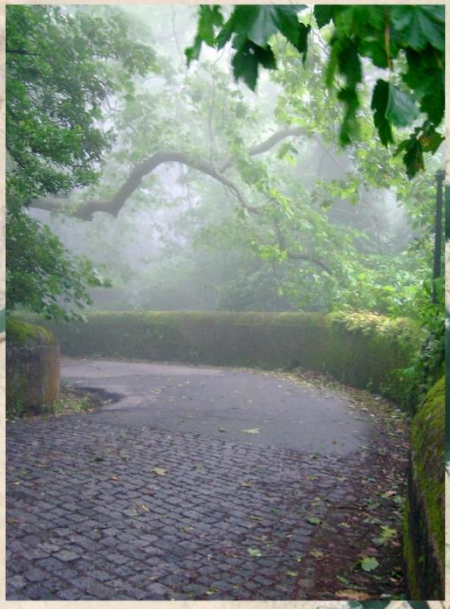

The Pathway to True Freedom II:

Under the MAGA Siege and American Dictatorship

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By

William Bergquist, Kevin Weitz, and Suzi Pomerantz

Atlantic Soundings Press

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Dedications

Bill Bergquist: I have co-authored this book for my five grandchildren, hoping that they will find the pathway to true freedom, even if this pathway eludes us, of the senior generation. I dedicate this book to them—Alicia (Nurse), Julia (Therapist), Miles (Broadcasting), Dylan (Culinary) and Izaak (Culinary). I also dedicate this book to the many mature women and men, throughout the world, who have sat in my classrooms and training facilities, offering their own experiences and insights about the troubling times in which we are now all living.

Kevin Weitz: I dedicate this book to the thousands of writers on Substack and other social media platforms who have inspired me in my writings on subjects related to the restriction of freedoms from authoritarianism, Christian Nationalism and MAGA xenophobia. I greatly admire the passion and commitment these writers demonstrate in exposing the hypocrisy, corruption and racism that is destroying the freedoms of so many Americans. And, to my wife Jennifer, who is writing her own very personal memoir, but always makes time to discuss and brainstorm ideas and concepts for our mutual writings. And for motivating and helping me with the technicalities and day-to-day discipline needed for writings that make an impact.

Suzi Pomerantz: I dedicate this book to my sister-besties, Dr. Sarah Sneed and Mrs. Dani Pardo Bratton. Forever in my mind as "DaniandSarah", these brilliant and spectacular women stand for true freedom and democracy every day in their local communities, online, and at protests. Their loyalty, support, and unconditional love have kept me grounded and sane through all of life's traumas since college and grad school together in the late 1980's. They also got me to my first ever No King's protest.

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Preface

This is a book about the pathway to true freedom. It has been offered in three versions. The first version (called *Freedom*) was authored by William Bergquist and Berne Weiss. It was based on the experiences of Bergquist and Weiss when working and living in two countries (Estonia and Hungary) during the years when the Soviet Union was collapsing. Accounts were given of the experiences of increased freedom to be found among the citizens of Estonia and Hungary.

The second version was prepared several years ago by William Bergquist, one of the authors of *Freedom*. It is built on the observations and analyses offered by the authors of the first version. This second version (*Pathway to True Freedom*) updated the history of the two countries featured in the first version, as well as introducing extensive observations and analyses of the way freedom is addressed in contemporary American life. The pathway to true freedom was clearly one that could be constructed with the proper balance between individual rights and collective responsibility, the establishment of a communality of interests among the citizens of the United States, and the collective generation of a compelling image of the future.

And then came the second Trump administration, following his election in November of 2025. At this moment in history, William Bergquist thought that the second version of this book on freedom was in many ways already "out-of-date." The pathway to freedom suddenly seemed to be overgrown with weeds, poison ivy, and many concrete barriers. Fundamental threats to our democracy were apparent, as were the threats to the balance between individual rights and collective responsibility, the establishment of a communality of interests, and, in particular, the collective generation of a compelling image of the future. Everything was now being challenged regarding these three pillars that are required for true freedom to prevail.

William Bergquist knew immediately that the new Trumpian challenges could never be addressed alone. He invited two trusted colleagues to join him in authoring a third version of the book. They were Kevin Weitz and

Suzi Pomerantz. The newly assembled three authors, in turn, decided that the Trumpian threat could not be addressed in a detached manner. Bergquist, Weitz, and Pomerantz all confronted Trump's threat to democracy from strong, emotionally laden backgrounds regarding freedom, tyranny, and democratic challenges. An important decision was made to share some of these background experiences in this third version of the book.

As the phenomenologists often suggest, the best way to present an "objective" perspective is to admit that there is no "objectivity." However, there is clarity regarding subjective biases that comes with the author's open and candid sharing of their experiences and acknowledgement of at least some of the biases associated with these experiences. This third version may be unique in the field of political psychology in its inclusion of not only perspectives from many behavioral science disciplines (psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science), but also its inclusion of deeply personal accounts offered by all three authors.

About This Book

In the first section, we provide an updated analysis of the events that were portrayed in the first version of this book, regarding the struggle for freedom during the early 1990s in the Eastern European countries of Estonia and Hungary. This updated analysis is accompanied by suggestions of how lessons to be learned about this struggle might be applied to the struggles for freedom that we are experiencing in mid-21st-century America. Accompanying each chapter is an extended statement regarding these current struggles in the United States.

As first witnessed in the initial chapters of this book, the three of us have committed to sharing our thoughts and feelings, as learners, regarding the Trump presidency at several points before and during his first year as president. We have shared our thoughts and feelings from November 2024, when Trump won the election. These thoughts are accompanied by both confirmation of our fears and the emergence of even greater fears regarding Trump's second term in office. Our feelings at the time were raw and often unprocessed.

All three of us did some of the necessary processing of our post-election feelings in preparing what we are calling the *Coda* to these chapters. While

the term "coda" is usually reserved for the identification of a concluding passage in a musical composition that diverges from the basic structure of this composition, we find it to be an appropriate term to use in our impassioned and very personal concluding section of each chapter. Our codas diverge significantly from the more detached and objective observations offered in the first part of each chapter.

The proposed three paths to True Freedom are identified and described in the second section of this book. These pathways involve balancing individual and collective responsibilities, finding a convergence of interests, and formulating a compelling image of the future. In the chapters of Section Two we identify what has been learned in Estonia following its own encounter with challenging and changing political conditions. Along with our consideration of how these three paths are found in the post-Soviet Estonia, the Codas offered in each of the three chapters in Section Two provide a venue for our personal review of these three paths as they are found in our world of Donald Trump. We are candid in sharing our own evolving insights regarding these three pathways to True Freedom. We comment on how things are going and what we have learned about democracy and True Freedom during the first four months of Trump's second presidency.

This third section provides us with an opportunity to relate what major commentators on contemporary American life and politics have to say about strategies for confronting tyranny and protecting democracy. What have we learned collectively during this year that will help us in a new manner to find our pathway to True Freedom? In this third section of this book, we provide our final thoughts and insights gained from this first year of Trump's presidency.

We bring our analysis of democracy and True Freedom to a close in Section Four with a consideration of the architecture and building blocks needed to construct a "beautiful city" in which True Freedom is to be found and maintained. We offer several hopeful signs regarding the path(s) to be taken toward True Freedom.

And then there is an Afterword that stirs things up a bit. It concerns views, space, and trees as they relate to the matter of a collaborative journey to True Freedom.

Section One
Prospects of True Freedom

Chapter One

From Collective to Individualistic Structures and Realities: Music, Society, and An Election

In preparing the second version of this book, one of the authors [WB] provided the following initial reflections regarding music and freedom.

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 happen to be enthralled with Mahler's massive work, as well as the lyrical works 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 (culminating in the tone poems of Richard Strauss). The structure had changed; however, 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 by most 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 to the large, multi-tiered musical structures of 18th and 19th-century classical music. I don't think this is just a matter 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 2024 Presidential Election in the United States has taken place. The music emerging from this election is decidedly dissonant. Nothing makes much sense. Multiple realities clash with one another. Dislocation and despair are abundant. A record number of people in the United States are seeking out therapists or have quit listening to the news. This is no longer a postmodern world. It is now a world of irony in which we must simultaneously hold contradictory beliefs and versions of reality in our head and heart. Though authoring her new book prior to this election, the astute social critic, Naomi Klein (2023, pp. 8-9), offers the following timely description:

> A state of shock is what happens to us—individually or as a society—when we experience a sudden and unprecedented event for which we do not yet have an adequate explanation. At its essence, a shock is the gap that opens up between the event and existing narratives to explain that event. Being creatures of narrative, humans tend to be uncomfortable with meaning vacuums . . .

To make sense of this nonsensical meaning vacuum situation in which we find ourselves, we turn first to the analysis offered in the original book.

The Background

A 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, 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 (which 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. There are pronouncements made every day from the high minaret in Istanbul. These words of divinity were imposing (especially for someone growing up in a highly secular Western society).

The exertion of standards emanating from the minaret would seem to declare 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). Most members of a Western society are likely to be amazed at (and hopefully 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 theorists of chaos and complexity would identify as a *Self-Organizing System.* There is no formal choreography or organizing group – just powerful self-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 cultivation 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 were few imposed structures 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. Certainly, there 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 dinner, while sipping on some mind or mood-altering libation. In the hunter-gatherer society, a narrative is 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?

A Fundamental Question

This reflection on music and societal patterns leads to a fundamental question that relates to old and new classical music, as well as the 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 Haydn and Mozart live comfortably beside Adams and Gorecki? Would a 21st-century Haydn or Mozart be composing music with their distinctive style applied to each of their compositions?

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 amidst the reality of contemporary polarized politics and religious zealotry. Or it might provide some guidance (as we 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 first section of the book. Each of these

chapters is based largely on observations made and interviews conducted by one of us [WB] while spending time in Estonia during the early 90s when the Soviet Union was collapsing. His work culminated in the writing of a book called *Freedom*. *Freedom* was co-authored with Berne Weiss, who was living through a similar transformation in Hungary (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994). Each chapter in the original book and in this update focuses on one or more aspects of freedom. Each addresses the fundamental issue of balancing individualism and the collective. Each chapter also provides the three of us, as authors of the revised book, with the opportunity to reflect on how the interplay between individualism and the collective can be introduced into our attempts to make sense of the presidential election that has taken place in the United States.

Coda: Then the Election Took Place . . .

We will indeed consider the interplay between individualism and the collective in the next chapters in this book. We will bring in the insights shared by one of us [WB] with his colleague, Berne Weiss, as they observed the revolutionary, completely unanticipated events that occurred in 1990s Estonia and Hungary. However, what about today? The three of us are not casually engaged in the events swirling around our heads. This is now *Our Own Country* that is being torn apart. It is not a country like Estonia or Hungary that exists many miles away—across an ocean that has enabled Americans to often feel protected during the past 200 years. This is a revolution of expectations, fears, and contradictions that directly impact our own mindset, neurobiology, and behavior. We are participants in our own psychological experiment regarding distorted and discrediting expertise and shattered bubbles of belief (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024).

The reactions we have to the election outcomes leave us without an objective viewpoint or a place of thoughtful reservation. We must, therefore, share our own reactions to the election outcomes while also offering relevant psychological, sociological, and political theories and historical evidence that hopefully can lead us to a place where Klein's shock is abated, and the vacuum is filled with some meaning. First, the reactions and "ghosts" related to these reactions. We begin in the coda of this chapter

with the initial thoughts and feelings to be shared by each of us regarding the 2024 election of Donald Trump.

The Three Domains

In setting the stage for our sharing of reactions to the election, we offer a basic model regarding ways we approach the many challenges of mid-21st-century life—including those associated with the new American presidency. This model concerns the ways in which we identify our current reality, our desired reality, and the ways in which to move from the current to the desired state. In Europe of the Middle Ages, there were many small fiefdoms, rather than several small and large countries (as there are today). Each of these fiefdoms had its own set of rules, its own history of success and struggle, and its own rulers. Thus, there was a set of domains in Europe that required one to recognize distinctive differences in perspective and practice when crossing the boundary into a new fiefdom.

We suggest that the same occurs when we transition from one set of perspectives and practices to another domain when tackling a challenging issue associated with Trump's second presidency. We wish to focus on three domains. These are the domains of *information* (where am I or where are we right now), *intentions* (where do I want to be or where do we want to be), and *ideas* (how do I or how do we get from where we are to where we want to be).

The *domain of information* is entered whenever we attempt to find out more about the current condition in which the client finds herself. In seeking to identify this information, we act as researchers, asking questions that can be answered by a systematic collection of information. In understanding the current situation, we (individually or collectively) must seek information that is valid. This is not easy in a world filled with misinformation and alternative realities. For instance, in recent issues of a particularly notorious (but widely-read) newspaper, articles appeared on how fluoride lowers IQ scores (based on an RFK-biased National Institutes of Health report) and about the personal rather than political reasons why many federal employees have left their jobs (thereby helping to soften the perceived impact of these abrupt departures).

It is also not easy to determine validity given the multiple criteria used to determine what is "real," as well as the requirement in our mid-21st-century

life that information be compelling as well as accurate (D'Agata and Fingal, 2012; Weitz and Bergquist, 2024) One can even justify "alternative realities," if there is some recognition that what is now considered the "truth" has only been identified as such because one group of "experts" won out over another group of "experts."

As Thomas Kuhn (1962/2012) noted many years ago, science is a very messy business, involving competing truths, paradigmatic revolutions, and often irrationally established communities of "proven facts." In a world of what's called "epistemological relativism (Boghossian, 2011), it is often quite a challenge to establish validity (despite what a group of "logical positivists" posed in Vienna many years ago).

We must also seek information that is useful. The aforementioned newspaper is to be respected for its very practical orientation, even if the facts are not always correct. The impressive circulation numbers for this newspaper speak to the value of useful information. We intend the reflections offered in this book to be of value in helping us identify a valid pathway to true freedom amidst presidential rule that challenges this fundamental freedom. We also hope that these reflections are valid and have offered our personal perspectives on the current conditions in the USA, revealing the biases we bring to our authorship of this book.

Many realistic plans can be established, and problems can be solved through the systematic collection of valid and useful information. This lies at the heart of rational, linear planning and problem-solving. In other instances, unfortunately, effective planning and problem-solving cannot exclusively be based on information about the current situation.

Many important decisions, particularly those involving people rather than numbers, center, at least in part, on conflicting goals, objectives, or desired outcomes. Attention must shift from the domain of information to that of intentions. This domain is likely to be particularly important in today's political environment, where conflict in values and purposes is so common.

Most importantly, the three of us have shared a substantial amount of information regarding our own background, biases, and hopes. In this way, you, as a reader, can better evaluate the validity of the analyses we offer in this book.

The *domain of intentions* is entered whenever we attempt to understand and clarify our personal or our institution's mission, vision, values, or purposes. While research prevails in the domains of information, clarification prevails in the domain of intentions. Unlike traditional approaches to clarification of intentions, which tend to emphasize enforcement or modeling, intention clarification focuses on the way in which mission, vision, values, and purposes come into being. This clarification is particularly important in a political environment where intentions are often conflicting—or hidden.

