cease and reconciliation can ensue, at least for the moment. And it is a time for reflection. Sanctuary is a state of mind, in an individual, a group, or a culture. It is a moment of rest, a moment when healing can occur, when we can stop long enough to get our bearings again, to find our center, and to set our course anew.

It is an important moment for an individual or for a society in this mid-21st Century world. Where do we go when we are challenged? Do we seek out false sanctuaries—such as are found in the

use of mind-altering drugs, obsessive shopping for un-needed goods, or binge watching and mindless channel surfing? Do we just suffer and remain frozen in a state of inaction and despair? Do we find sanctuary – and then come out renewed and with new insights?

Sport and exercise can act as sanctuary. Team sports activities provide collaboration, reflection, an opportunity to occur in a safe and supported environment and the ability to learn. Physical activity is nurturing, revitalizing and challenging. With failure (not being successful in a team sport), comes reflection and learning. It provides an opportunity to re-group and refresh with new insights.

It should also be noted that all Wisdom Traditions insist on sanctuary. A wisely lived and productive life is impossible without sanctuary. On the other hand, the wise heart knows the need for time and solitude and reflection, as a wise gardener knows the need for seasons and care if plants are to grow and flourish, to give nourishment and beauty. Every Wisdom Tradition calls for both time alone and time engaged in community or society or “the marketplace,” alternating the two throughout the days and through a life. Only time alone can provide a deep and intimate relationship with the Self and all that is. Only time in community can hone Self to a mature level of application and service. Only alone can you hear yourself. As Ken and Mary Gergen (2004) have noted, only in community can you hear others. The two can become one.

Joseph Campbell (1991) brought this vision to our world during the 1980s with his books (and TV show) on myth. The hero typically starts at home, then goes out to be alone in the wilderness (including into sanctuary), faces their real self, and then comes back richer. They then share their riches with the community. Without going out (or inward) there are no riches. Without coming back, there is no value. We leave shallow and disoriented, we come back deeper and oriented to our own true North Star. A mature life (and a mature society) needs both.

When and where do we need sanctuary and how do we create sanctuary? How do we sustain a setting in which de Tocqueville’s conditions are consistently present? How do we create sanctuaries when we wish to stop, hide, get away or rest (the first purpose)? What about the second function of sanctuary (to heal, repair, re-group and recover)? How and where do we retreat for a minute or two from a daunting challenge and come back to this challenge with renewed energy and new insights?

Solitary exercise can provide sanctuary. Physical movement whether performed in groups (such as Thai Chi) or walking, hiking or running through parks and forests provides the stimulation for the body and mind to reflect, rejuvenate and repair.

The third purpose of sanctuary – “to find our deep center and reorient to our deeper compass again” – is often controversial. It requires our delving into deeper, more personal, and often more spiritual issues. Certainly, the notion of “coming home to one’s own truth” is foundational to any moment of safety and deep learning. It is also fundamental to any form of agility that allows for new learning and new ventures. “Mini-sanctuary” – moments of flow – can be found (and created) that embody this fourth purpose. Learning is enhanced and further refined. Actions that

derive from this learning can be identified, described, and analyzed (what is often called “meta-learning”). There is dancing with new ideas and perspectives. Agility is alive and well.

Forums for Revisioning

A sanctuary can serve yet another important purpose in the creation of a compelling vision of the future. A temporary “sanctuary” can be established in which alternative visions of the future can be shared and in which new visions can emerge. I focus on two specific settings: (1) Future Search and (2) Open Space.

Future Search: Originally developed by Marvin Weisbord, a noted organization consultant, Future Search is a planning meeting procedure that is task focused. It builds on the basic principle that the meeting (collateral organization) should bring in a large number of people (as many as 100) from diverse backgrounds. In this way, the “whole system” is represented when a specific problem is being addressed.

Typically held over several days, Future Search begins with creating a picture of the past (often graphically portrayed on a long sheet of butcher paper). As is the case with most of the Future Search activities, small group discussions are held first. Report outs from these groups to the whole group follow (thus ensuring the initial contributions of all participants in the small groups). Bringing the focus to present time issues, a “mind map” is often produced (once again often making use of graphic portrayals on a large sheet of paper). Butcher paper often “reigns supreme” at a Future Search meeting.

The mind map includes not just current issues, but also anticipated trends as viewed from the diverse perspectives offered by Future Search participants. Given these varying views of the future, participants break again into small groups to imagine themselves in the near (and more distant) future. What would their life and work be like in a very positive future – and how would they get to this future? Consensus is reached in the small groups and their findings are reported to the entire group.

The primary task of the Future Search group is now to find “common ground” and to build an action plan that enables participants to take steps required (or at least identified) as a way to reach a shared positive future. Connections have been created during the Future Search process that make possible the ongoing collaboration among participants in working toward realization of the steps envisioned during the Future Search meeting. Follow-up activities and “check-ins” are identified, and the Future Search meeting is concluded.

Several distinctive features are deeply embedded in the Future Search process. These include new ways in which members of this organization interact with one another and in which planning is being engaged. Future Search also incorporates new ways in which leadership is being exhibited. Furthermore, Future Search encourages an appreciative perspective regarding contributions that can be made by each participant. Perhaps of greatest importance is the “whole system” perspective adopted by Future Search. This perspective contrasts with the isolated, silo-based perspective to be found in most regular organizational operations. This “whole system”

perspective of Future Search interweaves with a focus on the future (as the title of this method implies)—yielding an even more distinctive way of operating as a temporary collateral organization.

Open Space: A quite different model of collateral organization design is to be found in the more recent enactment of a comprehensive design called Open Space. Originally offered by Harrison Owens (yet another noted organizational consultant), Open Space provides a much less structured process than is the case with Future Search for addressing the diverse issues facing a specific organization or community. Like Future Search, Open Space is a method for organizing and running a meeting or multi-day conference where participants have been invited to focus on a specific, important task or purpose. Unlike Future Search, Open Space is participant-driven and less organizer-driven.

Pre-planning remains essential in preparing for an Open Space meeting. However, less pre-planning is needed than when Future Search is being engaged. The lack of substantial pre-planning is in keeping with an emerging perspective in the sciences regarding complex and chaotic systems that are “self-organizing.” As we now know is the case with many living systems, few hierarchical controls are present in the operation of Open Space. This type of collateral system is to some degree “self-organizing.” As noted, Open Space participants “drive” the agenda through the decisions they make throughout the meeting regarding the topics to be addressed and the extent to which any one topic sustains their attention.

Given the self-organizing nature of “open space” meetings, it is important that some “container” (Eisler’s chalice) be present throughout the meeting. This Open Space container is a set of assumptions that provide a foundation for this distinctive collateral organization. We like to think of these assumptions as representing (and enforcing) the “spirit” of Open Space. Following is a typical set of Open Space assumptions:

Whoever comes to this Open Space event is the right person (an appreciative perspective)

The topics being addressed are those that are most important, and those about which participants have a passion.

Whenever a particular topic emerges, it is the right time

When the dialogue regarding a topic is over, it's over

Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened

There is one Law: the “Law of Two Feet: Shoes are made for walking” (participants should feel free to move to another group and another topic)

With these assumptions in place, the Open Space facilitator or facilitation team becomes much less visible as the Open Space process begins. It is important to note that Open Space facilitators do play a role, but it is one that does not drive the agenda. Along with the guiding assumptions, the facilitators are providing the informal container for this collateral organization. They are “holding a space” for participants to self-organize. The facilitators are definitely not micro-

managing either activities or conversations; however, they are attending carefully to ongoing interactions among Open Space participants and will gently intervene if the informal leader of a small group gets heavy handed or if there is any kind of pressure for participants to join (or leave) a particular group.

Unlike what we find in Future Search, the agenda and anticipated outcomes of an Open Space meeting can't be fully specified prior to the formation of this collateral organization – precisely because of the self-organizing and evolving nature of any specific Open Space meeting. That is why we previously mentioned that any requirement is controversial if a collateral organization is to specify desired outcomes or leadership roles ahead of time. Open Space meetings operate as a dynamic, complex (and often chaotic) living entity. We can't anticipate what exactly is going to happen or which issues are to emerge and be addressed by Open Search participants. As noted in the basic assumptions we offered, there is an abiding belief that the right topics will emerge and will be handled by the right people.

One other important distinction must be drawn. As in the case of Future Search, Open Space meetings don't need experts. However, it is not about numbers or the diversity of Open Space participants. It is about the assumption that the right people are there. These people just need to be agile of thought as well as steadfast in their commitment to furthering the welfare of the organization or community they represent. While those initiating Open Space meetings might not be considering task-based outcomes, there are several process-based outcomes that are meaningful and ultimately critical to the success of an Open Search meeting. These outcomes have to do with safety, trust, courtesy – and appreciation. The assumptions identified at the start of the meeting and reinforced by Open Space facilitators throughout the meeting ensure or at least create conditions for realization of these process-oriented outcomes.

As in the case of most collateral organizations (such as Graeber and Wengrow have described), Open Space meetings are time limited. They might not last for an entire season (as in the case of some aboriginal tribes); however, they are usually convened for at least several hours or a few days. As in the case of Future Search, much of the work in Open Space is done in small groups – with occasional report outs to the entire group. Unlike in Future Search, the small group discussions are often quite fluid in an Open Space meeting. Participants easily leave one group and join another – or start a new group that will address a new topic or engage an existing topic in a new way. Butcher paper and flip charts once again “rule the day.” Updates of small group topics and initial points of inquiry related to these topics are posted on these charts along with the place and time where and when this group will be convened.

We find that there are two critical structural components of Open Space that should not be overlooked. First, someone in each small group should be designated as the recorder to take notes (often writing them on a flip chart). Second, at the end of each or at least most open space sessions, a summary document should be compiled from the notes taken by the recorder in each of the small groups. This summary is distributed as a paper or electronic document to all participants.

The distributed documents are used as the basis for prioritizing issues, identifying next steps, and continuing work beyond the meeting itself.

This critical component, in turn, points to one other structure that is introduced at the end of the Open Space meeting: all or most of the small groups then report to the whole group on follow-up activities. If one of the assumptions that I listed above is accurate – that passion is inherent in the topics being addressed-- then this passion (shared by Open Space participants) should extend beyond the Open Space meeting. The passion should motivate continuing attention to the issues being identified and addressed at the Open Space meeting. Without extensive formal monitoring, follow up activities should “self-organize,” and important actions should emerge from this collateral organization.

Along with other collateral organizations, the Open Space format can produce startling results and yield needed reform in the way intractable problems are being viewed and either managed or resolved. Administrators and the salesforce of a department store might discover a new way in which to reduce theft in their facility, while members of a forest service task force can produce a creative plan to control burn in their vulnerable ecology. A fresh approach to control of opioid use emerges from an Open Space meeting, while leaders of a community-based initiative to better serve their senior population generate a new strategy for coupling home repair with home health care visits by a social worker and nurse.

The fresh breeze of freely generated ideas, perspectives and practices just might circulate around an existing organization or community following a Future Search or Open Space meeting. This fresh breeze might be welcomed as it swirls around the heads and hearts of those living and working in the organization or community. It should also be noted, however, that heads and hearts might be troubled by this breeze. Members of the organization or community might remain intransigent and resentful of the “non-realistic” outcomes of this “chaotic” and wasteful collateral meeting. Thus, the new viewpoint might be both welcomed and rejected. Products of Future Search and Open Space are both friend and enemy, strong and weak, active and passive. VUCA-Plus ambiguity and contradiction abound.

We have indeed found that participants in many collateral organizations (like Future Search and Open Space) face ambivalent attitudes when they return to their home organization or community. Nevertheless, long after the Open Space (or Future Search) meeting concludes, its participants (and those affiliated with the participants) often find that the heart-based habits of this collateral organization will linger. They are prepared for this ambivalence and are likely to be persistent in their attempts to bring about reform in their organization or community. Unlike those who gather ideas from the passive attendance at a traditional conference or training program, the participants in collateral organizations are actively involved in the creation of the new ideas and are engaged in co-active learning with other participants. The heart-based habits to be found in these settings are invaluable. However, are they enough? Expert-related processes and Attitude must be engaged . . .

Processes that Provide a Pathway to True Freedom

There are many process-based interpersonal and group tools and strategies that help to create and maintain a community of heart—and provide a pathway to true freedom. These include the cluster of communication tools involved in Active Listening (Bolton, 1986; Bergquist and Mura, 2011) and strategies that encourage the generation and integration of diverse perspectives—such as those associated with Bohm dialogue (Bohm, 2004). We propose, however, that there are a specific set of process-based tools and strategies that are particularly effective in the facilitation of collective expertise and that incorporate these other tools and strategies. These emerge from and cluster around something called an *Appreciative Perspective* (Bergquist, 2003; Bergquist and Mura, 2011). What is the nature of such a perspective?

In essence, an appreciative perspective concerns a willingness to engage with other people from an assumption of mutual respect, in a mutual search for discovery of distinctive competencies and strengths—areas of expertise—with a view to helping them fulfill their aspirations and their potential. This simple statement might at first seem to be rather naive and idealistic, but at its core it holds the promise of helping to encourage and make use of collective expertise. Furthermore, this perspective comes in several different forms and has several different meanings that build on one another.

Understanding Another Person

Appreciation refers first to a clearer understanding of another person's perspective. Individually and collectively, we come to appreciate the point of view being offered by our colleagues and with this understanding, we can receive and build on their expertise. The tools of active listening are engaged to enable this understanding to take place. We offer a paraphrase of what another person has said so that we might not only benefit from what they have said, but also gained greater insight into their own perspectives by testing the accuracy of what we have heard (as processed through our own perspective).

This appreciative tool arises not from some detached observation, but rather from direct engagement. One gains knowledge from an appreciative perspective by “identifying with the observed.” (Harmon, 1990) Empathy is critical. One cares about the matter being studied and about those people with whom one is collaborating. Neutrality is inappropriate in such a setting, though compassion implies neither a loss of discipline nor a loss of boundaries between one's own perspectives and those of the other person. Appreciation, in other words, is about fuller understanding (but not merging with) another person's perspectives. It is about being open to, not necessarily uncritically embracing, another person's apparent expertise.

Valuing Another Person

Appreciation also refers to an increase in worth or value. A painting or stock portfolio appreciates in value. Van Gogh looked at a vase of sunflowers and in appreciating (painting) these flowers,

he increased their value for everyone. Van Gogh similarly appreciated and brought new value to his friends through his friendship: “Van Gogh did not merely articulate admiration for his friend: He created new values and new ways of seeing the world through the very act of valuing.” (Cooperrider, 1990)

Peter Vaill recounts a scene from the movie *Lawrence of Arabia* in which Lawrence tells a British Colonel that his job at the Arab camp was to “appreciate the situation.” (Vaill, 1990) By appreciating the situation, Lawrence assessed and helped add credibility to the Arab cause, much as a knowledgeable jeweler or art appraiser can increase the value of a diamond or painting through nothing more than thoughtful appraisal. Lawrence’s appreciation of the Arab situation, in turn, helped to produce a new level of courage and ambition on the part of the Arab communities with which Lawrence was associated.

When we seek out a fuller and more accurate assessment of another person’s perspective – though the use of active listening – then we are “valuing” what they have to contribute. When we fully appreciate our colleague’s unique perspective in the engagement and use of collective expertise, then we have raised their worth as contributors to this collective effort. Furthermore, we may have seen them, understood them, and valued them in ways that neither our colleague nor other participants in this collaborative effort might have seen them before – thus opening new vistas for their growth and further maturation of the collaborative venture. Paradoxically, at the point that someone is fully appreciated and reaffirmed, they will tend to live up to their newly acclaimed expertise, just as they will live down to their depreciated sense of expertise if constantly criticized and undervalued.

Recognizing Contributions made by Another Person

From yet another perspective, the process of appreciation concerns our personal and collective recognition of contributions that have been made by another person: “I appreciate the efforts you have made in doing research regarding this matter.” We are “catching people when they are doing it right” (rather than catching them “when they are doing it wrong”). This tool of appreciative requires not only that we note that what they have just said or done is helpful on behalf of the collective venture, but also an articulate statement regarding Why it has been helpful: “When you said XYZ, I noticed that we have become more ABC and have achieved QRS). Appreciation is not only about what, but also about why. We learn more about the ongoing process of a team when the impact of a specific statement or action is traced. The collaborative team learns from this appreciative tracing of cause and impact.