As we personally and collectively become clearer about intentions, we will begin to produce solutions that are more consistent with these intentions. The process of clarifying intentions becomes richer and more profound as each of us moves toward greater maturity. A mature intention is freely chosen; it is not imposed (an imposed requirement is part of the situation). A mature statement of mission, vision, values, and purpose is prized and affirmed; this statement serves as a guiding charter for one's society and is repeatedly engaged in a consistent and persistent manner.

We spend a considerable amount of time in this book examining the intentions of our current leader as well as the intentions inherent in a society where true freedom is to be found. In the individual accounts each of us provides in this book, we reveal many of our own personal intentions and reflect on the ways in which these intentions came into being.

The *domain of ideas* is entered whenever we attempt to generate a proposal intended to move from the current to the desired state. Ideas are sometimes fragile, often misunderstood, and easily lost. While information is found everywhere, we often ignore or misinterpret it. But we can usually go back and retrieve it. Similarly, even though intentions may be ignored or distorted, they resist extinction. Their resistance to change is often a source of frustration: old values linger, as do old visions and purposes. Good ideas, on the other hand, are easy to lose and hard to recover.

Settings must be created where ideas can readily be generated and retained. We devote a considerable amount of attention to settings conducive to constructive dialogue. Two processes are essential. *Divergence* produces creative ideas. Divergence requires minimum censorship of ideas, minimal restriction on people offering their own suggestions and taking risks, and minimal adherence to prescribed rules or procedures for generating new ideas.

We turn repeatedly in this book to the creation of safe places where divergent and creative ideas can readily be generated. The second process is *Convergence*. People must be given the opportunity to build on each other's ideas, to identify similarities in their ideas, and to agree upon a desired course of action. Convergence requires each of us to observe specific rules and procedures, to listen to ideas, and to be constructively critical of other ideas.

The domain of ideas often requires that we display a subtle and skillful interplay between convergence and divergence. The stories that the three of us share in this book contain new (and perhaps controversial) suggestions. Divergence is displayed in abundance. However, we also hope to be building toward specific proposals for finding or building a pathway to true freedom. We have learned from one another. And are seeking to collaborate in offering a convergent vision of how true freedom might be achieved.

Given these broad guidelines and aspirations regarding what we hope to accomplish in this book, we begin sharing personal histories and reactions to the second Trump term as president of the United States.

Suzi's Reflections

I had a lot of reactions to the election this time around. I was dreading it to begin with, and I was also half expecting it. I was half expecting it because, unlike the first time Trump was elected, when I was shocked and had to confront my complete and utter loss of faith in humanity, and complete shock and confusion at everything, you know? I used to believe that people were basically kind and good and that we're all the same and we're all one.

And then I had to confront my own naivete that my neighbors and family members, and friends had such a different worldview than I knew and thought, and that they could see the world so differently. And I love diversity of thought. It's not that. It's not that I'm opposed to people having different views or different opinions. That's what makes the world go around, but then after the first election of Trump, I became convinced that people knowingly were electing someone who was akin to Hitler. Given that I had grown up hearing stories from my grandparents who had literally run from Hitler himself and had watched what Hitler's Nazis had done to their own family members right in front of their eyes. I had grown up hearing

those stories, and I was terrified about what was going to happen in America.

Trump's first four years turned out to be a lot of bluster. Those four years were chaotic, traumatic and frightening. However, ultimately, we had guardrails in place in our government, and he did not truly understand how things worked well enough to guide the dramatic changes he wanted to create. There was a lot that happened, and a lot of people didn't survive those four years, but democracy for the large part did. This time around, however, a lot of those guardrails are not in place. And this time around, he knows more and his handlers know more. He came prepared. He has a blueprint this time.

My fears and concerns now, following the 2024 election are even deeper. The people who elected Trump and the people who pulled the strings, pushed the buttons and puppeteered the systems that got him elected this time around, I believe did so with their eyes wide open and have nefarious purposes in mind. Their nefarious purposes are sounded out to the tune of a 900+ page roadmap called Project 2025. I half expected this outcome to the election because he told us all along what would happen. He's been telling us all along that it's rigged, and he doesn't need any votes.

It's this maddening sense of trying over and over again to talk to people that I know and have known my whole life to be good people who care about other people. And yet they're willing to vote against me and what I believe in and what I believe to be true. They're willing to vote against my daughter. They're willing to vote against my children. They're willing to vote against everything I hold dear. They're willing to vote against my country. They're willing to vote against my freedom. They are willing to vote against their own best interests. They're people in my own family. They accuse me of voting against that which is good and decent. That is the hardest part.

They tell me that I'm believing propaganda and that I'm Woke (they use "woke" like it's a negative term). They tell me that I'm caught up in mainstream media. However, I don't watch mainstream media or read mainstream media. They tell me that I'm an idiot and a snowflake and a "libtard". You know, it's all the name-calling. They tell me that I don't know what I'm talking about. They assume I'm a democrat when I've always remained a registered independent. I believe in critical thinking and seeking

to understand and applying the lessons of history rather than being swept up in any one political "team" and the fervor of its fans.

They tell me to do my own research and not be so naïve~ when really these are people who watch Fox News and believe right-wing propaganda. These are the same people who do not realize that Fox News is an entertainment outlet. They do not see the hours I spend looking at all sides of a story to try to understand what the actual facts are underneath all the spin. They don't see that I truly research and seek multiple validated sources for what I read, versus seeing some meme on social media and considering that "doing their own research".

The polarization in our country due to the weaponization of social media to radicalize us using disinformation and echo chambers is only partly to blame for the situation we are in. During the first Trump administration, I learned about a very important book that anyone wondering how we got here should read. Respected journalist Jane Mayer's Dark Money exposes the hidden history of the billionaires behind the rise of the radical right, who have been pouring money into our political systems for decades in an attempt to buy power and create the disturbing widening of economic inequality we've seen here.

Realism for Trump and his people is opportunism. It's indifference to the welfare of certain people. Realism for them is going into the rabbit hole. Realism is the alternative reality. Realism for them is about the distortion of the whole George Floyd episode. It is about the denial of racism in this country. There are so many layers to their alternative reality, including accusing the rest of us that it is we who live in an alternative reality. It includes immigration and the border wall. And who does Trump put in charge of everything: two immigrants: Elon Musk and Ramaswamy. And then there are the tariffs. Our poor countrymen have no idea what tariffs are or how they really work. Our poor ignorant countrymen. . .

Kevin's Reflections

The election of Donald Trump says something about where the United States is right now. As an immigrant to this country, I just could not believe that the American population, now knowing who Trump is. We've had him for four years. We saw what happened in terms of his legal troubles and the January 6 insurrection. We witnessed what he did in response to the January

6 riots. There were many reports based on investigations showing what he did (and what he didn't do). And still, they elected this individual. It was mind-boggling to me and unbelievably disappointing.

As an immigrant from South Africa, I have come from a country that has a strong, disturbing history of authoritarian rule and profound discrimination. My reactions to this election are related to my background in South Africa. Very briefly, at the age of 16, during the time of the 1968 Olympics, I was seeing athletes like Tommy Smith, John Carlos, and Bob Beeman on television in South Africa. These incredible athletes were winning gold medals. However, more importantly, John Carlos and Tommy Smith were protesting on the award stands against black oppression. At the age of 16, I said "That's the country I want to be in!"

Having grown up as a youngster in apartheid South Africa, and being an athlete myself, these American protests had a profound impact on me. As a top athlete (400-meter runner) in South Africa, I'd never run against a black person. It was not allowed. So, here I saw the Olympic Games with these unbelievable Black athletes protesting discriminatory practices. I thought, " Wow, that is a country where I want to be". So, from my mid and late teen years all the way until the age of 20, I was determined to migrate to the United States.

And at the age of 20, I was eventually accepted on scholarship, I came to Ohio University. I was exposed to black protests. I went to the place at Kent State University in Ohio, where protesting students were killed during the Vietnam War. Even with these examples of America's flaws, I became absorbed in American life and American myths. I envisioned the United States as the beautiful and shining city on the hill—not perfect but aspiring to something better. We were moving towards a non-racist environment, diversity, and more recently, clean air, moving away from fossil fuels and so on. We were doing the right things, being leaders for the world. And suddenly, I realized with particularity—given Trump's second election—that maybe my perceptions were not correct.

The growing discontent with so-called woke-ism has taken over. Maybe this country isn't the country I thought it was 50 years ago. And that was crushing to me. So, I am struggling with the notion that this image I had from my early teens of the United States being this beacon on the hill is invalid. I am realizing, wow, that maybe I was wrong. I was unbelievably

disappointed. If you think about the essence of what Trump was championing, it was the antithesis of beauty and shining lights.

Bill's Reflections

My experience of facing the reality of Trump being selected twice as President of the United States began with the election results of 2016. It was early on Tuesday evening—too early for any results to come in from the left-leaning cable station to which we always listen. Even though there were no official results, there was a pervasive feeling among the commentators that things were not going as planned. Gloom was in the air even though Hilary Clinton was clearly the superior candidate—with many, many years of experience—and Donald Trump was a "joke" and nothing more than a huckster and reality TV celebrity.

I knew in my gut that the outcome would not be good. I fully engaged in my favorite defensive maneuver. I retreated to my "cave" (which was my bedroom). Snuggling into bed with soothing classical music playing on the cable channel, I soon fell asleep. I woke up five hours later, put on my bathroom, and walked into my wife's office. She sat there—stunned—and announced that Donald Trump had indeed won the election. Hillary Clinton had conceded.

My father taught me about the "cave" during the early years in my life. He would retreat most evenings to his small office at our home in Illinois and later in California. My Dad spent one or two hours reviewing his religious "lessons." I think my father probably learned about the "cave" from his own father—it seems to be a specialty of Scandinavian men. I perfected the construction of my own distinctive psychological cave when I was a teenager living in Van Nuys, California. My parents (and we three kids) were stressed out about the move from a small town in Illinois to the suburbs of a big city of California (Los Angeles). This was coupled with the failure to find an appropriate home. We were living in a rental "hell hole" (comparatively speaking). It was in this high-stress setting that I learned the fine art of retreating to my bedroom, turning on the radio (Lucky Lager Dance Time), and turning from reality to fantasy and dreams. This is how I first confronted the improbable election of Donald Trump to his first term in office.

I mostly did a lot of rethinking during the first days after the 2016 election of Donald Trump. Was he "serious" about his campaign promises to build a border wall, select pro-life Supreme Court justices, etc? Could he actually "run" the US government, given his lack of governmental administrative experience and his often-reported failure as a private business owner? I was mostly using my cognitive abilities to sort through alternative scenarios regarding what would happen during the coming four years. Like most US citizens, I didn't really know much about Trump, having cavalierly dismissed him as a serious candidate for the presidency. It was all reality TV, and we would soon be turning it off and returning to the real world and an extended and expanded implementation of liberal Obama policies. The "reality" of Trump America was slow to kick in for most other Americans and me.

Along came 2024. Donald Trump once again became the Republican Party's candidate for the US Presidency. He was once again running against a very competent woman who was "sure to win." And she lost the election. Once again, I had sensed the negative "vibes" early in the evening and retreated to my bedroom cave and to my music. Yet again, I woke up to find my wife. She informed me that Trump was once again to preside over the American democracy. My reactions to this yet-again unanticipated outcome were quite different from what they were in 2026.

I now knew all about Trump. I saw what he could do to the American democracy as well as what he could not do, given some courageous restraints ("guard-rails") provided by some of his staff. Other American citizens were also fully informed regarding Donald Trump's character and priorities. It was readily apparent that Trump had learned important lessons during his first term in office. He would ensure that the guardrails are set aside. He was now determined to not only implement dehumanizing and environmentally damaging policies but also seek revenge on those who had tried to bring him to justice during the Biden presidency.

My reaction became one not of becoming better informed, but one of questioning the fundamental nature of human behavior—or at least the behavior of American citizens. I was particularly concerned about collective behavior and turned to a book I had read many years before as a graduate student at the Harvard Divinity School. One of my heroes was Reinhold Niebuhr, the uncle of Richard R. Niebuhr, one of my professors at Harvard.

Reinhold Niebuhr wrote about the morality that can be found within the head and heart of an individual person, contrasted with the immorality inevitably found in the collective (societies).

I had been skeptical of Reinhold Niebuhr's perspective when attending classes at Harvard. I also found it difficult to hear about the presence of Evil in the world, as proposed (or at least pondered) by other Harvard Divinity professors and lecturers (especially Paul Tillich). I didn't want to believe that something called "Evil" actually exists in the world. Rather, there were flawed human beings and settings (such as unjust social systems) that provoked violence and dehumanizing behavior.

Now I began to wonder. Could some raw form of Evil actually exist in our world—and what does it look like? Will the collective always end up being immoral, or at least indifferent to the welfare of all people? On the other hand, are there really "moral" people who have the courage and persistent commitment to stand up for and fight for the moral and align with human dignity and welfare? And if these "moral" people actually exist, then where are they now, when we most need them? Will they always be crucified or at least thrown out of office after doing good for other people?

I found that my confrontation of matters concerning Morality and Evil required not only my mind but also my heart. My reactions to the 2024 election of Donald Trump were a blend of cognition (thoughts) and affect (feelings). I suspect that I was not alone in finding that my reactions were deeply embedded and composed of a diverse set of ideas and images regarding equitable political processes and just treatment of all people, alongside strong pulls toward fear, anger, and frustration. There was also a mixture of thoughts and feelings that were manifested as bewilderment and dislocation.

What Was Revealed

The reflections offered by us as authors of this book not only reveal something of our own thoughts and emotions regarding the 2024 election, but also several important themes that will be addressed throughout this book.

First, Suzi commented on the disturbing classification of her as *Other* by friends and even members of her own extended family. She was *Different* (with a capital D). This painful phenomenon of being set aside and

discounted was particularly distressing for Suzi because, as she notes, a tradition of separation and persecution as a Jew lingers with her. The holocaust resides not only in her DNA epigenetically, but in her heart and soul—as it does with most Jewish people of the 21st Century. One of our colleagues, Haim Weinberg, has joined with other psychodynamic social theorists and therapists to write about collective trauma (such as occurred repeatedly during the holocaust) (Hopper and Weinberg, 2019). They propose that there is a social unconscious residing in the psyche of Jews that emerges in their individual dreams, psychotherapy, and organizational behavior. This social unconscious is found in all societies (such as Singapore and Estonia) where trauma has been collectively experienced (Lim,2018; Parktal, 2021).

We have much more to say about the Other later in this book—and are not done considering the social unconscious as it relates to dynamics operating in the re-election of Donald Trump as US president. We identify the profound polarization that occurs when those on the other side of an issue become the discounted and disgraced Other. It's not just a case of dishonoring diverse points of view and the failure to honor Equity, Inclusion, Diversity, and Belonging. There is somehow a pervasive sense that these Other people are no longer even human. The legacy of Hitler was referenced. Under his rule, Jews, liberals, gypsies became the Other. They could be treated with disdain and even simply eliminated.