Appreciation can also be exhibited in the creation of conditions that allow people to “do it right” and exhibit all of their knowledge and skills. During the American depression, when many adults were out of work and were apprehensive about their own worth, President Franklyn Roosevelt declared that America must return to “an economic system under which each man shall be guaranteed the opportunity to show the best that there is in him.” (Richardson, 2024g, p. 229) For Roosevelt, economics and positive psychology were joined together in what he identified as the “new deal.” I suspect that this joining of appreciative work environments with a sense of self-

worth exemplifies the harmony of interests introduced by Anonymous 100 years before Franklyn served as president.

More immediately, appreciation is exhibited in a particularly constructive manner through the ongoing interaction between those engaged in the building of collective wisdom. It involves mutual respect and active engagement, accompanied by a natural flow of feedback, and an exchange of ideas. More specifically, appreciation is evident in not only the processes being engaged, but also the attitudes accompanying these appreciative tools regarding the nature and purpose of work done on behalf of building collective expertise.

These are the three most common uses of the term appreciation. We appreciate the expertise offered by other people through seeking to understand them, through valuing them, and through being attentive and thoughtful in acknowledging their ongoing contributions to the organization. The appreciative perspective can also be engaged in three additional ways that are distinctive – yet closely related to the first three. These three appreciative strategies offer a bridge between expertise-enhancing processes and expertise-enhancing attitudes.

Establishing a Positive Collective Image of the Future

We turn once more to images of the future. Appreciation can refer to the establishment of a positive image of the future among those engaged in the building of collective expertise. We grow to appreciate our collective effort by investing it with optimism. We engage both Personal and Collective Grace. We invest our graceful life with a sense of hope about our own future and the future of our community. We acknowledge the valuable role that we potentially play in our organization or society. Effective appreciative participation in a collaborative venture must be “not only concerned with what is but also with what might be.” (Frost and Egri, 1990) We come to appreciate our own role and that of other people with whom we are participating regarding the contributions we make jointly in helping to realize these images, purposes and values.

An appreciative perspective is always leaning into the future. There is consistent and frequent attention to what will happen (anticipation) and what should happen (aspirations) in the days and years ahead. Rather than focusing conversations on reconstructed narrative of the past, the conversations are directed toward construction of a new narrative concerning the future. While we appreciate that which has been successful in the past, we don’t dwell with nostalgia on the past, but instead continually trace out the implications of shared expertise, acquired wisdom and past successes regarding our vision of the future.

Recognizing Distinctive Sources of Expertise

Appreciation in a collaborative setting also refers to recognition of the distinctive expertise and potentials of people working within this setting. Even in a context of potential competition, appreciation transforms envy regarding the other person’s expertise into learning from this expertise. Personal achievement and individual contribution of expertise is transformed into a sense of overall purpose and the collective valuing of this expertise. The remarkable essayist Roger Rosenblatt (1997) revealed just such a process in candidly describing his sense of

competition with other writers. He suggests that the sense of admiration for the work of other writers can play a critical role in his own life:

Part of the satisfaction in becoming an admirer of the competition is that it allows you to wonder how someone else did something well, so that you might imitate it – steal it, to be blunt. But the best part is that it shows you that there are things you will never learn to do, skills and tricks that are out of your range, an entire imagination that is out of your range. The news may be disappointing on a personal level, but in terms of the cosmos, it is strangely gratifying. One sits among the works of one's contemporaries as in a planetarium, head all the way back, eyes gazing up at heavenly matter that is all the more beautiful for being unreachable. Am I growing up?

An appreciative culture is forged when an emphasis is placed on the realization of inherent potential and the uncovering of latent strengths rather than on the identification of weaknesses or deficits. People and organizations “do not need to be fixed. They need constant reaffirmation.” (Cooperrider, 1990)

Acknowledging the Value of Diversity

A final mode of appreciation is evident in a collaborative setting when efforts are made to form complementary relationships and recognize the mutual benefits that can be derived from the cooperation of differing constituencies and the valuing of varying sources of expertise. This appreciative strategy requires not only the recognition of diverse perspectives and differing backgrounds, but also the engagement in processes (such as Bohm-based dialogue) that brings about a search for common understanding, non-judgmental acceptance, and potential integration of diverse perspective and accompanying practices.

Yet another paradox is found in the engagement of this appreciative strategy. A culture of appreciative diversity actually provides collective integration (the glue that holds a system together) while the organization is growing and differentiating into many distinctive units of responsibility (division of labor) and geography. (Durkheim, 1933; Lawrence and Lorsch, 1969) The appreciative perspective is particularly important in the era of diversity, when there are significant differences in vision, values or culture among people participating in a collective venture. (Rosinski, 2010)

Attitudes that Provide a Pathway to True Freedom

Structural and process-based pathways to true freedom are embedded in a community of head and heart. These pathways lead to and are accelerated by an attitude of appreciation. What then is an attitude of appreciation? First, it is important to note that attitudes concern the way in which we see the world in which we live and work. Our attitudes guide the narrative we construct about this world and our reason for being in this world. This narrative can be embedded (and stuck) in the past and in the barriers that make an attractive future seem impossible to achieve. As I have already noted with regard to appreciative processes, the narrative can instead be constructed around a desirable future to which our collective energy and expertise can be directed.

Dynamic Constructivism

A framework called Dynamic Constructivism, resides at the heart of an appreciative narrative concerning the future. This framework exists as a contrast with an objectivist framework that was prevalent during the modern era – and is based on the assumption that reality and “facts” can be established and confirmed. The emergence of a dynamic constructivist perspective represents a revolutionary change in the way in which reality and “facts” are perceived.

Language, Narratives and Self: Story and performance are hallmarks of dynamic constructivism. We live in a world of constructed realities that are constantly shifting. We live in a world of language, semiotics and narratives. Language is no longer considered to be simply a handmaiden for reality, as the objectivists would suggest, nor does it construct a permanent or at least resistant reality as the traditional social constructivists would argue.

Furthermore, language is not a secondary vehicle we must employ when commenting on the reality that underlies and is the reference point for this language. The dynamic constructivists often take this analysis one step further by proposing that language is itself the primary reality in our daily life experiences. Language, originally and primarily relationship-based, assumes its own reality, and ceases to be an abstract sign that substitutes for the “real” things. Our cave is filled with language and conversations. This is reality – there is nothing outside the cave (or perhaps the cave doesn’t even exist).

While objectivism is based on the assumption that there is a constant reality to which one can refer (through the use of language and other symbol/sign systems), dynamic constructivism is based on the assumption that the mode and content of discourse and the relationship(s) that underlie this discourse are the closest thing we have to a reality. We are constantly reconstructing our reality because this reality is based on the specific relationship through which we are engaged via our discourse. We need not stay within Plato’s cave, because the relationship and the discourse are itself reality – it is not just a reflection of reality. The inside and outside of the cave are one in the same thing. The cave doesn’t exist.

Narratives of Our Time and Our Self: We are often distant from many of the most important events that impact on our lives. We live in a complex global community. We have many connections to a vaster world. Yet, we can no longer have direct experience of, nor can we have much influence over, this world. The cave has grown much larger than Plato might have imagined and may no longer even exist. The only access we have to this vast world is through language and narratives. As a result, we often share narratives about things and events rather than actually experiencing them.

Language itself becomes the shared experience. On the one hand, this perspective does not differ greatly from that offered by Plato. The narratives may be considered nothing more than second-hand conversations about the images of the cave’s walls. Yet, there is a difference, for the narratives and conversations are not just about experiences, they are themselves experiences. This

sense of a constructed reality that is reinforced by narrative and conversation is a starting point for dynamic constructivism.

The key point with regard to dynamic constructivism is that each specific conversation is itself a reality. Shared narratives and language are where we actually meet - self and others, self and society, self and shared cultural narrative. From this perspective, our stories about self will constitute our fundamental sense of self—they are the building blocks of our identity. Perhaps our stories about self are everything we mean by the term “self.” This would suggest that our stories about childhood, about major adult accomplishments, and about difficult lifelong disappointments may be the basic building blocks of self-image—whether or not they are accurate.

We are profoundly impacted by two often unacknowledged (or even unseen) forces in these narratives. First, we are influenced by the broad-based social constructions of reality which is conveyed through the stories of the society and organization in which we find ourselves. This is the contribution made by static constructivists. Second, we are influenced by a more narrowly based personal construction of reality that is conveyed through stories we tell about ourselves (and perhaps stories that we inherit from and about our family and immediate community).

The Hermeneutic Circle and Use of Metaphors: There is actually a third level of narrative which makes the dynamics of constructivism even more complex and challenging. We are co-creating narratives (and ultimately creating reality) with other people—those with whom we are interacting. All meanings or statements are referring to a system of narratives and semiotics, but this is in itself an open-ended system of signs referring to signs referring to signs. No concept can therefore have an ultimate, unequivocal meaning.

We can illustrate this complex, nested and recursive dynamic—often referred to as the *Hermeneutic Circle*—by turning to narratives and conversations that occur within a workplace. For example, once the manager of a specific department has spoken, the reality that was created when she spoke is no longer present. Even if she says the same words, they are spoken in a different context, hence have somewhat different meaning. Thus, even when our manager is “speaking” – in the form of vocalized or written words or in the form of other images (visual, tactile)—these words or images will have different meaning each time they are interpreted. Meaning will shift depending on who hears the statement, what the setting is in which the communication takes place, and which words or images have preceded and will follow these efforts at communication.

Shifting Reality and Dissonance: According to the dynamic constructivists, reality for the 21st century manager is a shifting phenomenon that is subject to change and uncertainty, meant to be expressed in nuanced, ever-changing ways, again and again, in response to new contexts. There is even movement inside 21st Century wonderlands. It is hard to remain fully ensconced in a static belief system even when residing in a sheltered wonderland.

Heros and truths don't remain in place forever. Serenity is always tenuous. The insanity of beliefs and practices eventually intrudes on the thoughts, feelings and actions of Wonderland's residents. The question becomes for these residents: do I leave Wonderland? Do I instead try to find a way to somehow make sense of the insanity? The challenge of finding cognitive consonance and escaping from cognitive dissonance is great for these men and women.

Nothing Stays the Same: Reality is just as dynamic and evolving as the beliefs we hold and the heroes from whom we seek guidance. More than ever, our organizations are based on and dependent on these dynamic interpersonal conversations and shifting, context-based narratives. Most people, resources and attention in present-day organizations are devoted not to the direct production of goods or direct provision of services, but to the use of verbal and written modes of communication about these goods and services. Given these conditions, storytelling and narrative are central to 21st century leadership. Stories are the lifeblood and source of system maintenance in both personal and organizational lives.

The construction of stories about organizational successes and failures by leaders is critical to the processes of personal and organizational transformation. Clearly, the conversations that are most effective in bringing about organizational integration frequently take the form of metaphors that are conveyed through stories. (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) Metaphors are used to portray something about an organization – in particular something about leadership, authority, and values. These metaphors are central to the organization, for they contribute to the conversations that are at the heart of the organization. They point to a shared set of signs and narratives, and as such create, recreate and strengthen the experience of shared values. The stories of an organization are important to fully appreciate for yet another reason: they are critical bridges between the present and past. Organizations exist at the present moment in time. The past life of an organization exists largely in the present conversations, i.e., the stories about the past.

The past life also exists in the conversations that are now taking place about past conversations (via archival records). The formal records of the organization are the conversations that take place between people who are of the present and the past. Similarly, the organization's future is shaped in current conversations about this future. Narratives actually do more than tell stories, they create a framework in which the identity of the organization is perceived and presented. Storytelling is a central ingredient in relationships. Relationships, in turn, become important in the reconstruction of reality – whether this reality be personal or organizational in nature.

Several questions arise from this dynamic constructivism. In what way(s) do personal and organizational narratives and images influence or alter one another? Is there a shift in the organization's narrative when a new top manager is hired, or the organization itself is restructured? From the perspective of anyone facing the challenge of Fact-finding in an organization, there are major concerns with regard to the nature of narrative and identity that is being conveyed by the organization and the narrative and identity of each employee –and in particular the person reflecting on the Facts and making decisions based on this reflection.

Social Construction and Heuristics: As we look at the long history of facts, we find that the objectivist perspective has dominated Western culture (and particularly Western science) for many centuries. However, the constructivist perspective has begun to hold sway – particularly in what is often referred to as a postmodern frame of reference in both the sciences and humanities (Bergquist, 1993). As I have already noted, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967), led the way in this emphasis on constructivism by identifying the “social constructions of reality.” They proposed that social systems are particularly effective (and important) in the creation and reinforcement of specific constructions in any society. Considerable reinforcement of this social constructivist framework has come from other social scientists and observers since Berger and Luckmann first offered their thesis.

Recently, expanded support has been found to exist regarding the constructivist perspective. This support exists in the field of economics among those who have championed the inter-disciplinary initiative called behavioral economics. Kahneman, Tversky and Thaler have received Nobel Prizes in recognition of their success in taking on the task of documenting how specific heuristics (what Berger and Luckmann might call social constructions) influence daily decision making as well as the formulation of public policy and commercial marketing. The behavioral economists offer a particularly important question regarding social construction: who is sitting at the table? Who influences social constructions and what is the agenda being held by and inserted into the conversations by these highly influential participants? It is in the establishment of criteria for judgement and, even more fundamentally, the topic(s) to be addressed that powerful social constructions are formed and reinforced.

Collaborative expertise and truth: Most importantly, we are enhancing the expertise being offered by our colleague and ourselves when we engage in dynamic constructivism. We construct a dynamic, evolving reality in which all resources are being deployed on behalf of a better future. A dynamic constructivism moves well beyond the stability of traditional, broad-based societal and cultural perspectives regarding “legitimate” or “illegitimate” sources of expertise. The emergence of a dynamic constructivist perspective represents a revolutionary change in the true sense of the term. Expertise resides in the collective rather than in just the individual “expert” who receives our attention only because they possess power, prestige or position.

As Ken and Mary Gergen (2004) proclaimed, “truth is only found within community.” More specifically, they would suggest that truth is found in trusting relationships: “constructivism favors a replacement of the individual as the source of meaning with the relationship.” Even more to the point, truth is found in dialogue – and disagreement. There is an insistence that we respect and learn from other people: “one is invited into a posture of curiosity and respect for others.” Of greatest importance is the respect we show for the distinctive expertise which people from all backgrounds bring to the dynamic construction of a desirable future. According to Ken and Mary Gergen (2004), a constructivist framework:

is . . . likely to favor forms of dialogue out of which new realities and values might emerge. The challenge is not to locate “the one best way.” But to create the kinds of relationships in which we can collaboratively build our future.

We are not confined to traditional sources of expertise in such a setting (where an appreciative attitude is prevalent), because the relationship and the discourse is itself reality and the primary source of expertise.

Direct Experience and Shared Narratives: We are often distant from many of the most important events that impact on our lives. We live in a complex, global community and have many connections to a vaster world. Most importantly, we may no longer have direct experience of (nor can we have much influence over) this world. As a result, we often share narratives about things and events rather than actually experiencing them. Language itself becomes the shared experience. This sense of a constructed reality that is reinforced by narrative and conversation is a starting point for dynamic constructivism. The key point with regard to dynamic constructivism is that each specific conversation is itself a reality.

Shared narratives and language are where we actually meet with other people and our society. More than ever, our work groups and organizations are based on and dependent on these dynamic interpersonal conversations and shifting, context-based narratives. Most people, resources and attention in present-day work groups and organizations are devoted not to the direct production of goods or direct provision of services, but instead to the use of verbal and written modes of communication about these goods and services.

Given these conditions, storytelling and narrative are central to 21st century life and form the foundation for collective expertise. Stories are the lifeblood and source of system maintenance in both personal and organizational lives. The construction of stories about person, group and organizational successes and failures is critical to the processes of change and transformation at any of these three levels. It is in these stories that expertise is most effectively shared in a compelling (and authentic) manner. Pathways are laid through these stories that enable us to begin our journey to true freedom. Fragments of this pathway and a compelling vision of the future are offered in the next chapter.

Conclusions

As transcendent beings, we have the capacity to reflect on our own experiences and to place these experiences in space and time. This is the human challenge, the human opportunity, and the human curse of transcendence. Our sense of a dynamic, constantly reconstructed universe, based in our interactions with other people, leads us inevitably to a sense of bewilderment. At a more immediate level, we are confronted with the complexity, unpredictability and turbulence of contemporary organizational life. How does one find the courage to stand in the face of this “awe-full-ness”? And what is the role to be played by so-called experts in helping us address these challenges (as well as facing their own personal challenges)?

Clearly, the movement from an objectivist to a constructivist ontology and from a static to a

dynamic perspective on Facts requires personal commitment and courage – particularly courage. Our sense of self and reality – our personal reality – is always in flux. How do we live with this personal uncertainty? I return to wisdom offered by Paul Tillich (2000). He has written about the existential (and theological) “courage to be” – the courage needed to acknowledge one’s being and one’s becoming in the world. If human beings are minds, and not just brains, if they live in dynamic interaction with other people and events in their life, then they require a “courage to be.” Tillich believes that this courage is not embedded in a secular world. Rather courage is inherently spiritual in nature or at least there are spiritual demands being made on us as we are confronted with the dynamic universe in which we live.