A second major theme was introduced by Suzi. This theme concerns the nature of *Reality*. The election of Donald Trump to a second term seems to have been founded, at least in part, on the creation of (alternative) realities that, in many instances, were unrelated to what has actually occurred in the world during the Biden years. The MAGA folks declared (screamed out) that Biden and his associates were not living in reality. They were consumed in dreams and aspirations that required a bending of truth and an honest appraisal of the real issues facing America (and the world). One of us [WB] appointed a conservative lawyer to the position of Academic Dean at the graduate school, where he served as president. The dean often declared that one should always be an idealistic liberal during their twenties (rather than being heartless), but should grow wiser and more realistic when older, and thus become conservative by the time they are 50!

Those who elected Trump would probably view themselves as being realists. Like our dean, they would consider the policies of Joe Biden to be impractical and idealistic. It is time once again for the practical realism of Donald Trump (the very successful businessman who was "accurately" portrayed on the Reality TV series). Yet, as Suzi has noted, the "new" reality is actually just opportunism. It is only "practical" concerning the growth of a wealthy man's portfolio. True "reality" to be found in the negative impact of Trump's economics on those who are poor and powerless. The alternative realities introduced by MAGA folks will not hold up under the assault of real-time trade wars, broken international alliances leading to new conflicts, and the inevitable spread of new pandemics.

As one of the co-authors of this book, Kevin has introduced several distinctive themes, having grown up in a different country and having held positive views about American society and the freedom he would find in moving to this country. Now, having lived in the United States for several decades, Kevin is facing a disturbing reality. In many ways, the current America is beginning to resemble the South Africa in which Kevin resides during the first years of his life.

The second theme relates directly to the first. It concerns the disillusionment Kevin felt when he discovered the "real" ways of American society. While Suzi and Bill were born in the United States, Kevin made the choice as a mature adult to immigrate to this country. He must deal with the strong feelings associated with his important decision. The concept of "cognitive dissonance" is directly applicable. Kevin must not only confront the failure of America to live up to his lofty expectations but also confront his own naivety as an aspiring athlete looking forward to living in the world of the "free and brave" – like his heroes, Tommy Smith, John Carlos, and Bob Beeman.

Bill has introduced several other themes that often reemerge in this book. First, he identifies his own tendency to hide in his "cave." We will see many attempts to escape in this book. Sometimes it is an escape from freedom itself. At other times, it is an escape from the challenges of societal volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence, and contradiction (VUCA-Plus)—a set of challenges that we will consider in great detail throughout this book.

As we are about to note in Chapter Two, the challenges of freedom and VUCA-Plus can lead one to escape down a prominent mid-21st-century rabbit hole that leads to the wonderland of reassuring views of the outside world that are profoundly distorted (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). Bill admits to leaping down this rabbit hole and seeking out the serenity of sleep and music. He awoke to find himself no longer in Wonderland. He was now back in a world where he could only wonder what had happened during the previous five hours.

We suspect that many other people found similar ways to escape the harsh reality of Trump's election. This pull toward escape has continued since Election Day. A telling statement regarding this escape among those opposed to Trump is offered in the December 13, 2024, issue of *The Week* (2024, p. 16):

> Kevin O'Kelly, a librarian in Somerville Mass., is a longtime news junkie. But since the election, his life has taken a sharp tum. Instead of scrolling news-feeds, he's listening to antiquarian music and watching British comedies on YouTube. "Anything not to read about him," he says. O'Kelly is in good company, said Beth Teitell in *The Boston Globe*. He's one of many liberals who has developed "Trump Detachment Syndrome," a "self-protective behavior" that involves blacking out the news and not watching, reading about, or "discussing you-know-who." "Call it the great tune-out of late 2024," said Edward Helmore in *The Guardian*. It shows in the ratings for the left-leaning cable channel MSNBC, which since Election Day has lost 47 percent of its audience.

Several questions might be posed about this "Trump Detachment Syndrome." Is this syndrome likely to last, or will news-junkies leave their rabbit hole and return to the "real" world of Donald Trump's presidency? At a more profound level, we might inquire about the benefits of this retreat for the person who is tuning out the news and the broader citizenry. What happens if important, thoughtful members of our society never leave their rabbit hole?

This latter question leads us back to the topic of this chapter—individualism versus collectivism—and to a second theme (morality) that was introduced by Bill. As we will see throughout this book, there is an ongoing pull between a focus on individual benefits and a focus on collective benefits as

they relate to the pathway to freedom. We must be free of collective constraints, yet we will only find true freedom when acting in a socially responsible, collective manner. If we escape into a rabbit hole to detach from reality and recover from the Trump illness, then we will ensure that the Trump malady persists (even after he is no longer in office).

Reinhold Niebuhr suggests that it is particularly important for individuals to remain engaged in the stressful world of politics. Otherwise, the inevitable collective immorality of society will prevail. It is in Niebuhr's perspectives on personal morality where we find an effective bridge between individualism and collectivism. We would suggest that the bridge consists of an Individualistic Morality, where a distinctive, personal stand is taken regarding an important public issue, but this individual stand is being taken on behalf of the collective good. We will keep this bridge in mind when considering the pathway to freedom in the remaining chapters of this third version of a book about freedom.

Distal and Proximal Perspectives: Challenges and Threats

A bridge between the individual and collective has just been identified. A second bridge must be built between a proximal perspective on freedom and a distal perspective. This book was originally intended to offer a distal perspective on true freedom. It was based in part on observations regarding the emergence of freedom in the country of Estonia and on books, articles, and research studies concerning the nature of true (and false) freedom. As authors of this version of *Pathway to True Freedom*, we have added additional perspectives—from a thoughtful, considered distance.

However, something has happened. There is a bump in the road that leads us to true freedom. Things aren't going as we thought (or at least hoped) that they would. We have experienced Naomi Klein's shock. None of us is willing to remain in a rabbit hole for very long. Serenity is in none of our genes. This leads us to the proximal perspective. This perspective is offered when we get up close to a phenomenon. We describe not just what is occurring, but also our own reactions to (and perhaps participation in) this phenomenon. Proximity produces both thoughts and feelings—and these psychic elements are often interwoven (bewilderment).

When choosing between distal and proximal perspectives, we are also choosing between two neurological pathways. On the one hand, from a

distal perspective, the exploration of a viable pathway to true freedom is being framed as a challenge. We are inviting ourselves to address and perhaps find "solutions" to the problems associated with VUCA-Plus. We are taking on the challenge of learning from other social observers and critics about the conditions needed to establish true freedom. We are even challenging ourselves with the task of finding a pathway to true freedom amidst Trump America.

All of this is well and good. Studies have been conducted that compare an athlete's appraisal (Lazarus, 1999) of an upcoming task (e.g. a race) as a challenge with an athlete's appraisal of that task as a threat (Meijen, et al., 2020). If the task is considered a challenge, then the athlete's body is aroused in a positive, rewarding manner. Activating chemicals (adrenaline) associated with the sympathetic system give way to soothing and nurturing chemicals (oxytocin and neuropeptide Y) associated with the parasympathetic system. An adaptive outcome is likely to take place under these conditions.

Unfortunately, the two of us are not athletes. The task we are facing concerns our "making sense" of Trump's election. A compelling proximal perspective can't be avoided. We face threats rather than find challenges. The two of us have had strong, often negative reactions to the 2024 election of Donald Trump. Put simply, we both find his prospective presidency to be threatening to us. We fear his autocratic actions and the potential fall of our cherished (though flawed) democracy.

This is where the distinction between distal and proximal perspectives can make a big difference. The study of athletes suggests that when athletes view the task as a threat rather than a challenge, their neurobiology takes a quite different course. The initial activation of the sympathetic system remains in place. Adrenaline and other arousing hormones and neurotransmitters linger—and actually intensify.

In a recent extended conversation concerning these findings about the challenge and threat faced by athletes, the matter of neurobiological Freeze was brought forth. It is when faced with a pervasive, powerful, or elusive threat that human beings are likely to freeze rather than seek to fight against or flee from that which is threatening (Salus, 2024c; Sapolsky, 2004). The authors who synthesized the research and revised the theory of challenge and threat among athletes (Meijen, et al., 2020) proposed that the appraisal

of resources helps to determine the appraisal of challenge or threat. High levels of threat arise when the stakes are high, and the athlete believes they have insufficient resources to meet perceived demands. We would suggest that these conditions—leading to a sense of lost control—are likely to elicit a state of freeze and produce ineffective behavior.

Conclusions

The proximal conditions that all Americans now face as the second Trump presidency is about to begin are a powerful source of threat for many of us. Many of us experience a loss of control resulting from insufficient resources to meet the demand for effective adjustment to (or opposition to) the Trump presidency. We are not alone in experiencing the coursing of adrenaline through our veins. We are joined by many other American citizens who feel frozen in place. There is a sustained sympathetic system alert state that keeps many of us on edge (and sends many of us to a psychotherapist or to the use of numbing drugs). We could instead embrace (or be afflicted by) a Trump Detachment Syndrome. However, this doesn't do any of us any good--individually or collectively. So, the challenge is to convert the Threat into a Challenge. This is quite a task.

Hopefully, what we offer in this book is of some benefit in this regard.

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.

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 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 far from over, and the challenges associated with terrorism and the spread of 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, identified by Berne Weiss and me during the early 1990s (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994), was tragically prescient. This ghost still haunts many countries. We are finding the strains and often the profound, tangible presence of authoritarianism operating in Europe, Africa, the Middle 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 we have identified as VUCA-Plus (Bergquist, 2020a). In the current chapter, we reflect on the nature of VUCA-Plus challenges, the resultant escape from freedom, and the turn toward authoritarianism.

Conditions of VUCA-Plus

Where do we begin in providing a capsule but compelling description of challenges we face in the 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 in a "post postmodern 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 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, one of us [WB] has added two other characteristics: turbulence and contradiction. Pulling together these six conditions, we can identify the VUCA-Plus conditions of mid-21st Century life and work (Bergquist, 2020a: Bergquist, Sandstrom and Mura, 2023). In this chapter, we wish to broaden our consideration of each VUCA-Plus element. We are considering the polarities associated with each element. We also 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, we will briefly dwell on the meaning 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 the 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 must consider not only the number of elements (when the setting becomes complicated) but also the interactions and interdependencies (when the setting becomes 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 relates 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 a "fuzzy" form. The fourth condition, *Uncertainty,* concerns the stability of any assessment made regarding reality. Under conditions of uncertainty, reality seems to be changing in unexpected ways over a short duration. Why should we do an extensive assessment, make plans, or offer expert predictions if our world is hazy, swirling, and always surprising us?

Deservedly, VUCA is 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 large in number and size, as well as multi-tiered and nested within one another. To make matters even more "realistic"—and challenging—we have added two other conditions to VUCA. They are turbulence and contradiction. Both conditions interweave in the tapestry of VUCA. They each add a further layer of challenge to that now faced by us in our mid-21st-century society. Turbulence involves the interplay between rapid change, cyclical change, stagnation, and chaos within our current world. Contradiction identifies 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 saturated 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 daily 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 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 discover why and how escape is engaged when faced with the conditions of VUCA-Plus, we turn first to the insights offered by Erich Fromm many years ago about authoritarianism and the escape from freedom. His insights are particularly relevant given the 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, 1941a, pp. 140-141). We 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 loneliness. Fromm identifies a twofold process of discovering true freedom. One first experiences what he calls "negative freedom"; this is 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. In Fromm's utopian vision, these new institutions offer greater economic and political equity while also encouraging creativity and community. The three of us consider 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, Storms 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 termed 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, we 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 found after a 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. They 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 gain some sense of the storm's nature by looking at its more benevolent manifestation. Jung (and Otto) would suggest that the storm occurs 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 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 force 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 elicit 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. It leads us to an experience that penetrates and changes our inner psyche. And we don't know how this will happen. It is beyond our control or true comprehension.

We 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.

This ambivalence is abundant among the interviewed Estonians in 1994. There was the all-inspiring songfest when Estonians began to sing their national songs despite Soviet bans on this music. These songs were probably 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, Estonian singing was 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 exhaustion and deep fear associated with newfound 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 (1941a), there is another course open to each of us. We can simply give up our freedom and then try to overcome the loneliness 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 (1941a, pp. 140-141) 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.

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, we consider a second avenue, nationalism, as well as two of the more personal modes of escape: ethnocentrism and excessive consumption. However, right now it is time to shift our attention 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 found in individuals, rather than as a societal and cultural dynamic. While the work done by Theodore Adorno and his colleagues (Adorno, et al. 1950/1964) regarding authoritarian personality offers insights into the origins of authoritarian perspectives, it is important to recognize that authoritarian dynamics operate at multiple 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, we offer multiple perspectives on this dynamic. We once again turn to Fromm's analysis as a foundation. At the heart of authoritarianism, according to Fromm, there are four major elements. The three of us 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 we introduce an important concept (to be reintroduced at several points in this book). This concept concerns the "locus of control" (Rotter, 1966). At some points during 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 desirable.

At other points, we assume that we have little (if any) control over what is occurring. We must sit back and watch what is happening. 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

to assume an external locus of control. Furthermore, some societies and cultures are leaning toward an 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 find that there is the negation of one's own sense of self-efficacy 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 we just noted regarding the dynamics of 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 mythical 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 align with some primitive 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 just noted, there is the projection of one's own power onto another. Having abandoned our 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* (1941a), primarily on the authoritarianism of Nazi Germany.

His analysis was still apropos 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 the collapse of the Soviet Union. In his later work, Fromm acknowledged 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 existing 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. 1950/1964) 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 Frankfurt Institute, which sought to blend Freudian and Marxist perspectives). 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.

Our temporary diversion into the issue of ideological bias was taken because it is hard not to take a biased position when analyzing the nature and dynamics of authoritarianism. 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 we are introducing in this book on freedom come to their observations 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 present 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 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 justify their attacks, they must convince themselves that their 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 souls 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. Indeed, their loyalty will only get stronger as his behavior gets 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 engage their analysis, especially in the era of MAGA and Donald Trump. However, we must take their leaning into account when assessing the validity of their observations—as well as the validity of our own work (with our own left-leaning biases).

Seeking Unity

Our diversion has been taken not only to admit to our own biases, 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. We turn to a profound desire to be found among human beings for some sense of unity. We are "social animals" 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 we 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 portrays the ultimate unity and 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) makes 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 eternality.

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 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 found in many contemporary societies. The pull toward dressing, acting, and thinking like other people can be considered a survival strategy 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 we will soon turn.

At a more disturbing level, we can turn to an account offered by Anne Applebaum—a guide to whom we will often refer in this book. In *Twilight of Democracy*, Applebaum (2020, p. 109) writes about the "strong preference for unity" on the part of people throughout the world. She (Applebaum, 2020, p. 117) provides the following disturbing description of 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, in some people, it inspires the desire to forcibly silence the rest.

The preference for unity may ultimately lead not just to a desire that one way of seeing and being in the world prevails, 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) elaborates 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 we have identified as VUCA-Plus), Vox (like many other political parties leaning toward authoritarian rule) has found a way to embed its ideology in the identity of many Spanish citizens. A deep, lingering search for unity moves these residents of a mid-21st-century society from mild conformity to a strident demand for a uniformity of thought and action.