Chapter Sixteen

Toward the Future

Up to this point, I have introduced some of the elements that we might bring to a compelling image of the future. I have described the formulation of this future as an architectural enterprise. It involves careful construction of an edifice that can be envisioned but does not yet exist. I have dwelt on the nature of dynamic constructivism because it plays a central role in the creation of a shared attitude regarding the purpose for and desired destination of collective expertise. Why, in other words, are we willing to work together and find “reality” within the sharing of diverse perspectives. This is hard, demanding interpersonal work—why do we do it. This engagement in collaboration and the building of collective expertise requires the accompanying construction of a compelling and guiding vision of the future. Communities of Heart are sustained by just such a vision.

Put simply, collaborative engagements are guided by and motivated by an articulate vision of the future that is persuasive and motivating. Contributions are made and expertise is brought forth and accepted because people are “hungry” for a dream or image of a better world that is saturated with justice, equity and prosperity. I bring this book to a close by considering the key ingredients to be found in a successful collaborative engagement.

Visionary Leadership

Leaders of vision like Abraham Lincoln often were born in poverty and are self-taught—the mantle of expertise did not come “naturally” to them. Other visionary leaders such as Susan B. Anthony (and the other Seneca Falls advocates for women’s rights) and Martin Luther King (and the other civil rights leaders of the 1960s) grew up in a world that discriminated against the expertise that they have to offer (or at least against the expertise offered by people who are “not of their kind”).

Visionary stories often contain moments of personal doubt and spiritual despair. We see this in the inspiring stories of Joan-of-Arc and Mother Teresa. Visionary stories often contain elements not only of doubt and despair, but also of wisdom and courage. Visionary leaders convey stories of sacrifice, tribulation and triumph—having parted the Red Sea or dwelled in the desert so that they might enter into a land of milk and honey. Ironically, in many instances they have led their people to a land of milk and honey but have not been able to enter this land themselves (Moses, Lincoln, Gandhi, John and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King).

The key to wholehearted acceptance of and sustained support for a visionary leader resides in the identification of a compelling story from the past that bridges to the future, or that encompasses fiscal and social responsibility. It is a sacred story that successfully conveys secular values. While this story often involves something about the visionary leader’s own life and struggles, it must also resonate with and align with the stories and personal aspirations of those

hearing or reading this story. The visionary leader's own expertise must align with the hopes (not just the fears) of those whom this leader wishes to guide into a promising future. There is a phrase which usually reads: "think globally but act locally." This same sentiment, slightly revised, can apply to visionary stories: "make them personal and local, but be sure that they speak to a much larger constituency."

Visionary Settings

Given that visionary leadership is dependent on the right place and the right time, it is also important that the vision be articulated at the right time and in the right place. While Lincoln's Gettysburg Address still appeals to us today, it is profound in large part because it was given at a commemoration ceremony for those soldiers who died during the bloody battle at Gettysburg. Lincoln is literally "consecrating" the ground where these young men were buried. Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech was similarly given on a particularly auspicious occasion (a major civil rights march on Washington D.C.) and at a very patriotic location (facing the Lincoln Memorial). The visionary leader must pick a special time and place when offering a visionary statement.

Where and when does the visionary leader find this special place and time? What is the nature of a setting in which a vision of the future can be created that builds off collective expertise, that is collectively embraced and that provides guidance for the articulation and use of shared expertise? These are critical questions. The answer resides partially in the descriptions we have already provided regarding structures that enhance collective expertise. We wish to expand on these descriptions by proposing that there are five primary criteria with regard to the nature of an effective setting for establishing a collective vision of the future. These five criteria tell us something about when and where we should not only offer a vision, but also invite in collective expertise. We will first briefly identify these criteria and then suggest how these criteria help us identify an appropriate time and place for collective expertise and vision.

First, any collective expertise and any statement of vision must be created and sustained by an entire social system—not just its leader(s). Collaboration is critical. As we noted with regard to Open Space technologies, the right people are always there to build the future. As Ken and Mary Gergen propose, it is only a matter of facilitating a shared exploration of the "truth." Expertise comes in collaboration, rather than in the knowledge or skill of any one person (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). The isolated leader of vision is speaking only to the wind if they have no appetite for constructive engagement with other people. A vision that is not subject to ongoing dialogue and revision is of no value to anyone.

Second, the vision statement must be offered within a context of appreciation for past accomplishments and present-day contributions. All too often the visionary leader (especially if new to this role) will ignore or offer a critical perspective on past achievements rather than honoring these achievements and seeking to learn from them. We must always remember that someday in the near future, we will be the relics of the past and may be overlooked by the next

generation. We will be the visionary leader who holds a vision that is now out-of-date and whose accomplishments on behalf of this vision are no longer fully appreciated.

Third, the statement of vision must be coupled with a statement of mission. Whenever a vision of the future is generated, it must be coupled with a clear commitment to something that is not about the future, or even exclusively about the present. It must be coupled with an enduring sense of mission. Expertise that operates independent of mission is rarely either heard or engaged over an extended period of time. When not aligning their expertise with mission, the “expert” is likely to hear something like the following: “nice to know but not really relevant to what we are working on today.”

The expert should pause before offering their insights and advice in order to ask themselves the following: “What do we do as a family, clan, organization, or social system that remains fundamental and unchanged, and what do I have to offer that aligns with that which is fundamental and unchanging?” At an even deeper level, we might ask as an expert: “What do I have to offer that is key to our survival?” From an appreciative perspective, we must always look toward the future through the lens of foundations and continuity. What is our “business” and how does our vision for the future relate to this business? This might seem to contradict what we suggested earlier regarding a focus on the future; however, this is not the case. The focus should remain on the future, but the lens through which we view the future should be aligned with our mission and fundamental reasons for being present in our world. We attend from our mission to our future.

The fourth criterion concerns the relationship between vision and values. How does our vision of the future relate to the fundamental values of this family, clan, organization or social system? What will and what won’t we do in order to realize our dream for the future? Martin Luther King not only offered us a dream – he also insisted that this dream be realized through a set of values based on nonviolence. Similarly, Lincoln’s statement of gratitude for the sacrifice made at Gettysburg is based on his firm commitment to preservation of the union. The “ends” (vision) never justify the use of inappropriate or unethical “means” (values). Expertise might be directed toward the means, but it should always be offered on behalf of some valued outcome that is shared by all involved in the collaborative venture--otherwise the expert is vulnerable to the lure of personal power (as a replacement for collaborative support).

Fifth, the vision statement and expertise should relate to some formally identified sense of purpose: what difference does our family, clan, organization or social system contribute in the life of people living in this community, country or world? What social purpose are we serving and how does this purpose relate to our vision of the future? Our vision can be self-serving or even profoundly destructive with regard to social purpose (as in the case of Hitler’s vision). It is important that vision be aligned with a fundamental social purpose that provides value to people in general, not just our in-group. Expertise that is offered in a manner that is unrelated to social purpose is (and should be) ignored.

Thus, while a vision statement will change over time and expertise will sometimes be heard and at other times be ignored, the mission, values and social purposes tend not to change, or they change very slowly. While the vision is the wind in the sails that propels a vessel, the mission, values and social purposes provide the anchor, keel and rudder that keep the ship afloat and properly aligned. Furthermore, even though thoughtful (expert) advice and a compelling vision statement may come out of the mouth of a visionary leader, it ultimately requires collaboration and appreciation if the expert advice and vision are to be truly owned by those who must make use of the advice and enact this vision.

Several conclusions regarding appropriate time and place can be extracted from these five criteria. First, the expertise and vision statement should be offered alongside clearly articulated statements regarding mission, values and purposes. The vision itself should build on many conversations, the sharing of stories (not just the visionary leader's stories) and the identification of moments of "greatness" in the past history and present realities of the organization. Expertise is valued, and visions come alive and help guide collective action when they are generated and articulated under these conditions (place and time).

Settings and Challenges

If brilliant expertise is evident and a compelling vision is generated, then what do we do about this expertise and vision? We must do more than applaud the compelling advice-giver or visionary speech-giver. We must do more than walk away, inspired to do good –for at least a day or week. So-called "motivational" speakers and renowned "experts" provide a welcome respite from the daily grind, but they rarely have long term impact. The neurosciences offer an important clue regarding what has occurred after listening to the expert or motivator.

Recent research regarding the hormonal system in the human body points to the important role played not just by adrenaline, but also by oxytocin, a hormone that brings us closer together rather than leads us to fight or flee. Oxytocin is a "bonding" agency. It is critical to the production of love and hope in human beings. It is the hormone that surges in women (and even in men) when a child is about to be born. It is the primary physiological ingredient which turns (to use Martin Buber's phrase) an "I-It" relationship into an "I-Thou" relationship (Buber, 2000).

I propose that oxytocin is also critical to the sustained enactment of expert advice or engagement with a compelling vision. While adrenaline may surge after receiving compelling advice or listening to a stirring (and visionary) speech, it is the bonding power of oxytocin that motivates people to build on expertise and a vision through collaboration and community. The neurosciences are teaching us that experts and leaders of vision must not just excite people, they must also "bond" people to their expert advice or new vision. Triangulation is required for expertise to be effectively used or a vision to be sustained. By this we mean that it is enough for two people to work together – a third element must be present if the working relationship is to be sustained. This third element is a shared vision (linked to a shared mission, set of values and compelling social purpose).

The “I-Thou” conception offered by Martin Buber (1958) provides us with guidance in this matter. As a Jewish theologian, Buber proposes that the “I-Thou” exists through God’s grace. Similarly, the Greek word “agape” refers not just to mankind’s relationship to some deity. It also relates to the ways in which we treat and care for other people on behalf of our religious beliefs. During the 21st Century, we need not focus on the relationship between humankind and a deity – we can focus instead on ways in which collaborative relationships are enhanced and sustained (“I-Thou”) when these relationships are based on a shared vision. We don’t need adrenaline. Rather, we need oxytocin which is produced to bind people together and bind people to a vision (as well as mission, values and purposes). This is the key to enactment of collective expertise as well as sustaining a vision. Expertise and vision must induce a sense of community and shared commitment; hence neither the expertise nor the vision can just be the product of one person’s advice or sense of the future.

If people are open to the sharing of expertise and are bound together, at least in part, through commitment to a shared, compelling vision of the future, then it becomes obvious that the two key roles to be played by the visionary leader are keeping the vision alive and preparing a new vision. This usually means not only that the leader periodically reminds his or her colleagues of the vision, but also that the leader facilitates a periodic review of and updating of the vision. The leader of vision is in trouble if the vision either is ignored or if the vision is reached. We continue to look for expert insights and advice from other people because there must always be a sense of something undone, of something yet to be done, of something worth doing.

Temporary Systems

We must find appropriate settings for testing out, reflecting on and revising our image of the future. I propose that in many instances, we can create safe places in which to test, reflect on and revise visions of the future in organizational and community settings. We can establish temporary systems. Formal sanctuaries clearly are temporary systems; however, temporary systems are also to be found in many other forms. Many types of temporary systems are to be found throughout our society (Miles, 1964). These systems can provide short-term, ad hoc settings in which new methods or products are tested out as a “wind tunnel” for new ideas. Other temporary systems provide regularly convened alternative structures, in which all or many members of an organization can communicate, manage conflicts, and solve problems in ways that are not usually employed in daily work life. We will turn to these “collateral organizations” shortly. Some temporary systems enable participants to try out a new skill without fear of failure (a “dress rehearsal”). Other temporary systems enable participants to get a taste of the end point to which they are striving.

Finding the Chalice

A set of key questions are appropriately posed at this point. How do we create these systems in the organizations in which we work and communities where we live? How do we replicate systems that are comparable to the sanctuaries we have just described? How do we find the delicate balance between challenge and support. These questions can also be posed in more

metaphoric terms. How do we engage what Rianne Eisler identifies as both the blade (challenge) and chalice (support) when creating a temporary setting? What would a chalice (and a blade) look like in a sanctuary? As Eisler has suggested, we mold a chalice to contain the anxiety and direct the energy (support), while also wielding the sword of change and transformation (challenge). The sword helps to mobilize creativity and energy in the first place, while the chalice makes it safe for this mobilization to occur. The chalice and blade allow us to learn and flourish – collective expertise is safely and courageously engaged in this setting.

It is important to note that Eisler’s chalice is not just a metaphoric image. She offers ample evidence that the chalice (as well as the sword) is to be found in many nonhierarchical communities that existed in ancient European communities. As I mentioned earlier in this book, Graeber and Wengrow (2021) have more recently shown how nonhierarchical systems have also operated over many centuries in societies located throughout the world (including Aboriginal American societies). Furthermore, as I noted earlier in this book, many of the societies studied by Graeber and Wengrow established nonhierarchical systems on a temporary basis – often related to seasons of the year or specific community functions. I propose that Eisler’s chalice can be found in certain contemporary systems – and these systems are often temporary (in alignment with the societies identified by Graeber and Wengrow). The term Collateral Organization is used to label these very special (and often under-appreciated) social structures. They are “collateral” because they exist alongside of rather than replacing traditional (often hierarchical) structures.

Collateral Organizations

Collateral organizations are used to achieve two primary goals. First, they provide an opportunity for members of an organization to think “outside the box” and lean/learn into the future. Second, collateral organizations help those involved to identify and either resolve or manage challenging issues that have not been addressed in a satisfactory manner via the “regular” way in which the organization operates. A new organization doesn’t have to be created, nor do new people have to be brought into the organization. Only heart-based habits are required when establishing a collateral organization.

The leaders of contemporary organizations often create task forces, project teams, ad hoc committees, quality circles and pilot projects as a way of getting around seemingly intractable problems. They might even transform their organization by imposing a matrix design so that multiple perspectives can be brought to a set of recurring problems. These initiatives are often quite valuable in helping to open the doors and windows of the organization so that some freedom can blow in. However, they don’t meet all of the needs that can be served by a collateral design. They simply do not provide enough freedom nor encourage the kind of creative, multi-perspective work that is being engaged in a temporary setting (such as a collateral organization) that is set up with different norms, ways of interpersonal engagement, and even assignment of leadership and facilitation functions.

The collateral organization is unique in that it usually is not populated just with experts who purportedly are best able to address a specific issue; rather, the collateral organization typically

involves a whole host of people (often the entire organization). It seems that the intractable issue often is intractable precisely because it is not clear who the experts really are with regard to this specific issue. Unlike most daily challenges that have clearly defined parameters and solutions that are readily accessible to the “right” people with expertise in a specific area, major issues are often multi-tiered and operate in what Miller and Page (2007) call a rugged and dancing landscape. All hands must be on deck when an organization or community faces such a challenge. Who knows where the answer can be found?

Establishing a Collateral Organization

I have described several collateral organizational designs previously in this book. These include Future Search and Open Space. At this point, I want to offer a more generic description of the Collateral Organization—for this structure can be designed in many different ways and used for many different purposes.

The following steps are typically taken in forming a collateral organization. Leaders of an organization or community must first acknowledge that the usual way of doing things is not necessarily of greatest value when applied to certain types of institutional challenges. It is important to emphasize that this doesn’t mean that the organization or community will abandon its regular way of operating (to be replaced by the new collateral organization): “we will still hold on to our tried-and-true, proven way of being as an organization. But we will be adding something.” We can hold on to the old while embracing the new. This is the magic of collateral designs.

Second, a set of values and a compelling vision must be articulated concerning what the collateral organization must do if it is to be successful. As we have already mentioned, a collateral organization should not be focused on a specific problem. Rather it should provide a new approach to the identification and management or resolution of a cluster of interrelated problems that have eluded successful management or resolution via the standard mode of operation in this organization. Collateral organizations are intended to address what Miller and Page (2007) call complex issues. While complicated issues involve many parts, complex issues involve many parts that are intricately interwoven. Intractability usually concerns complexity rather than complication and is often best addressed through the use of a collateral system that operates in a new way that introduces unique perspectives and practices.

The third and fourth steps will vary quite a bit depending on the nature and purpose of the collateral organization. The third step concerns specification of measurable objectives, along with specification of assigned tasks. This step might be inappropriate if the collateral organization is intended as an “open space” for consideration of multiple problems as they emerge. An open space is particularly appropriate if this collateral organization is to be a safe place where a whole host of lingering problems can be identified and discussed. The fourth step concerns the people who will be invited to participate in this collateral organization. At one extreme we find the collateral organization that is set up specifically for members of the C-Suite or perhaps from those from the C-Suite together with members of the governing board. At the other end is the collateral

organization that is open to all members of the organization or community (and perhaps even stakeholders both inside and outside the organization or community).