An unswerving loyalty to not only the 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 for the irreparable damage done to freedom.

The search for unity might reach even further. It might reach 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 (2022c) 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 civilization has brought all of us great benefits, but now people like myself and others are questioning the moral foundation of Western civilization."

Unity is thus 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 is not only 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 regress to a very primitive level. We will later describe a process called "schizmogenesis" by Gregory Bateson that accelerates divisions

between two communities. Here in the mid-21st Century, we are witnessing this process in vivid display.

Seeking Simplicity

How do we account for this disturbing trend in contemporary societies? This search for unity by framing it as a matter of morality might be considered a sign 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 is 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 contains 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 judgments and take specific actions (knowing full well that other sets of truths hold equal validity).

The dualistic epistemology is found among young people and among those who are stuck as adults in this early stage of moral and cognitive development. For many adults, dualism of thought might be a matter of epistemological expedience. These people find it much easier to engage their world as a "dualist" rather than as a "relativist." It is a matter of thinking in a fast, habitual manner about important issues (Kahneman, 2011/2013). For adults, the imposition of morality on political thought and action could be evidence of this deeper pull toward a unitary, simplistic epistemology of morality – based in the compelling search for unity and unconscious seduction of the Uroboros.

These "dualists" are inclined to be guided by their emotional rather than their rational brain. While the rational brain tends to operate primarily out of our prefrontal cortex, the center of our emotional life is located in our limbic system. And, particularly, in our amygdala. We proposed that the

amygdala, in turn, is tuned to three primary ways to categorize what is occurring in the external world (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024).

Offering a model called the Semantic Differential, Charles Osgood (1957) proposes that we tend to view the world primarily on 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)? We propose that Dualists are inclined to accept the expertise of someone in authority (strong/weak) who offers simple (right/wrong) solutions to problems. Facts offered by this authority figure are accepted uncritically and without hesitation. For the authority is right, good, and strong.

Elizabeth Kolbert (2022) recently wrote about this pull toward Dualism when reflecting on the famous Robbers Cave studies. These studies provided a compelling narrative of how two groups at a Boys Camp readily polarized and assigned good/bad labels to one another. Kolbert suggests that we might be conducting a comparable "real life" experiment today as we divide not into the Boy's Camp Rattlers and Eagles—but instead into America's Elephants (Republicans) and Donkeys (Democrats). And we are a bit older than the boys at camp. And we can do much more harm to one another than the boys could.

Kolbert (2020) suggests that this dualism is seductive for adults. It "flattens, distorts, reduces character to symptom, and in turn, instructs and insists upon its moral authority." Kolbert goes on to note that "the solace of its simplicity comes at no little cost. It disregards what we know and asks that we forfeit, too—forget about the pleasures of not knowing." (Kolbert, 2020). Perry would suggest in reading Kolbert's account that the pleasures of not knowing belong to those people whom Perry calls the "relativists." These are the folks who take on the challenge of viewing the world in a complex manner. There are relative truths, relative goods and bads—and even relatively trustworthy or untrustworthy authorities. These relativists are likely to accept a constructivist perspective on reality and to critically examine their own theories-in-use and biased models and practices.

Rather than waiting for the Relativists to "make up their minds", the Dualist is likely to make a decision and take action based on the Facts provided by their trusted authoritative expert and by their own, more immediate firing

of the amygdala based on Osgood's three-fold categorization. The Dualist will not only grow impatient with Relativist delays but also grow suspicious of the Relativist's ultimate alliance. It doesn't take long for the Dualist to assign the Relativist to the bad (and evil) side of the two-partition bucket.

If instead, the Dualist is influenced by the Relativist or finds reason to doubt their trusted expert, then (according to Perry) there is no movement to relativism. Instead, the Dualist embraces Multiplicity – which is a variant on dualism. If there is no one authority that can be trusted, then there is NO authority to be trusted. Everyone is suspect. And we are all on our own to find the truth and to check out the Facts. The Multiplist stance was in full display in American culture during the 1960s and might be the dominant perspective in our postmodern world.

What then about the challenges facing the Relativist regarding making decisions and acting in the world? They will look for guidance from their prefrontal cortex rather than the limbic system. The Relativists will be reflective and critical in their own judgements regarding the best (most realistic and ethical) actions to take (Schön, 1983). However, they do eventually have to move forward. Perry identifies this as a movement from relativism to Commitment in the Midst of Relativism. Despite our biases and distorted perspectives on the world in which we live, we commit to doing something. This is better than sitting back and doing nothing.

As our colleague, John Preston, often noted, the movement from contemplation to action requires the coordinated efforts of many cortical functions. We must link our prefrontal cortex to other parts of our brain and body that are geared toward action. These include not just the limbic system, but also the Basal Ganglia, Insula, and (when taking action) motor cortex and cerebellum. The shift from contemplation to action is challenging not only from a neurobiological perspective but also from a psychological perspective. This shift to commitment is inevitably painful, much like the shift from Dualism to Multiplicity (and from Multiplicity to Relativism) is painful. Each transition requires that we grieve the loss of contentment (and even loss of innocence) found at the previous developmental stages. We are being kicked out of multiple Edens on our way to a life of thoughtful action that is guided by imprecise and often conflicting Facts.

Declaring Unswerving Loyalty

We 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 depend upon the person, group, or institution in which we have invested all authority and power. As 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 over 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 to the leader and hold that person responsible for enacting roles and behaviors they themselves are unwilling to perform, out of fear of failure, embarrassment, or even success. The leader will then "personalize" the power that has been bestowed on them (Geddes, Wright and Frantz, 2018).

As proposed many years ago by French and Raven (French, Raven and Cartwright, 1959), there are multiple sources of power (coercive, reward, legitimate, referent, and expert, with informational power added later by Raven). However, recently, these multiple sources of power have often been consolidated in the hands of a single person or small loyal group of followers – such as we now find with Donald Trump and his minions. Under these conditions of personalized and consolidated power, leadership is aggrandized, checks and balances are eroded, and few diverse perspectives are found at the table where decisions are made.

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 we just described. Fromm writes of the power that projection has in establishing authority in groups. He notes (Fromm, 1941a, 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. They invest this person with miraculous and numinous powers.

The psychodynamic theorist, Wilfred Bion (1961), would identify these powers as one or more of three types. First, there is the power of *wisdom*. An assumption of dependency is shared among 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 the 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) label the process of *metabolism*. This obscure term is used to label the psychological dynamics associated with managing the anxiety associated with this 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 is often 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 consider 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 displays superior wisdom, then the system is in crisis. Similarly, if members of the system can't collectively identify a viable enemy (who 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 prioritizing a compelling vision must always collude to be sure that this vision is never actualized. A realized vision is often anticlimactic. And ultimately, it is 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, 1941a, p. 176).

A leader may use this authority and the power of wisdom, courage, or vision to achieve something of value for the group and for society. Alternatively, the leader can use this power to satisfy the need for personal ego-gratification and/or the acquisition of financial or physical resources. If the latter is the case, then this leader will not well serve the group nor society. The subordination of self to an external power will lead 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, 1941a, p. 172).

The loyalist, an authoritarian character, is expected to suffer without complaint, to comply without question, to love without considering the source or basis for this love. Fromm suggests that something important is sacrificed in moving toward authoritarianism and the projection of our power onto an outside authority. We sacrifice our genuine love for other people. And, even more importantly, we lose the 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") becomes dominant. Slow, reflective thinking is replaced by fast thinking (Kahneman, 2011/2013), 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 collective higher-order dialogue. (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Gergen and Gergen, 2004). As we will note when considering a new fifth element, there is now only one centralized reality and very little room for consideration of alternative perspectives on reality. One's government and state are the providers not just of control, but also a collectively shared and reinforced version of the truth.

As we combine 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. They are diminishing the credibility of their own ability to formulate and test reality in a VUCA-Plus environment. They self-punish by declaring themselves unworthy (supposedly) of the attention being devoted to them by their beloved leader. Their leader deserves 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 deep, unconscious level, the numinous experience is founded in a primitive archetype. This archetype leaves the

loyalist's own personal psyche self-wounded and shrunk in size—creating the minimal self (Lasch, 1984) we mentioned above. Any kind of appreciative perspective regarding self is lost in the self-appraisal of deficiency. We are saved, as unworthy recipients of forgiveness (for our sinful self), only by the grace offered by the esteemed (and self-sacrificing) leader.

Identifying the Other

We turn now to Fromm's fourth element: we escape into authoritarianism by distinguishing ourselves from people devoted to different ideologies or agencies or are in some other way different from ourselves. 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 offered 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 that many of us are 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 will seem strange if our own culture is being challenged and our own version of reality is no longer the only viable alternative. As 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 largely because of these splintered conditions and the many contradictions that reside in our 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, we suggest that our world is more like the curved and dangerous world portrayed by David Smick (Smick, 2008). The homogenizing elements portrayed by Friedman have produced coordinated international forces both inside and outside

government that hold the potential of destroying democracies as they currently operate.

Much of this nightmarish world was prophetically portrayed in Paddy Chayefsky's *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 where 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 stockholders. 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. These commodities, in turn, are skillfully marketed by those controlling international business conglomerates.

Our mid-21st-century world might be even more curved and dangerous than Smick (2008) 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 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 foundations 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 that 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, given the topic of this book. The autocracy she describes hits directly at the heart of present-day democracy and (ultimately) 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.

We 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." As noted above, under these conditions, we desperately want the social constructions offered by our revered leader to be accepted as reality. As Oshry suggested, under conditions of uncertainty and anxiety, we want to feel "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 in Fukuyama and long for an end to the history of dissent and war. We want a flat world of uniformity—what we will describe as an environment of Serenity.

Oshry (2018) 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 the 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. These are narratives that tell us why we are right and why the "others" are wrong. As we noted before, the differences between us and the "others" can be defined as a moral struggle with the desired outcome being the achievement of unity. Authoritarianism thus controls both the internal life of our emotions and the external life concerning 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. We suggest that Fromm's analysis is applicable to the Estonian society of the early 1990s. Furthermore, we have been making the case in this book that these four elements are found in many 21st-century societies. As already mentioned, we go beyond Fromm's four elements. There is an element that we label the *disguise of authoritarianism*. This element is often less apparent than the other four, though just as powerful and pernicious.

We propose that an authoritarian state of affairs is disguised in what the three of us have 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 operating 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 conveyed by the media are based on several prevalent myths that are never tested and rarely 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 non-restricted marketplace of ideas is alive and well in some (if not all) societies. There is no centralized or coordinated control over production or distribution. We 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. There are many digital forums for deliberation and debate about alternative world perspectives and ideologies. Gross would caution Friedman and those who accept Friedman's premise that the Internet and related enterprises might not be either open or free. We 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 perpetuated by those who benefit most from ensuring that none of these conditions ever occurs 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 Estonia), we are 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 (1949/1983) 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" from 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)?

We would add the perspective conveyed recently by our guide, Anne Applebaum. She 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) states that her 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.

Applebaum points to a highly diverse set of actors. Yet, in their diversity, they hold one thing in common. None of them is a major, powerful leader 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 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 a 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.

Coda: The Election Took Place Midst Polarization and Hatred

Following the surprising election results, the three of us reflected on the remarkable and disturbing polarization that was fully embedded in the decisions being made by the electorate regarding who should be the next president. Voters on both ends of the political spectrum identified many of those residing at the other end as the "Other." It was not just a matter of differing positions on specific policies. It was more a matter of the "Other" people not being quite human, or at least not patriotic or sane.

This led two of us [SP and WB] to reflect on the Holocaust Experiences of World War II and on the history of Anti-Semitism as it has occurred throughout the world. As an immigrant from South Africa, one of us [KW] also began to reflect on his perspectives regarding his home country and the opportunities available in the United States. All three of us reflected on ways Donald Trump is influencing the polarization and hatred found in all corners of our mid-21st-century world.

Suzi's Reflections

The election results produced a strong reaction in Suzi, founded on the history of her own Jewish family during a period of intense polarization in their European homeland:

My grandmother was living in Poland when Hitler came into power. My grandfather was a highly decorated Major in the Russian army and a medical doctor. He was married to his college sweetheart, also a doctor, in 1937. They had a baby daughter. The Nazis killed his wife and young daughter when they invaded Poland in June of 1941, where my grandfather was stationed and serving as chief of the medical services. He survived the Holocaust through bartering his medical expertise for eggs and an occasional chicken, and also by posing as an Armenian doctor or as a Commandant.

He fought in the resistance, which he and my grandmother spoke of as "the Partisans." He set up and ran field hospitals, working 14-hour days as a surgeon treating the wounded. He had heard about a Jewish pharmacist in a nearby village in Poland with a beautiful daughter. He went to their village to check out the rumor because he needed a new wife. And that's when he

met my grandmother in 1939. He rescued not only my grandmother, but also her father. They made plans to meet up with her two brothers, who were studying in Palestine. Grandma saw her mother and her little sister killed by the Nazis in their village.

Their story is incredible. During my whole childhood, I remember hearing these stories from my grandparents. I kept asking: "Why didn't anybody in America and elsewhere in the world know about what was happening? What was America doing in 1939 and 1940? What did the rest of the world do? Why didn't anybody do anything to help?"

It's amazing to look around during the last year or two. I know what the rest of the world was doing in 1939—because that's what we all have been doing in 2024. We're watching it happen. We are feeling powerless and helpless to change it. There are a few people who are shouting into the wind, but their voices are not enough. Well, there is one option: we can leave the United States. But where do we go?

My grandparents did leave Poland. They got married in 1944 and did what they could to survive, starving in the forests while in the Partisan movement, stealing medical supplies from the hospital to help the wounded. My grandmother was apparently a highly skilled sharpshooter, and my grandfather saved many lives with his medical knowledge. There were many stories about the close calls they experienced and the challenges during their time with the Partisans.

When my grandmother was pregnant with twins, they finally escaped somehow by train. The details are unclear. My grandfather told the story of seeing his brother for the last time, in passing, one of them on a train and the other on the platform. Neither knew it would be the last time they saw each other (until they managed to reunite here in America 50 years later). That may have been when my grandfather left Russia, I'm not entirely sure.

There are stories in my family about my grandparents escaping on foot over the Italian Alps. My grandmother was at that time 8 months pregnant with twins (my aunt and mother). They somehow made it to what was then Palestine, and in 1945, my grandparents became parents. They were very involved in their community in Tel Aviv. My grandfather established a thriving medical practice there, and I've heard they frequently had dinner parties with the likes of Golda Meir and other dignitaries. In 1959, they

arrived in America, where my grandfather's medical research and practice paved the way for their family to thrive.

Bill's Reflections

Bill reflects on his family's involvement in events surrounding the Holocaust, Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy, which were less traumatic than was the case with Suzi's grandparents. Bill has centered on patriotism alongside a push against misguided authoritarian rule. Bill's own father took a job helping to administer a factory producing war vehicles. While he rarely talked about this work, I know he was proud to serve his country in this patriotic manner (being too old to serve in the military).