The final (and perhaps most important) step is establishing the ground rules (norms) for operation of the Collateral organization. How are people in this organization expected to treat one another? What is the nature of leadership and facilitation for this organization? It is also critical to establish the boundaries between this collateral system and the standard, daily operating system of the organization. There are also important boundaries to be established regarding what can be shared outside the collateral organization (norms addressing confidentiality) and how insights and recommendations coming out of the collateral organization will be shared (if at all) with specific stakeholders (norms addressing the relative transparency of the collateral organization).

Collateral organizations can last for quite differing lengths of time and be held in diverse settings. They might be one to two hour “huddles” that are held at the worksite. They begin or end each workday or bring a week of work to an end on Friday afternoon. The huddle can provide an opportunity for a candid review of services provided to patients in a dental office or plans for the next week of menus in a restaurant. Facilitation of the huddle can rotate among all employees (serving as an informal leadership development initiative).

The collateral organization is more likely to last a day or two and be held away from the worksite (often in a retreat setting). On occasion, the collateral organization lasts for a week or longer. However, this rarely is done and is not recommended—for it is hard to sustain a distinctive way of operating for a lengthy period of time. The long-lasting collateral organization begins to either resemble the standard way of operating or take on its own rigidity of structure, process or culture.

Facilitating a Collateral Organization

Standard team management tools can be deployed in facilitating the operations of a collateral organization. These tools include those that encourage “out-of-the-box” thinking (so-called “divergent” methods)—such as brainstorming. They also include “convergent” tools that move a team toward consensus—such as the Delphi technique that provides progressive focusing of team members (through successively collated judgements by team members regarding a specific issue). Other traditional facilitation tools include the setting of ground rules, delegating roles, providing breaks, and taking notes (usually on a flipchart or through use of power point). Most importantly, team facilitation should include periodic review of ongoing team processes and meta-planning (finding ways to collect ideas for upcoming meetings that enable thoughtful consideration of each member’s ideas).

Even more powerfully structured modes of facilitation might be engaged to ensure that the collateral organization can operate in a truly unique manner. The talking stick (which was an aboriginal tool of democracy) might be used to ensure that everyone in the organization has an opportunity to be heard. Each person who has just spoken is “free” to hand the talking stick to anyone whom they invite to share their own perspective and contribute their own ideas. Variants on the talking stick include simply going “around the circle” with each team member providing

their idea regarding a specific issue. This circle technique can be made more interesting if each member has to contribute a new idea that has not been previously mentioned. Several rounds will often produce very interesting results. This “divergent” technique is often preferable to brainstorming in that it ensures that creative thinking is not dominated by one or two team members.

An even more demanding tool can be engaged. This is a divergent process like brainstorming and the group circle process we have just described. Originally engaged by George Prince and William Gordon (1961), this process (called spectrum analysis) is particularly well aligned with the purpose of collateral design. Through their organization called *Synectics*, Prince and Gordon offered a spectrum perspective that might today be called “appreciative.” It is assumed in a spectrum analysis that there is at least the seed of a good idea embedded in everything that is suggested. All ideas can be placed somewhere on a line (spectrum) from great to poor – it is not either/or. This being the case, every person who speaks up must first indicate three reasons why the idea offered by the previous speaker can be viewed as a positive contribution. Frequently, when this restriction is imposed, the collateral participants end up building on each other’s ideas rather than offering opposing suggestions. If a diverse population of participants is invited to this collateral setting, the spectrum analysis is likely to yield particularly interesting, innovative – and even “break-through” outcomes.

We can offer yet another example of how a collateral organization might look quite different from a traditionally operating organization. In this case, the facilitation addresses the differing perspectives held by subgroups in the collateral organization (Blake, Shepard and Mouton, 1964). Originally used as a conflict-management tool, an intergroup perception process requires that a specific subgroup (we will call it “A”) produce a list of its own distinctive characteristics, a list of what it believes are the distinctive characteristics of the other subgroup(s) is (are) (Group B, C etc.) and a list of what it predicts the other subgroup(s) are likely to include on their list of Group A’s characteristics. The same assignment is given to each of the other subgroups. These lists are shared and discussed. In many ways, this process builds on the theory of mind we identified earlier in this chapter. A much richer (and more accurate and constructive) theory of mind can be built collectively through the use of this process – especially if it is engaged early in the life of a collateral organization. This tool is of particular value when the collateral organization is composed of participants from different “camps” and polarizations.

Viable Images of the Future

I have proposed that certain forms of leadership and specific collateral structures can be of great value in bringing about the construction of a viable image of the future. I now return to Fred Polak (1973) and the wisdom he offers regarding the construction of a compelling image of the future.

I begin with Polak’s assessment regarding the decline of social systems that have lost their image of the future. Polak points to a critical factor in the ongoing existence of any social system (or any living system for that matter). It must have something toward which it is moving or toward which

it is growing. Organisms are inherently “auto-telic” – meaning that they are self-purposed. They don’t need anything outside themselves to engage their world actively and in an inquisitive manner. This is the fundamental nature of play and curiosity that is to be found among all mammals.

Without a sense of direction and future possibilities we dry up and find no reason to face the continuing challenge of survival. We find little reason for producing and preparing a new generation. In the series of Australian movies regarding Mad Max, a post-nuclear holocaust world is portrayed that is coming to an end. When no viable future is in sight, then (as we see in these movies) there is no attending to children. They must fend for themselves, for we know they have no personal futures. Ironically, there is a powerful story about post-nuclear holocaust in a novel by Cormac McCarthy (2006), called *The Road*, in which the father continues to protect and sacrifice for his son, even though the world is coming to an end. This extraordinary protagonist somehow finds meaning and purpose – and vision—regarding his son in the midst of despair and death. Perhaps this is the type of leadership that we need in the challenging world of mid-21st Century polarization, terrorism, nihilism and despair.

Viable Vision

The leader and collaborative team that is honored and respected for their capacity to convey a compelling vision of the future needs a viable vision. One of the great ironies to be faced emerges when the vision has been realized, abandoned or ignored. If there is no longer the need for a vision, then we certainly don’t need a visionary leader – and don’t need to continue meeting. The visionary leader and collaborative team confront Irony: don’t be too successful. Without an unfulfilled vision there is no need for hope or commitment to the cause. We confiscate our future and walk away with nothing new about which to dream.

We can point once again to Winston Churchill as a notable example of this decline in collective support for visionary leadership. During World War II, Churchill not only exhibited courage – he also articulated a compelling vision regarding the future of England (and all of Europe), that helped to increase the resolve of English citizens to fight against the Nazi regime and Hitler’s equally as compelling (though horrifying) vision for a new Europe. When the Germans were defeated, England and Churchill not only lost an enemy – they also lost their compelling vision for the future.

While England (and all of Western Europe) were certainly better off after World War II than they were during the war, there was not a new Europe. The United Nations didn’t solve all international problems. This was not the war-to-end-all-wars (as was proclaimed at the conclusion of World War I). Many writers have documented the existential despair that followed World War II, when people had to return to a life that had not improved, despite the visionary statements of World War II leaders like Churchill, Roosevelt, De Gaulle – even Stalin.

What about the role of vision on more limited terms – in a team or organization? I propose that the same ironic challenge exists. The vision must remain viable. Community groups and organizations are often in crisis when they achieve some success and have realized a dream. What

do we do now that we have completed this five-year plan? We have obtained this grant and have initiated our new programs, but nothing has really changed, and we are still hustling for more funds. Why do we need either the old experts or a new set of experts given our present circumstances? Is there really anything worth fighting for that can benefit from expertise?

New Goals

I have already noted that it is critical that a new set of goals (a new baseline) be established if the environment or constituencies being served are changing. This is a central feature of the Polystatic process. It is also important to establish new goals before the old ones are realized – as a way to avoid “the confiscation of the future.” It is equally as important that achievement of the old goals be honored and celebrated. An organization that simply moves from one five-year plan to a second five-year plan is just as vulnerable to exhaustion and disillusionment as an organization that never realizes its dreams (because they have been set too high). We must appreciate the achievement of current goals and must linger for a moment to honor the old dream and vision before moving forward to a new sense of the future.