On the other hand, there was my uncle, who served in the military. He was a leading officer who worked in the European theater under the command of General George Patton. My uncle was given the order to send the soldiers under him into a specific battle. My uncle knew that this assignment would lead to the death of many of his men and was not a strategically sound decision. My uncle refused to obey this order. He was threatened with a court martial. However, an immediate investigation revealed that my uncle was correct in his assessment. As a result, my uncle was exonerated and deeply praised by the men serving under his command. I admire my father for serving his country as a dedicated production administrator and my uncle for serving as a courageous warrior.

I have recently gone back further into my family history and discovered the dedication and courage of an ancestor, President James Garfield. During his shortened career, Garfield took on multiple causes that were controversial at the time (and in many cases still are). Born in a log cabin, James Garfield took a stand on several controversial issues. He had witnessed the bloody struggles of the Civil War, having served as a Union Army soldier and having engaged in many battles, including those at Shiloh and Chickamauga. Later, as minority leader of the House of Representatives, Garfield fought against the attempts of Southern legislators to overturn many outcomes of the Civil War—especially those related to the civil rights of Black Americans.

In 1870, Americans added the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, making sure that Black men could vote. As soon as the amendment was ratified, white southerners pushed back. Their objection to Black voting,

they claimed, was that poor, uneducated Black men just out of enslavement were voting for lawmakers who promised them public services, like roads and schools, that could be paid for only with taxes levied on people with the means to pay, which in the post-Civil War South usually meant white men.

The congressional leader who eventually forced them to back down was James A. Garfield. Impressed by his successful effort to save the country, in 1880, party leaders nominated him for president. On August 6 in New York City, he singled out the veterans in the crowd to explain how he saw the nation's future. "Gentlemen," he said:

> . . . ideas outlive men; ideas outlive all earthly things. You who fought in the war for the Union fought for immortal ideas, and by their might you crowned the war with victory. But victory was worth nothing except for the truths that were under it, in it, and above it. We meet tonight as comrades to stand guard around the sacred truths for which we fought. . . We have seen white men betray the flag and fight to kill the Union; but in all that long, dreary war we never saw a traitor in a black skin.

To great applause, Garfield vowed:

> [W]e will stand by these [B]lack allies. We will stand by them until the sun of liberty, fixed in the firmament of our Constitution, shall shine with equal ray upon every man, [B]lack or white, throughout the Union.

As the audience cheered, he continued: "Fellow? citizens, fellow soldiers, in this there is the beneficence of eternal justice, and by it we will stand forever."

Garfield won the presidency that year, but just barely. The South went solidly Democratic, and in the years to come, white northerners looked the other way as white southerners kept Black men from voting, first with terrorism and then with state election laws using grandfather clauses that cut out Black men. States also cut up districts unevenly to favor the Democrats, who ran an all-white, segregationist party. In 1880, the South became solidly Democratic, and with white men keeping Black people from the polls, it would remain so until 1964. James Garfield was assassinated on September 19, 1881. He served as president for only 6 months.

I find myself inspired by James Garfield's legacy and marvel at the troubling similarities to be found between the perspectives and practices of Southern racists in the late 19th Century and the MAGA racists of the mid-21st Century. In many ways, nothing has changed. A visionary James Garfield is still needed, alongside the patriotic administrative skills offered by my father and the courageous commitment of my uncle to the welfare of all being served.

Kevin's Reflections

I offer a personal perspective on freedom, based on my experiences as a youth and young adult living in South Africa. In the winter of 1960, growing up as an 8-year-old in the idyllic (for a white-skinned young boy) community of Cape Town, South Africa, my family had moved to the new suburb of Meadowridge, a former farming community on the southeast (backside) of Table Mountain. Van Reenen's Farm was adjacent to our new house, and the mountain offered a towering backdrop to our view of this majestic world. The summers were long, and we spent most weekends on the beach. The winters were mild and wet, but immensely green and beautiful, given our surroundings of Port Jackson forests covering much of the region.

As young children growing up, my siblings and I climbed trees, built tree houses, hiked with my Dad up Table Mountain's Skeleton Gorge, and swam and surfed at some of the most beautiful beaches in the world. My recollection of my life is that it was perfect. My sense of being free was profound. I still recall that feeling today, 65 years later. I was free (with minor limitations) to do what I wanted – play with neighborhood friends and ride bikes in the forests (likely where I developed my love of mountain biking, which continues to this day). Nothing in my life since has matched that sense of freedom and joy. This was at the height of South Africa's Apartheid system. As a young white South African boy, the world was mine!

One winter's day, it was my turn to go out in my Wellington boots and collect dunneballs (donnebolle in Afrikaans or pinecones in English) for our fireplace. As I was picking these off the forest floor, a short black man approached along a trail through the trees. He was impeccably dressed (it was a Sunday, and he was likely on his way to church somewhere). I specifically remember his beautifully buffed brown shoes – not like the rather old shoes my dad wore. He kindly greeted me with a smile. "Good morning, young master," he said! I was not surprised at this greeting – I was

living at the peak of South Africa's Apartheid system. I, as an 8-year-old white boy, was called "master". I greeted him back and shook his hand.

I then almost instinctively reached into my pocket and pulled out a silver coin – a "tickey" (3 pennies) – in the currency at that time. I gave it to him, and he reached out with two hands – one hand over the other with palms upward – a sign of respect and appreciation, but also a gesture of begging in some cultures. He responded, saying, "Now I can buy bread, thank you"! He smiled and walked on, and I recall feeling good about what I had done.

This memory has stayed with me for almost sixty-five years. What I did not appreciate and intellectualize at the time was the gentleman's mindset and emotions in that interaction with me on that rainy day in the forest - my "theory of mind" was undeveloped. What amazes me to this day is his sense of calm – his apparent contentment. Having lived all his life in a racist country where he was subordinate to an 8-year-old should surely have enraged him. Why not take out his revenge on this little white boy all alone in the forest? Like Nelson Mandela decades later, what made this man seemingly content despite being subjugated by the Afrikaner Christian nationalist government into a second-class citizen?

My Freedom – Your Prison: South Africa's Apartheid system not only banished people of color to tribal lands (and so-called "locations"). They were required to carry identity documents to enter and work in "white" areas. The system also reduced their freedoms in many other ways – it created an imprisonment of the mind. Many were made to believe they were inferior. Their freedom of choice and opportunity for education, work, and sport amongst many other endeavors, were extremely limited. Their freedoms of choice were hugely restricted.

Over 60 years later, now living in northern California, I feel I am returning to the dark days of apartheid – not with the same structures and policies perhaps, but with a similar mindset about "others" being "less than" and the enemy. Trump's victory says more about the mindset of many Americans than it does about Trump himself. Leadership matters .... A LOT!

South Africa would be a very different place if not for Mandela's leadership. He made it acceptable (through his own example) and necessary (through new laws) for people of different cultures and racial backgrounds to

overcome racist beliefs and behaviors and become a more inclusive society. My son lives in Johannesburg and is married to a woman who, in South African terminology, is Cape Colored. His friends and family are of all races. If he had married a black woman thirty or more years before, it would have been likely that he would have been arrested and jailed.

Mandela's leadership approach, which incorporates compassion and a sense of freedom for all people, allowed this to happen. While Mandela led with caring and compassion, Trump leads with hate and retribution - hate and retribution for people who do not support him and people who are different – his (sometimes) vaguely disguised disdain for people of color is glaring. His racist comments date back decades and are well-documented. There is a reason why white supremacist groups support him. Racist comments from his most ardent supporters are common, and about eugenics are not uncommon.

MAGA is dividing us into "Us and Them": The sense of freedom and joy I felt arriving in the United States for the first time in 1973 and for the second time in 2003 was profound. I cried as I deboarded the plane in Seattle in 2003. My mix of emotions was based on a sense of what I had left behind in South Africa (despite the joy of a new democratic government), which was a crime wave that had unfolded, making day-to-day life untenable. What I had been given with my green card residency was a sense of psychological safety – a just society in which all people could live in peace and safety with equal opportunities, knowing that the federal and state governments operated to support all people, not just a "chosen" group as in the old apartheid system.

That sense of safety is beginning to crumble. The DOGE organization, led by Elon Musk (also a South African) and reportedly a band of 19-to-20-something-aged tech-nerds given uncontrolled access and power to the nation's most private information (about you and me – all of us) and authority to fire federal employees at will, is frightening. One of these individuals has been reported to promote eugenics – the process of retaining and improving the genetics of a particular race – and has apparently stated something like "I was racist before it was cool."

Elon Musk gave what looked very much like a Nazi salute. Trump has stopped all funding to South Africa because, he claims, white Afrikaners (the architects of Apartheid) have been treated poorly by the South African

government and have been offered asylum in the US! Moreover, WOKE is bad – concern for discrimination and social injustice – is bad. DEI (diversity, equity, and Inclusion) programs are being dismantled. All of these beliefs and actions are similar to the foundational beliefs of South Africa's Apartheid system. And the most worrying part is - the majority of Americans voted for this.

"Our Democracy is Under Threat" – Yawn!: During the 2024 election cycle, Democrats often voiced their concerns about Trump's views being anti-democratic, that he was a threat to the Constitution and our democracy. Most Republicans I listened to (I do sometimes try my best to listen to Fox News and other conservative channels) downplayed these sentiments or ridiculed these concerns. Let's consider what is currently happening: Recent statements by VP Vance and others suggest that Trump is at liberty to ignore orders of Federal judges. Once the notion that "anything the President does is by its very nature lawful" is the end of our democratic system. To further complicate that reality is the decision by the SCOTUS that Presidents are largely immune from prosecution for almost anything they do while in office. This is the point at which our democracy is over, and we are now a fascist dictatorship. Trump recently referred to himself on Truth Social as "LONG LIVE THE KING"!

I don't necessarily disagree with some of the Trump administration's policies. It is his overt language, attitude, and behavior that is disturbing:

- Illegal immigration - It took me 17 years to become an American citizen. I went through expensive applications, invasive interviews, and even required detailed documents to make an application. A family member had to sponsor me, and was required to sign documents, ensuring he would financially support me in the USA if I was unable to support myself. He had to show financial records to prove he could do this. I then had to study and take an exam to be accepted. I struggle to understand how many states accept that people can illegally cross the border and then be supported and protected. There is no question that this country needs immigrants for all categories, from working on farms and in restaurants to working in high-tech organizations. I believe this should be conducted on the basis of need and legality. We cannot be the solution to the world's problems.

- Streamlining government – all large corporations need to, and usually do, conduct cost streamlining and efficiency efforts periodically. The Federal Government is the largest employer in the US by far (almost 3 million employees), and cost efficiency efforts are likely long overdue. I worked with McKinsey Consulting for two years on a cost streamlining exercise in a major South African bank. We applied a specific process to identify unnecessary and redundant work processes and outputs (called activity value analysis). Elon Musk's DOGE apparently does not adopt a methodical approach – it's a "chainsaw" approach with little or no consideration of effectiveness, safety, or what is necessary for the American people. Certainly, this approach appears to have little regard for the individuals impacted and for the American public.

I completely agree with the US efforts to provide funding for important humanitarian projects. USAID's 2024 budget was reportedly $32 billion! This is while thousands of homeless Americans live in squalor on the streets of large cities, young children go hungry every day, and the water supply of many cities is tainted by lead. While the need for assistance in many other countries is urgent, I do believe that – given limited resources and the choices that need to be made – Americans should be the priority. But let's do this in a thoughtful, compassionate, and respectful manner.

The United States cannot be the world's savior – certainly not while our deficit is skyrocketing. There are always opportunity costs – if we are solving the world's problems, those funds are not being used to solve severe problems here in the US. That is not to say we should not contribute to global efforts, but I feel it should be more balanced with domestic needs.

It is the derogatory language and name-calling that worries me most – "They're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime, they're rapists, and some, I assume, are good people" is unacceptable (unfortunately, this language appears to be welcomed and applauded by many MAGA supporters). Some of Trump's comments mirror language used by white supremacists, such as his claim that immigrants are "poisoning the blood" of the country. Adolf Hitler used the term "blood poisoning" in *Mein Kampf* to criticize the mixing of races.

The architects of South Africa's apartheid system also used similar derogatory terms to describe people of color and position them as lower

status, and this raises huge red flags for me. Absolutely, I agree, ensure that only people who enter this country legally can remain and receive services, but Trump's derogatory and demeaning language is dangerous and should be rejected by every reasonable person. If people are in the US illegally, they need to be deported, in my view, but this needs to be done in a humane manner.

"Fast Forward to the Past" – The Chosen race, Poisoning the Blood of our Nation, and Trump has been sent by God!: The leaders of South Africa during the Apartheid period, who were members of the Dutch Reform Church, believed they were the chosen race by God, and they were called to lead South Africa, and that they were superior to non-white people. Fifty-two years after first arriving in the US, and now living in northern California, I feel I am returning to those dark days of apartheid – not necessarily with the same laws, structures, and policies, but with a similar mindset about "others" – anyone who is not like us (typically white and male-dominated) is not ok. Trump's victory says more about the mindset of many Americans than it does about Trump himself.

Now, in the US, there is a strategy (defined in Project 2025) to go back to the "good old days" where America was dominantly a Christian nation, and white men largely dominated government leadership positions. This harkens back to South Africa's Apartheid period. During an interview in 2010, South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu was asked how it can be that Christianity was used both to support and reject apartheid. He responded:

> It is people. Because as you were saying, some people are able to use the Bible as a means of opposing injustice, whereas others are able to find justification. You can find justification for slavery in the Bible. Some say this is what the Bible says and that closes the argument. You will find that the Bible, if you want it to, will justify many things.

Tutu asserted that it is the people who interpreted the Bible to support injustices, which explains the discrepancies within Christianity during apartheid. The decades-long pro-apartheid regime in South Africa was heavily supported by Christian denominations, specifically the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)."

Learning From Mistakes of the Past: Christianity, Apartheid, and Social Movement Framing: Trump is being called a modern King Cyrus – the ancient Persian King 2500 years ago who proclaimed that the Jewish exiles in Babylon could return and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Indeed, along with a number of evangelical Christian leaders, Benjamin Netanyahu has referred to Trump in this manner. The US is moving towards an apartheid type vision, driven in part by white people, largely Christian nationalist fueled fervor, towards an apartheid form of thinking – white, Christian people are good, all others are less so:

Members of the chauvinist group Proud Boys began displaying Christian nationalist tendencies in the lead-up to the insurrection. They have increasingly added prayer and other religious expressions to their ethic of patriotism and hypermasculinity. In Idaho, there are signs that some members of the Patriot Front who were arrested for allegedly planning to riot at a Coeur d'Alene Pride event have shown connections to pastor and former Washington state lawmaker Matt Shea, a right-wing firebrand who has touted a document titled "Biblical Basis for War."

Who Are the Christian Nationalists? A Taxonomy for the Post-Jan. 6 World is offered by the Pulitzer Center: Extremist Christian nationalist groups can pose a significant threat to our freedoms. These groups seek to impose a narrow interpretation of religious beliefs onto the broader society. This undermines the separation of church and state that is foundational to our democratic systems and the freedoms of others. This can lead to the erosion of the religious freedoms of others, as individuals who do not share these beliefs may face discrimination or even violence to conform. Additionally, the authoritarian tendencies of these groups can result in the suppression of dissent and the curtailment of freedom of speech and assembly.

What if I agree with the 10 Commandments being posted in my child's school, but prefer also to have the Hindu Yamas posted? What about Islam's Mahomet's commands? By promoting a singular religious national identity tied to specific religious ideologies, this thinking marginalizes and alienates other diverse communities, weakening the pluralism that is essential for a healthy, functioning democracy. This thinking was a cornerstone of South Africa's apartheid system. And there are serious warning signs emerging here in the US.

What was Revealed

Kevin is rightfully shocked by what has occurred in his newly adopted country. He had lived with the prejudice and cruelty of apartheid in South Africa and now expected to live in a quite different society. Apparently, he was wrong. We are living in an American society that has created its own form of apartheid. We separate and abuse. We sort by race rather than merit. Our schools and churches do not allow us to fully comprehend the racial wound in our society that is never healed, just as it is never healed in Kevin's South Africa.

There are not only similar dynamics operating in South Africa and the United States. We are also experiencing something like what Suzi's grandparents experienced as Jews living in a world that was filled with profound hatred for the "Other" (Jews, Gypsies, Intellectuals, Liberals). The fascism of Donald Trump and his followers might seem "friendly" (Gross, 1980) as compared to the violent form of fascism found in Germany, Italy (and later Spain). However, it is still fascism. And many people are still subjected to hatred and cruelty. Antisemitism, racial discrimination, and fascism weren't supposed to take place in the United States – nor in Germany.

The remarkable thing that Hannah Arendt said concerned where anti-Semitism and fascism were going to rise up, it was not going to be in Germany. It was going to be in France--with the Dreyfus affair and many other antisemitic incidents. France is the country where everyone knew if it was going to emerge. Yet, this polarized hatred against Jews took on a virulent form in mid-20th Century Germany. The rise of Nazism in Germany came as something of a surprise, created in part by the financial collapse of post-World War I Germany, and being on the losing side of the First World War.

While antisemitism was expected in France, given its long history of anti-Jewish sentiments and actions, the economic status of France was stronger than that found in Germany [also on the winning side of World War I]. Then there is the matter of Italy, where antisemitism was even weaker than in Germany. In many ways, Trump is closer to Mussolini than to Hitler. As was the case in Italy, the antisemitism in the United States is strong; however, it is often secondary to the polarizing hatred engendered by Trump and his MAGA followers regarding Hispanics, Asians, members of

the LGBTQ community, and virtually anyone else who is opposing the domination of American society by those who are White, Male, and Christian.

Thus, in some sense, Suzi is correct in comparing what is occurring in the United States to what was going on for her grandparents before World War II and the Holocaust. Our reactions to the election results might compare with those of Suzi's grandparents when they perhaps realized, "Oh my God, this is not going to correct itself! There are no safe places. There are no guardrails!"

Voyage of the Damned: Suzi mentioned that one option is for those of us who "lost the election" to find some other place to live. Many people, like Suzi's grandparents, left Europe and immigrated to the United States (or some other country). Perhaps, this is an option. We can move to a "safe" place. But where is this place? There was a disturbing movie called *Voyage of the Damned* released in 1976. It was based on the true story of a ship carrying hundreds of German-Jewish refugees.

The ship was sent to Havana in 1939 by the Nazis, but was denied permission to land anywhere. The ship was eventually obliged to return to Germany, where certain death awaited many of its passengers. While *Voyage of the Damned* was based on real-life events, it can also serve as a metaphor for a fundamental question: Can you really escape from repressive authoritarian forces? Is the alternative just to float out there without a country, without a place to call home? So, it's back to the anchoring of oneself. At one point, each of us (like most Americans) was proud to be an American. We trusted this society to ultimately do good, to do justice. It was going to be safe for Suzi as a Jew to live and practice her religion in a safe country called the United States. It was safe for Bill and Kevin to continue writing critiques of a society in which expertise is in shambles, and bubbles of belief are reinforced (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024).

Frustration-Aggression: What changed? Perhaps nothing. It might have been that everything "simply came to a head" and were pushed over the top by Donald Trump and his associates. One of the foundational theories regarding dysfunctional and destructive human behavior would seem relevant here. This is the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis formulated by psychologists at Yale University during the 1930s. John Dollard, Neil Miller, and their Yale colleagues (Dollard, et. al., 1939) proposed that Frustration,

as the culprit, occurs when one is blocked from achieving a specific goal (this was called "goal response interference"). This model of "social learning" is founded on the premise, first of all, that a compelling goal has been viewed—and that other people have been successful in achieving it. Frustration arises because this goal should be one that can be achieved. Why am I blocked? What is wrong with me—or with society—that prevented the achievement of this goal?

During the first half of the 20th Century, many Southern farmers were frustrated. Their movement to a goal was blocked. Specifically, they were unsuccessful in bringing their cotton crop to market. The weather didn't cooperate. Furthermore, the price of the products they raised was too low for them to make a decent living. Frustration was in full force. They were powerless to do anything about the weather and had very little to say about the price of cotton.

Dollard and Miller did something quite dramatic that was reported in a short article they published. They showed that the failure to make a living as a cotton farmer was closely correlated with the lynching of black men! The poorer the sale of crops at a reasonable price, the more likely it was that a black man would be hanged on a Southern tree. Relating this highly disturbing finding to their studies regarding the behavior of rats in their Yale laboratory, Dollard and Miller proposed that people (and rats) are likely to become aggressive when repeatedly frustrated.

One of us [WB] was involved in a project to document an instance of frustration-aggression in action during a later period of time in the United States. During the 1950s, some residents of Los Angeles decided to fulfill their dream of living on a lake by building a weekend home on Lake Elsinore (located just south of Los Angeles). Unfortunately, their lake began to dry up, leaving these weekend residents with a frustrated dream. Something or someone had to be blamed for the lake's retreat. While the real culprit was Mother Nature, some Lake Elsinore residents looked to a more tangible target they could blame. And on which they could direct their frustration-based aggression. A "usual" target was available: their Jewish neighbors on the lake. Somehow, the "Jews" were responsible for the drying up of the lake.

A highly controversial documentary called "City of Hate" aired on Los Angeles television on December 11, 1959. It documented the growing

antisemitism in the Lake Elsinore community, culminating in the burning of a Lake Elsinore synagogue. As a young man, one of us [WB] watched this documentary. It lingered in his consciousness for many years. Eventually, there was an opportunity to send a group of graduate students to Lake Elsinore in preparation for a group term paper on the frustration-aggression hypothesis. These students went to the Lake Elsinore library to obtain a description in the local newspaper of the now-forty-year-old "mini-pogrom."

The students found that pages in the newspaper had been torn out that would have contained an account of what occurred. Furthermore, after conducting several interviews with long-time residents of Lake Elsinore (confirming what had occurred), the students were approached by one elder member of the community. They were told that it would be "best if you left Lake Elsinore right now." The students did leave. They had to prepare a term paper based on the bit of information they had obtained. This incident seemed to have been torn directly out of Miller and Dollard's article regarding how the frustration of a dream can lead to discrimination and violence, whether this dream is located in the hopes of poor Southern farmers for a profitable cotton crop or the hopes of Los Angelinos for lakeside living on weekends.

The hypothesis of Dollard and Miller appears to have considerable face validity. There is the classic case of a man who is hassled on the job, coming home to hassle and even physically abuse his wife. She, in turn, screams at her child. The child, in turn, kicks the dog. Frustration is shared downhill. The pecking order provides guidance regarding whom one can hurt without repercussions. "I can kill the black man without being punished". "I can yell at my submissive wife and feel somewhat better about my alienating work life".

Frustration-Aggression in 2024: We set the stage for a 2024 enactment of the frustration-aggression dynamic. We present the tale of a frustrated citizen who is looking for someone to blame and kick. Here are his words:

> In 2024, I became completely frustrated about my status in American society. I see other people thriving, but I am trying to keep food on the table. Other folks have yachts, while I only have an old Chevrolet that barely gets me to work every day. I don't have enough money to feel safe, while those Elite College-grads can purchase expensive homes that enable them to live free of crime or

the pushing of drugs that I witness in my urban neighborhood. In this state of frustration, I find no one to kick. My wife is "liberated" and will kick back. My kids are hidden away in their bedroom. They are addicted to the Internet and are unavailable for kicking. I have to look elsewhere for an appropriate outlet to express my frustration.

Donald Trump appears everywhere on the TV channel I watch after dinner and on Internet sites I check out late every evening before going to bed. Trump may be very wealthy. However, like me, he is very frustrated. His frustrations concern being treated unfairly and being criminally blocked from the presidency in 2020. I know he has done bad things. However, my minister tells me and other members of my Evangelical church that God often appoints sinners to bring about the needed reform of a sinful world.

What do I do about my frustration? Donald Trump shows me what to do. I have witnessed many people being aggressive on behalf of Trump as they stormed the US Capital on January 6, 2020. I found myself rooting for them during the riot and later during their trials. As a result of all these events I witnessed on television and the Internet, I was able to express and take some pleasure in my aggression as enacted indirectly through the words of Donald Trump and the actions taken by his MAGA supporters. With all of that, I decided to vote for Donald Trump, believing that he is going to punish or deport some "lesser" people (illegal immigrants, minorities, poor people). I anticipated that my ongoing frustration would be continually assuaged through the violent actions being taken by Donald Trump's new government.

Thus, we find the frustrated Trump voter in full display. Ready to join the MAGA cohort. . .

Our own Frustration-Aggression Enactment: What about the three of us. Are we any better than the frustrated citizen we just portrayed? The three of us have thoughtfully and objectively examined the motives and behavior of those "other" people who voted for Trump. However, what about the three of us? What do Elite college-educated citizens like us do who did NOT vote for Trump? We were blocked from our vision of a Harris presidency. We were profoundly frustrated with the election outcome.

Our dreams have been dashed. Like what occurred with the Southern cotton farmers and the Lake Elsinore residents. Are we allowed to be angry? Can our emotions "run wild" or at least run in a less tame fashion? God forbid that we become aggressive – or even find gratification in vicariously enjoying aggression displayed by other people who "hate" Donald Trump. Who do we kick? Where do we find an outlet for our pent-up frustration regarding those #^%@*&$^% MAGA idiots?

It has gotten even worse. An executive of an inhumane health care insurance company is shot to death on a street in New York City. Are we allowed to feel a bit good about his death for a couple of seconds before expressing our disdain for violent actions? What about the attempt on Donald Trump's life at one of his rallies? For even a fleeting moment, are we allowed to acknowledge our regret regarding the failure of this assassin to achieve his goal? Must we monitor our fantasies as well as reactions to the actual aggressive events occurring in our mid-21st Century world?

Frustration-Regression Hypothesis: There is an alternative route for the engagement of our frustration. We can regress to a more primitive state. Le Bon (1895/2022) and other social observers of the 19th and early 20th Century wrote about this repression, often to justify authoritarian rule over the primitive behavior of the masses. In his early and most influential writing, Sigmund Freud (1900/2010) also focused on the regressive process, primarily as related to the blockage of sexual expression in his rigid Viennese society. This regression was particularly evident in the production of dreams. With sexuality repressed by the "super-ego", the "ego" finds a way to indirectly express this powerful urge (Id) by regressing in the dream to a more primitive process (use of symbols) and more primitive content (often from childhood). In his later writing, Freud (1920/1990) suggested that there might even be a mixture of sexual urges with primitive feelings of anger, envy, and disgust (related to Thanatos—a death instinct).

We find the regression described by Freud in the mass rallies staged during the 1930s and early 1940s by the Nazis. Hitler was able to identify and powerfully articulate the collective frustration of his fellow Germans. They had lost the war, found nothing but chaos and dysfunction in their postwar government. Cynicism flourished in the cafes and universities of postwar Germany (as portrayed in the writings of Isherwood and the subsequent musical portrait offered by Kander and Ebb's *Cabaret*). The Elite in

Germany were indifferent to the plight of the poor, and those in charge did little to meet the needs of those who never quite recovered from the ravages of the "Great War."

The propensity toward psychological flight continued among the citizens of World War II Germany. Despite what occurred all around them during the war, Germans remained devoted to their theaters and soccer matches. This escape and accompanying indifference (along with tales of heroism and atrocities) are powerfully documented in a recent book about life in Berlin from 1939 to 1945 (Buruma, 2026). In a review of this book in the *New York Times*, Kevin Peraino proposed that "dictators thrive not on love, but on indifference" (The Week, 2026). Everything was primed for the expression of collective frustration and the search for ways to alleviate frustrations after World War I, up through World War II.

We find one strategy for addressing frustration in the aggression against Jews, Gypsies, and left-wing intellectuals. A second (accompanying strategy) was found in the regressive power of Hitler's rallies. These rallies made extensive use of primitive processes—such as symbols (flags, banners, and the prominent Nazi swastika) and repeated pronouncement of elementary themes. Attention was directed to ancient Aryan history and myth (much as was done by Richard Wagner in his 19th-century operas). And the aroused emotions were old and ugly, aligned in many cases with primitive urges regarding destruction and death. Captured in the documentaries prepared by Leni Riefenstahl, the Nuremberg rallies and other events orchestrated by Hitler and his Nazi cohort exemplified powerfully and disturbingly the way in which collective frustration can lead to collective regression.

Something similar has occurred much more recently in the rallies staged at Madison Square Garden in 2024 by the MAGA folks. Once again, one of us [WB] witnessed this social psychological theorem in practice. The psychological laboratory is left behind, as the powerful forces of regression are engaged, resulting from the collective frustration experienced by a whole group of people. This event took place in Los Angeles during the late 1950s. A "patriotic" rally was held at the Los Angeles Sports Arena. Herbert Philbrick, the author of *I Led 3 Lives,* was featured at this rally. His book on Communist infiltration became a popular TV series from 1953 to 1956. He had served as an undercover agent and was fully "knowledgeable" regarding

all of the communists who had infiltrated the US government. Out of sheer curiosity, WB decided to attend the rally with several of his college friends. This was probably an early stage in WB's preoccupation with mass social psychological phenomena.

The Sports Arena was draped with many large American flags. The place was packed with men and women (mostly with pale complexions) wearing patriotic gear (usually red, white, and blue) with buttons or hat banners declaring the need to purify America and rid the United States of communist influence. The evening commenced with many fiery speeches delivered by lower-level conservative California politicians. Then a couple of Hollywood stars spoke dramatically of the dangers hidden in the leftist movies being produced in Tinseltown. Finally, out came Herbert Philbrick. The place erupted. Chants began, and flags were waved. It was right out of a Nazi rally. Philbrick was shouting about the Communists. His rhetoric became more extreme.

All members of the audience stood after each of his declarations. In front of the row where we were sitting was a man who seemed to struggle with repeatedly standing up. At one point, he remained seated. Those around him began to scream at him (above the very noisy clamor of the arena). They told him to stand up. He remained seated. Other men near him began to beat him with their fists and flags. He fell to the ground. At this point, we, college students, decided to leave the arena. It was not safe for those who were not "patriotic" in their immediate reactions to Philbrick's pronouncements. It is not known what the fate was of this man who did not stand.