The old experts and visionary leaders face irony at this point. The “experts” no longer have much to say that is relevant or “up to date.” Anything older than two years is now passe in our fast moving, technology-driven world. Yesterday’s knowledge is today’s remnant of the past. Ironically, it is precisely the success of an expert in moving a system forward that makes their “reality” no longer relevant. Similarly, the success of a visionary leader often leads to the need for a new vision (and new leader). The half-life of a vision is now shrinking, and visionary leaders are readily thrown on the trash-heap.

Often times, the dispensable expert and visionary leader must embrace the Irony and step aside for the new expert and vision – given that they have finished the task and await a period of rest and reflection back on what has been achieved. At other times, old experts and visionary leaders can move beyond Irony by becoming the updated expert and new visionary leader. They find renewed energy and commitment while collaborating with others in generating expertise and formulating a new vision. Sometimes this may be necessary if there is no obvious visionary successor to pass the baton to – it is critical that the successor is fully capable.

The expert and visionary leader, along with those colleagues with whom they collaborate, must decide when “enough-is-enough” and when the mantle of expertise and leadership must be passed on to the next generation. The expert must become an expert regarding when to pass the mantle. The visionary leader must find and articulate a personal vision regarding what they will next do in their life. This is perhaps the most important decision that an expert, leader or collaborative team can make. When do we move on and how do we help the next generation succeed?

Discernment and Morality in Our Time

Visionary leadership and safe and supportive settings are needed to guide the ship through the world of VUCA-Plus. This expertise is to be found inside each of us and in the groups of which

we are members. Through slow-thinking and an appreciative perspective we can find both consistency and agility in our beliefs. There are good and bad ideas, as well as valid and invalid versions of reality. We have only to find the courage within relativism to discover what is good and valid – and to make important decisions regarding our life and work. The crisis of expertise and belief can be averted.

Communities of head and heart, buttressed by appreciative processes and attitudes, provide members of a team with a framework for reflection on their own areas of expertise. These processes and attitudes enable participants to receive feedback from other people regarding the areas of expertise that they most want to leverage for their own growth and for the collaborative enactment of a shared vision. In these settings, and with appreciative processes and attitudes in place, there is the remarkable (and rare) opportunity for hand-in-hand achievement of individual and collective goals – provided that these goals are worthy of our care and attention.

Discernment

How do we discern if they are worthy? What, even more fundamentally, does it mean to be moral in the decisions we make and paths we take on behalf of a greater good and guided by a compelling vision of the future? We turn to a spiritual source in order to gain some insights regarding this matter of morality—as we have done at several points in this book. This source is one of our guides, Reinhold Niebuhr (1932). He wrote cogently about the challenge of taking moral action within a world that is all-too-often immoral. To begin with, Niebuhr would probably review the content of this book and shake his head in disgust – and agreement. He would see the roots of present-day misinformation, conspiracy, polarization and violence deeply embedded in human history:

Though human society has roots which lie deeper in history than the beginning of human life, men have made comparatively but little progress in solving the problem of their aggregate existence. Each century originates a new complexity and each new generation faces a new vexation in it. For all the centuries of experience, men have not yet learned how to live together without compounding their vices and covering each other "with mud and with blood."

And this was written when the Holocaust and World War II were yet to consume the world!

Individual Morality/Collective Immorality

Niebuhr (1932) proceeds by identifying the “culprit” as (in part) the imaginative power of humankind. Apparently, we are not only capable of imagining attacking lions and a compelling future, but also imagining a set of personal wants that are not yet (and probably never can be) fulfilled.

The society in which each man lives is at once the basis for, and the nemesis of, that fulness of life which each man seeks. However much human ingenuity may increase the treasures which nature provides for the satisfaction of human needs, they can never be sufficient to satisfy all human wants; for man, unlike other creatures, is gifted and cursed with an imagination which extends his appetites beyond the requirements of subsistence. Human society will never escape the problem of the equitable distribution of the physical and cultural goods which provide for the preservation and fulfillment of human life.

It is in from this profoundly pessimistic frame of reference that Reinhold Niebuhr would read what we have written in this book and suggest that there is very little that can be done collectively to engage moral judgments in addressing mid-21st Century challenges. Communities of heart exist for only a few moments in time. Sanctuaries that ensure reflection exist only in isolation from the real world. Open Space and Future Search gatherings are fine, but they yield very few lasting improvements in our communities. While Niebuhr would undoubtedly encourage the facilitation of processes we have described in this chapter, he would probably concentrate on the way(s) in which we acknowledge and deploy our personal expertise – coupled with personally-held values and a guiding sense of morality.

We find a more optimistic Niebuhr in his assessment of an individual human being's capacity to engage rational capacities – what Daniel Kahneman (2011) would identify as “slow thinking”: “Their rational faculty prompts [human beings] to a sense of justice which educational discipline may refine and purge of egoistic elements until they are able to view a social situation, in which their own interests are involved, with a fair measure of objectivity.” Niebuhr suggests that:

Individual men may be moral in the sense that they are able to consider interests other than their own in determining problems of conduct, and are capable, on occasion, of preferring the advantages of others to their own. They are endowed by nature with a measure of sympathy and consideration for their kind, the breadth of which may be extended by an astute social pedagogy.

It is at this point that Niebuhr's optimism regarding the capacity for rational, sympathetic judgment by individual actors runs up against the improbability that this same level of rationality and sympathy will be found in the collective. As psychoanalysts would propose, there is a “regression” in human thought and feelings when people gather together. Niebuhr puts it this way:

. . . All these achievements are more difficult, if not impossible, for human societies and social groups. In every human group there is less reason to guide and to check impulse, less capacity for self-transcendence, less ability to comprehend the needs of others and therefore more unrestrained egoism than the individuals, who compose the group, reveal in their personal relationships.

As a social scientist, as well as theologian, Niebuhr offers his own diagnosis:

The inferiority of the morality of groups to that of individuals is due in part to the difficulty of establishing a rational social force which is powerful enough to cope with the natural impulses by which society achieves its cohesion; but in part it is merely the revelation of a collective egotism, compounded of the egotistic impulses of individuals, which achieve a more vivid expression and a more cumulative effect when they are united in a common impulse than when they express themselves separately and discreetly.

Is it possible to create a culture in which we respect and trust one another when we are so polarized and distrustful?

Conclusions

Living and working in a mid-21st Century society that is saturated with VUCA-Plus, I find Niebuhr's dilemma of moral mankind and immoral society to be particularly poignant. We might declare this to be the central theme of this book: thoughtful and compassionate morality (with its attendant courage) pitted against thoughtless, indifferent immorality (found in a wonderland of Serenity). A sustained commitment to equity and social good must exist--in the midst of VUCA-Plus conditions of moral contradiction and ambiguity.

I would suggest that three questions might be posed at this point. The answers to these questions might provide some guidance.

- (1) Where do we collectively find clear directions into the future when we live in the midst of collapsing coherence?
- (2) How do we find a truth that can guide us when we are unwilling to trust any expert but one of our own choosing?
- (3) How do we work toward the greater good when we are reticent to leave our silo of belief?

Reinhold Niebuhr suggests that these choices and actions are up to us individually. We can be moral despite living in a world that often leans toward immorality (or at least indifference regarding the condition of humanity and the global environment). In this book, I have hopefully provided some understanding and appreciation for the challenges of expertise and belief that exist in our VUCA-Plus world. In addition, I have offered some strategies and tools that might aid in the movement from understanding to action. If I have been at all successful in this endeavor, then my multi-year work in the preparation of this book has been worthwhile.

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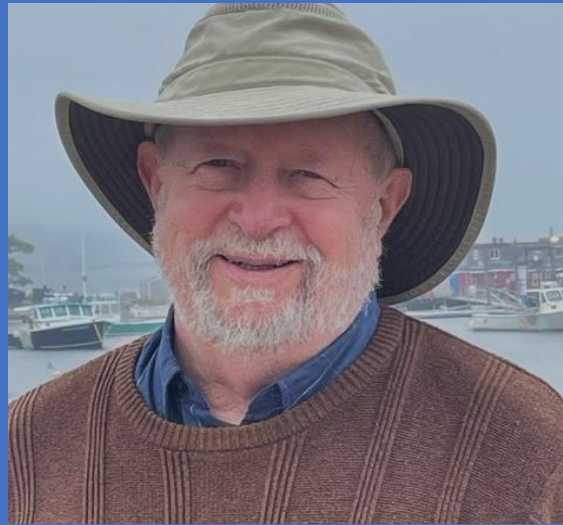
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