What we witnessed was a powerful regression. Everyone in the arena became more "primitive" in their emotions and actions. There was even aggression in the beating of someone who would not stand up. The words spoken by all of the rally presenters focused on sources of frustration for those in attendance:

> Food prices were high because of Jewish price-gouging. The American military was crippled by the insidious infiltration of "Socialists" and "Communists." Russia was winning the Cold War because of this crippling impact. The God-given Gospel of Jesus Christ was being perverted by left-leaning preachers affiliated with liberal churches. These false prophets were no longer accepting the

> liberal truth of the Bible. Police officers were failing to enforce the law of the land because they were being monitored for "bad behavior" by soft-minded city officials.
>
> Most importantly, California and other endangered states were being run by corrupt politicians who were kowtowing to the moneyed liberal establishment. And you can throw in the biased liberal newspapers and the Commie movie industry. We are witnessing the destruction of a God-given American way of life!

This voice offered no thoughtful consideration of the facts. There was little understanding or empathy for people holding different beliefs or being born with a darker skin pigment. Childish fear of the dark (ambiguity, complexity, and uncertainty) was on full display that evening at the LA Sports Arena. WB witnessed frustration leading to regression up close and personal.

Conclusions

It should be noted that Clayton Alderfer (1972) offers a much less dramatic (and nonpolitical) version of the interplay between frustration and regression. Building on the theory of motivation offered by Abraham Maslow, Alderfer proposes that the frustration of specific Maslow-based needs leads to a regression back to the gratification of lower-level needs on Maslow's hierarchy. Applying an ERC (Existence, Relatedness, and Growth) principle to his understanding of human motivation,

Alderfer conveys a behavior pattern found in daily life—far away from the insanity of Nazi rallies—and (hopefully) far away from the rallies of Madison Square Garden and the LA Sports Arena. However, we should not discount what Alderfer is suggesting. The inability to meet higher-order needs (such as a sense of meaning in life and a sense of personal achievement) can certainly create conditions that lead to a primitive search for authority. These conditions can also encourage an accompanying search for something (or better yet, someone: the "Other") to blame for the frustrating inability to meet these higher-order needs.

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Chapter Three

Dwelling in Caves, Seeking Serenity and Finding Freedom

In Chapter Two, we sought out critiques offered by Fromm, Gross, and Applebaum regarding a propensity of 20th-century Europeans and Americans to seek escape from freedom. These authors focused on the lure of authoritarianism. In this chapter, we offer a comparable perspective regarding 21st Century society that concerns a propensity to escape into something we are calling Serenity. However, we begin by turning to a much earlier perspective on the lure of a simple, authority-based propensity. This perspective is offered by Socrates, the Greek philosopher who is known through the writings of Plato. Socrates (Plato) offered an allegory of a cave and those dwelling in the cave.

We will be presenting our account of the mid-21st Century pull toward serenity, but first, we invite you to join us on a visit to Plato's cave. During this visit, we will reflect on the way Plato's allegory relates to matters of Serenity and Freedom in contemporary times.

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 these 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 now live? 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, 2026).

Turning back to Plato's allegory, we live with an expanded cast of characters in the cave. First, something or someone is 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 are we unable to actually see reality, something or someone will 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 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 who is 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 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 (2011/2013), 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 prevalent interpretations.

We offer one poignant account of this matter of diversification by our most frequently referenced guide: Heather Cox Richardson. She (Richardson, 2022b) recounts the confirmation hearings of Ketanji Brown Jackson to become the first African American woman to serve on 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 qualifications:

> "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 ascend 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). Many elements of the world operating inside Estonia, the United States, and many other countries are in flux.

First, there are now multiple fires burning in the cave. They are 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) that defined much of our reality during the 19th and 20th centuries 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? 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 into the nature of the cave? What about the world that is projected onto the walls of the cave? What about the nature and agenda of the interpreters? And lest we forget, Plato (and Socrates) had their agendas many centuries ago that influenced the way we look at the cave and the wall. Perhaps there isn't a cave or wall. Only an outdated allegory told by philosophies of times past.

We should also consider whether to step outside the cave. Can we 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

settings, context, interpersonal relationships, and the nature of our own experiences? 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 understanding of cognitive and emotional processes pushes us to even more challenging perspectives. Socrates's allegory is much more extensive than the version we 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. Further questions arise about the role to be played by leaders and other cave dwellers in addressing these implications.

Inside the cave, its inhabitants (prisoners) are chained so that their legs and necks are fixed. They are forced, when shackled, 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.

The images swirling around the cave may be much more complicated and diverse than those 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 (1991/2000) writes about a saturated self, suggesting that we are inundated with so 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-. It is multiphrenia (rather than schizophrenia).

Leaving the Cave

What happens when one of the cave dwellers is unchained and leaves the cave? Do they enter another cave? 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? Is it filled with many contradictory belief systems? Let's imagine that this single prisoner (whom we will call the protagonist) is freed from the chains and is forced to turn and see the fire. Our protagonists 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 casting shadows. The sounds are likely to be strange. Perhaps another language is being spoken. No words might 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 a new reality and knowledge that the freed prisoner is experiencing. Slowly, her eyes will adjust to the sunlight. The sounds become less bewildering.

Gradually, the former prisoner can see the reflections of people and natural things in the water located 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

Several critical questions emerge: Could our protagonist return to the cave? 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 conveys a different reality. What happens when this person returns to the cave? Would this person be considered a "philosopher" (as Plato suggests)? Would they instead be identified as a "fool" or as a person who is "mad"? The former prisoners' 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 (imprisoned 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' friendly fascism would be reestablished. Comforting order would be restored in 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 if it exists 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 of our exploration of authoritarianism and freedom. An entire society can be perceived as a cave. Members of a society can be identified 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 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 these processes precipitate. Social systems become stuck in their traditional manner of thinking. Rigid, often tacitly held, rules prevail about how things are done. Bertrand Gross's shared myths are present. There are powerful collective heuristics. 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. These cave dwellers, individually and collectively, 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 allowed 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? Does Serenity exist in the cave? Do they blame the escaped and returning prisoner for their newfound 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

We now turn from the Platonic allegory of the cave to a recent portrayal of society and its challenges and fictions. Specifically, we reconvene my analysis of VUCA-Plus and suggest ways in which many people seek to escape from the mid-21st-century challenges of VUCA-Plus by entering a metaphoric rabbit hole. Rather than being born in a Platonic cave and never entering a world outside the cave, our 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, we set the stage for this portrait of a contemporary propensity for escape and serenity.

Swirling and Angst-Ridden Conditions

Whether or not we are living in a 21st-century cave, the world is challenging. There is a 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—mighty winds are throwing us off course and back into the cave. We must make decisions in settings 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 we have mentioned, many observers of our contemporary social

condition have gone so far as to suggest that residents of a VUCA-Plus world find themselves exhausted by the flood of contradictory information pouring over them (Newport, 2016; Stoycheva, 2022). 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?

We 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 to the six conditions of VUCA-Plus. These six conditions not only create Angst. They also make amelioration of the conditions of Angst much more difficult. Angst, in turn, tends to pull us toward simplistic, reality-denying, and polarizing beliefs and solutions (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). Those who seek to lead 21st-century organizations and social systems 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. We 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 caught up in the "perfect storm" of VUCA-Plus and societal Angst—especially when we confront a major wave such as COVID-19 (Mura and Bergquist, 2020). 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 shoreline 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 the 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 yield 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, 2011/2013). 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 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 to create and maintain stability. However, triangles are not easy to adjust. Unfortunately, our 21st Century requires 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 require that we be creative. This often means operating in organizational cracks (Stacey,1996) and the intersections between organizations (Johansson, 2004). As Nassim Taleb (Taleb, 2012, p. 3) has poetically noted, "wind extinguishes a candle and energizes fire. Likewise with randomness,

uncertainty, chaos; you want to use them, not hide from them. You want to be the fire and wish for the wind."

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."

When considering the two remaining conditions of Serenity, we seemingly find Calm when we remain silent and still. Unfortunately, immobility is often actually stress-induced freeze. We can easily mistake calm for the response we make when attacked as a 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 (Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955). We take wrong action and distort reality to avoid dissonance (Festinger, 1957). We change our attitudes and beliefs based on our strong need to find balance in our relationships with other people, concerning what they believe (Heider, 1946). It is hard to be friends with those holding widely divergent beliefs.

While dissonance regarding facts and our internal realities drives our beliefs, discrepancies between beliefs and our external relationships drive

our interpersonal relationships. We desperately seek out congruence and consistency between our self-image and our actions, our beliefs and our encounters with other people, between our espoused theory and theory-in-action (Argyris and Schön, 1974), and between our values and our life choices. 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, we now turn to a more detailed analysis of the six conditions of Serenity as each relates to its VUCA-Plus counterpart. We identify several distinct 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 the cutting edge. The three of us then identify ways in which the accompanying option of Serenity can be achieved to escape this specific VUCA-Plus challenge. We also expand on the costs associated with engaging each condition of Serenity.

Volatility and Stability

We are living in a world of 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 evident. The personal impact of volatility on our sense of continuity and stability is profound.

We are often surprised and unprepared. Consequently, we look for 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 for 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".

It is this divisional force that operates not only when a community or nation has an external enemy to confront, but also when, without an external enemy, there is a splitting and polarization of the internal factions. We have witnessed this in Taiwan. When the threat of Chinese invasion dwindles, the internal tensions between competing political parties within Taiwan

intensify. We may also be seeing this same dynamic operating in contemporary American political life.

With the Cold War and clear definition of an external enemy (Soviet Union) being a thing of the past, we have seen to the significant increase in domestic tensions within the United States. Our "new" enemy is no longer those evil "Russians". They have been replaced by the even more villainous "Democrats" and "Liberals" or the disgusting "Republicans" or "Conservatives." It was Abraham Lincoln who long ago warned us that the destruction of the United States could come only from within – as witnessed by the Civil War that he confronted as President (Richardson, 2025).

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* amid 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* amid 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?

We 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. We expand on this metaphor by noting that there are two kinds of anchors: ground and sea.

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 these anchors 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 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 amid 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.

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 (2007) would suggest our world resembles a rugged landscape. There is no dominant element (no single presiding mountain); rather, there are a host of ridges and valleys. We find no single 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 the rapid expansion in 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 elevate 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. According to Taleb, 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 a small stretch of water and perhaps a sand bar that can be crossed at low tide. We sometimes 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 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 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 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 plan for rogue events and black swans—rather than ignoring them. *Contingency Planning* is required. As the name implies, this mode of planning requires that we plan for various contingencies—some positive and some negative. A related planning process, called *pre-mortem reflection,* has been advocated by behavioral economists (Bergquist, 2014b).

While we are accustomed to "post-mortem" assessments after a project is finished, Daniel Kahneman and his colleagues (Kahneman, 2011/2013) propose that we engage in slow and critical thinking before initiating 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 enacting the project. This pre-project reflection helps a project team prepare for potential challenges (contingency planning); it also helps reduce the depth of a change curve that inevitably accompanies major projects or changes in an organization's operations (Bergquist, 2014b).

Over the past decade, each of us has 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, we often take contingency planning processes and pre-mortem processes a step further as a constructive way to find stability in the midst of a volatile world. We invite them to identify some "black swans" that might impact their project or change. The shade of black can vary, with both unexpected positive events lighting the way and darker negative events posing a major challenge.

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 instead likely 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. It concerns the increasing prospects for surprising and "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 the 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 the existing framework. This perspective concerns learning from and adapting to 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 a 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 significant new learning. We find one specific way to be in the world and look for other people who think and act similarly. Together, we created a Bubble of Belief (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). 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 we simply impose 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. We 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 Ourself* 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. We are 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 whom 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 resistant to all new ideas. They are never likely to "leave home" and venture into new territory. Actually, in some cases, a recalcitrant often seeks out certainty and resists change because they were "burned" in the past by uncertainty when they offered something new in their organization or community. The failure to enact new ideas not only leads to the loss of these ideas but also to the loss of a willingness 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, 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, 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 interconnected parts) (Miller and Page, 2007). We must consider many different things and multiple, interrelated events that simultaneously have an impact on our life and work. The systemic impact of this complexity is great. It is hard in the mid-21st Century to make sense of or find meaning in what occurs in our daily life. 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. Fast, "knee-jerk" thinking based on habit must be left at the front door. Discipline and sustained concentration are prerequisites, though 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, we must join with others who similarly distort their world. 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 (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). 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 (2011/2013). 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, 2011/2013; Kahneman, Sibony and Sunstein, 2021).

The Search for Simplicity

As we have already noted, there is a contemporary widespread push for simplicity. This push is aided by the mid-21st Century media we consume. 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 can 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 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. As we have noted, Plato offered a portrait of human beings living 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. Plato's allegory provides us with the opportunity to gain insights into our reflections on the nature of the cave, the world that is projected onto the cave walls, and the nature and agenda of the interpreters.

This opportunity requires that we tolerate or even feel comfortable with Complexity. We should 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 happening around us can be quite confusing. Our world is often not 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. This leaves 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 lenses 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, 2024). It gets even worse when this instability is accompanied by an 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 patience and a willingness 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 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 use greatly impacts what we see. Most importantly, we can look at objects and events at a distance 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 lenses 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. Statistics provide 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 waffles 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, 2011/2013; 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.

One of us [WB] personally witnessed the profound engagement in this phenomenological process on the part of a graduate student attending his 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.

Most of us 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 authoritarian proclivities thrive in this environment. They block 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 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 restrain 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 exists 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 form.

Given the presence of white water following the Second World War, does it still exist today? In agreement with Peter Vaill (2008), we 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 unpredictable manner. We might be able to adjust temporarily to one of these four conditions. However, we will 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 a 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). What 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 that 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 we 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* amid 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 the movement of the double-bladed paddle back and form.

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. We must 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 (Newport, 2016; Stoycheva, 2022). We might steer our craft to a quite 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 precured 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 occur 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 are 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 talk 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 spiritual 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 secular 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 a 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 most 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, amid this widespread escape from true freedom, we find a new challenge: 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, 2024). 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 through constructive dialogue, whereas falsehoods and deliberate lies often can be addressed only in a courtroom.

There is a major systemic impact when contradiction saturates 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). Faced with no one clear "reality," we decide that there is NO true reality. We turn collectively to expedience in our alignment with the authoritative version of "truth." Those who hold the most power and the highest status provide the "truth." 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 minds 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 before 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 viewpoint. It concerns *Integrating* diverse perspectives, policies, and practices. The primary concern from this point of view is recognition that there is one (and only one) unified reality which can be viewed from multiple, complementary viewpoints. The differing perspectives, policies. and practices that we encounter are only components of a larger, unified perspective, policy, 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 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, policy, or practice also has its flaws and disadvantages. We are led back to the first option—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, policy, or practice—thus bringing in the Left Column's focus on *Appreciation*. We don't immediately jump to the problems and barriers associated with each option (which drives us to the second option). Rather, we spend time in the appreciative column seeking a 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 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 seriously are we focusing on this one side? 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 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 while 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 outcomes and impacts are likely to be closely related 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 openings that would allow for flexibility, variant inconsistency, or incongruence (Bergquist, 2026).

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 the highest priority, and groupthink is a prerequisite. 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. Both 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 a "true believer." This often accompanies our entrance into the inner temple. There is a set

of tenets in our religion or life philosophy that requires us to think, feel, and act in a certain manner. Each of the tenets is compatible with each of the other tenets. We find a long history of debate and resolution associated with each tenet that ensures full alignment. This is a "God-given" Gospel. It 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 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 life. Yet, at what cost . . .

In essence, there are two ways 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 to embrace and find both energy and partial solutions within each challenge. Furthermore, we can "manage" the polarities that reside inside each of the six VUCA-Plus conditions.

We find ourselves asking several questions: Are we 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? We ask a second question: Can we hold on to two or more contradictory beliefs without dropping one of them? Perhaps we should replace these two questions with a third and fourth question: Do we have any other option if we are to successfully address the overwhelming challenges of VUCA-Plus? If we are to find true freedom? 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. How do we most successfully identify, analyze, and manage the

contradictions inherent in polarities associated with the six conditions of VUCA-Plus?

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. We can apply what we have learned from engaging each of these six conditions to our work with 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.

Are we 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. Helplessly watching and feeling the polarities swirling around our psyche and soul. Not a very healthy stance . . .

Coda: The Election Results Called Our Optimism into Question

The three of us must be optimists, for we are in the business of promoting human and organizational development. We must believe that improvement in human and organizational lives is desirable and feasible. We find it difficult to acknowledge that individual and collective lives might intentionally NOT be improved. Cognitive dissonant alarms ring out in our heads, hearts, and souls. Is it possible that lives might be SET BACK by decisions made and actions taken in contemporary society?

Is it possible that human beings collectively will decide to make life more difficult for themselves and other members of their community? Do many people prefer to escape down a rabbit hole so that they might live in a fraudulent wonderland of Serenity? Do they consciously choose to abandon honesty and decency to avoid living in the real world of life-fulfilling opportunity (alongside major challenges)?

The 2024 election results provide clear and disturbing answers to the questions we have raised. Results from the presidential election, along with the election of many other public officials, suggest that many people are willing to work against their own best interests. They leap down the rabbit hole of their own accord. No one is pointing a gun at them or declaring that

they must obey. To use Bertrand Gross's phrase, many folks seem to be perfectly content with "friendly fascism."

Suzi's Reflections

Suzi expressed her frustration and disbelief over the current state of affairs in the US, particularly regarding the election of a convicted felon and rapist to a high office. She referenced Jane Mayer's book, *Dark Money*, which she believes lays out the long-term influences that led to this situation. Suzi also shared her struggle with cognitive dissonance, questioning everything she believed in after the election. Suzi further discussed her concerns about the breakdown of checks and balances in the US government and the role of disinformation in these events.

It's alternate facts. It's people who believe alternative facts. Frankly, I don't know how you can look at someone who's been convicted of 34 felonies and convicted of rape and say, "this is someone who should be the president of our country", no matter what you believe about our election process. Even if you just look at the other candidate and think, "oh, we can never have a woman of color as our leader", even if you're just misogynistic and racist, and that's your basis for ruling out the highly educated, highly qualified prosecutor who was his opponent, There's no way for me to grasp that so many Americans actually wanted to elect someone who should not have been allowed to even run for office. In many states, voters who are convicted of a crime are not allowed to vote! Yet we can elect them as President! I think our systems are completely flawed. There's just no way a convicted felon and convicted rapist should be allowed to even run for the highest office of our land, let alone get elected.

There is a breakdown in our systems to begin with. But then, when you add in all of the things that laid the stage for how we got to where we are. Many of these additional destructive factors are identified by Jane Mayer, an award-winning journalist who wrote *Dark Money*. Mayer suggests that the stage was set many years ago for someone like Trump to come to power. The founding story for Dark Money is set in a world that existed 20 to 30 years ago. And there are all of the international influences, China and Russia. Consideration must also be given to what's been happening with influential, big-money networks in America—such as the network formed and funded

by the Koch brothers. There are powerful organizations that have these wonderful, patriotic-sounding names like *The Freedom Caucus*.

Mayer tells us we must also look at what's been happening in universities. These have become "beachheads" for "teaching" (indoctrinating) young minds not about liberal, humane values (as supposedly occurred during the past half century) but about rugged individualistic capitalism. The young "conservatives" are being cultivated for positions of leadership in local and state government. Their political opportunities are being cultivated through extensive gerrymandering and the reworking of the electoral system. The stage for what we're living through now was constructed right in front of us over the past two to three decades. So, what is happening now only makes any sense by looking back to the often-unacknowledged actions taken by right-wing operatives in recent times. It is important to take time to reflect on these political realities. Otherwise, we can go mad trying to determine why people will act in this improbable manner.

I had not taken this broader perspective after the 2016 election. I was bewildered—and thought I had gone mad. How could I have been so wrong about everything? It really made me question everything. Everything I thought was true. Everything I believed to be true about people, about humanity, about myself, about everything. Someone who, to me, obviously was not a good person. And for sure not a good leader. Good grief, I do this for a living. I have been a leadership coach for 30 years. This is what I do, and it made me question everything. Like, maybe I have no business being a leadership coach. I was literally questioning everything. How could I be so wrong? And then the chaos, drama, and trauma that ensued for those four years.

This did happen. The 2016 election tore everything apart for me. I started wondering about everything I'd ever been taught about civics, our government, and our country. About checks and balances. Where were these checks and balances that I've been taught about all along? We're supposed to have all these separate branches of government. How is this allowed to happen? And every single thing that was happening, how is this allowed to happen? The more I learned, the more it was like fireworks going off in my brain, as more parts of my brain were exploding. I experienced an expanding cognitive dissonance, causing more things to be called into question. It was this blowing apart. Part of the problem is that we are

intelligent and educated—how could we be so completely surprised and bewildered?

Then, I read about the long history of Dark Money. I also remembered what I had learned about disinformation, which is distinct from misinformation. Misinformation is more like an honest mistake. You get the facts wrong, you misquote something, or you unintentionally share information that is not accurate. Disinformation is intentionally wrong information used to manipulate people. It is active psychological warfare in the form of misleading or false information that is intended to confuse, lead people to a particular view or opinion, or undermine trust. There is significant evidence that Russia and, to a lesser extent, China used sophisticated disinformation campaigns to interfere with our elections, first to erode trust in Hilary Clinton and get Trump elected, then to further create echo-chambers or silos of polarization based on disinformation to get Trump elected the second time. (see https://apnews.com/article/russia-trump-biden-harris-china-election-disinformation-54d7e44de370f016e87ab7df33fd11c8).

Bill's Perspective

I have discovered something important in listening to Suzi and her experience in confronting the election of 2016, along with the election of 2024. It concerns the expansion of cognitive dissonance. As Suzi has indicated, cognitive dissonance can lead to questioning everything, not just the specific issue at hand. Part of what's not talked about in Cognitive Dissonance Theory is its tendency to generalize. Once you're confronting the dissonance, it causes you to disbelieve or question everything. Not just the specifics of whatever the dissonance is about, but everything. A college teacher tells you that there are 12 valid interpretations of Moby Dick. There's no one interpretation that is correct. You're going to say, "Well, maybe literary interpretation is flawed. And maybe history is flawed. Maybe everything is flawed. What the hell am I doing in college?" There's that existential sense that everything gets torn apart. William Perry (1970) identifies this as the stage of Multiplicity in a journey toward cognitive and moral complexity.

Neither cognitive dissonance nor multiplicity sits very well in my heart, head, and soul. Like Suzi, I found it hard to accept the election results of 2016 and struggle with the results of 2024. In fact, when results were

coming in on both November nights in 2016 and 2024, I headed off to bed at an early hour so that I might replace the agony of defeat and aroused dissonance with a night of sleep. To be frank, I engaged one of the most primitive of all psychological defenses: I chose unconsciousness (sleep). Unfortunately, sleep could not solve anything. I woke up to a new world of Trump leadership and the potential disruption of American democracy. What was I to do?

Kevin's Perspective

At this point, before the inauguration of Trump, I think about why this happened. Why now has the shining light on the hill been dimmed, if not put out? I think that the research we did (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024), provided some insight. The contributing factors are not necessarily just Trump factors *per se*. His personality, the Machiavellian type of personality that he is, took advantage of some of this growing sentiment over several decades.

Here are some of the other factors. There is growing resistance to white male domination historically in this country. If you go back centuries and certainly even decades, this country was largely a white male-dominated Christian nation. And the church and white men controlled pretty much everything. To some degree, one sees that today in our government. There are still a lot of white men.

Obviously, there have been some changes. However, I think racism is foundational to the issue of open borders. The imagined threat stems from the idea that open borders allow in people of color. And as Trump has said, those rapists, those criminals, and those horrible people from other countries are swarming into the United States. They are raping our women and stealing and murdering us. I think that's something he latched onto several years ago. However, a specific concern about critical race theory has emerged recently. Nevertheless, for many years, white men (particularly evangelical Christians) have seen the country moving away from what it was decades and even centuries ago.

And it has now come to a point where there's a huge backlash if you look at evangelical Christians voting for Trump. Evangelical Christians and Christians in general are voting for a man who has been accused of sexual assault. Someone who is a convicted felon. As Mitt Romney concludes,

Trump is a man with an immoral character. And yet they will elevate him as this Christlike figure. At least in part, this relates to growing sentiments about this whole notion of critical race theory. This sentiment also relates to the fear that religion, and particularly Christianity, is declining in the United States. Uneducated and less educated white men are beginning to say: Well, hang on a second. We were somewhat in a strong position simply by being white and male. We had some level of authority, and we're seeing that disappear." The post-election research certainly shows quite convincingly that the growth of this sentiment was a major influential phenomenon that Democrats and liberals have largely ignored.

What is Revealed

Three defensive routines can be identified regarding the reactions of all three of us to both elections. Furthermore, we don't think the three of us have been alone in our engagement with these three routines. They are manifest in the perspectives and practices of many other Americans and the collective perspectives and practices of many American institutions.

Partition: We use the term Partition to identify the first of these three defensive routines. All three of us have blocked out the opposing viewpoint regarding President Trump and the MAGA movement. We try to listen for a few minutes to Fox News or other right-wing news outlets and find that this attempt to take in the "other side" leads only to heightened anxiety, anger, and despair.

Our cognitive dissonance has been reactivated. If these right-wingers are "right," then every value we hold dear and every perspective on the way the United States should operate is called into question. We quickly switch to one of our preferred cable news channels. We follow the same partitioning practice when acquiring news and political perspectives from the Internet, magazines, and books we read. More generally, it seems that polarization in our society (and in most societies) increases with the presence of VUCA-Plus conditions. We want our world to be stable, certain, simple, clear, calm, and consistent (the conditions of Serenity). This only occurs for most of us when we attend only to those sources of information that "sing our song."

Intellectualization: This is our second defensive routine. As consultants, executive coaches, graduate school professors, and authors, we find this routine to be our "strong suit." We can intellectualize our way out of many

emotionally laden situations. We have written about leadership, sales, organizational conflict, interpersonal relationships, and even intimacy. Each of these areas is potentially charged with emotions. We have written books about political processes (including this one) that enable us to handle the emotion-laden realization that our nation has twice chosen a flawed person to become its president.

While not everyone in the United States is inclined toward intellectualization, they will use their intellect to deflect reality and manage their emotions. In this book, we often refer to the behavioral economists' identification of flawed heuristics (such as recency being right). We would also point to a heuristic that is often referenced by one of our medical colleagues. It has a fancy Latin name: *post hoc ergo proctor hoc* (After which, therefore because of which). He points out how common this heuristic is in the field of medicine: "I tried some miracle pill and sure enough I was soon feeling better".

This person assumes that their improved health (after which) results from taking this pill (because of which). Or: "My child became autistic (after which) because they were vaccinated (because of which)". Similarly, we would suggest that many folks in our society "intellectualize" (reduce cognitive dissonance) when they declare that Trump's electoral victories (after which) are a result of his ethical actions on behalf of America's welfare (because of which). What comes before isn't always the cause of what comes later, especially in the political arena.

Regression: The third defensive routine that we embrace to "get through" the emotional labyrinth of Trump's victories is the most primitive of the three. We engage in Regression to a more primitive state of thinking and feeling, thanks in large part to the powerful neurobiological functioning of the Limbic system's Amygdala. Engaging in what we have identified as Osgood's (1957) semantic categorization, the Amygdala provides ongoing monitoring of "threat level." The extent to which an entity (person, institution, perspective, or practice) is threatening depends on its intentions (bad vs. good) and its agency (active vs. passive; strong vs. weak).

Conclusions

The three of us each find that we are inclined at times to label Trump, his policies, and his minions as bad, active, and strong. This Amygdala-based

labeling is particularly active when we're tired, frustrated, or anxious. We adopt a very regressive state when leaning toward a belief that "Evil" does exist in the world and that it threatens the very existence of American democracy and even human life on this planet. Once again, the three of us assume that we are not alone in this primitive categorization. Terms such as "evil," "barbaric," and "monstrous" are assigned by each political camp to those leading the opposing camp. Tragically, this regression has repeatedly appeared in the history of humankind. The human capacity to demonize "the other side" might ultimately be the greatest "evil" that we must confront.

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Chapter Four
Hope, Skepticism, and Freedom

In this chapter and Chapter Five, we leave our general pronouncements regarding challenges associated with the journey to freedom. We set aside life in a Platonic cave or a wonderland of Serenity. 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 independence. This was not an easy process for citizens 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 turn to other people for guidance. There is no one to tell them what to do.

Berne Weiss and Bill Bergquist witnessed the magnitude and unpredictability of changes occurring in Eastern Europe during the early 1990s. They also witnessed the emergence of Freedom. This emergence was a source of great hope—but also a great challenge—for the citizens of Eastern Europe during the early 1990s. Bergquist and Weiss described emergent Freedom in their book about the social revolution occurring in Estonia and Hungary during the Soviet Union's collapse (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994). Berne and Bill distilled concepts of freedom from Western literature, along with their personal experiences in Hungary, Estonia, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Most importantly, their conclusions were based on interviews conducted in Estonia and Hungary. The hope for 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 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 long-standing 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 personal lives due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. They believed these changes were irreversible, and many challenges awaiting them primarily concerned their ability to live with and sustain their new freedom. Although history of the past in both countries led to skepticism, more recent history led to hope and challenge.

In setting the stage for our discussion of the reactions of Hungarians and Estonians to this freedom, we began with these contradictory feelings of hope and skepticism and, in particular, the sources and expression of these feelings. Contradiction and other conditions of VUCA-Plus were alive and well in Estonia and Hungary of the early 1990s. We provide the original analysis, while also bringing this analysis up to date with the arc of hope and skepticism since the early 1990s in societies throughout our volatile, unpredictable, complex, ambiguous, turbulent, and contradictory world. We 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 the Stage

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.)

Rapid Collapse

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, alongside 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. Goods and services were often generated to serve the primary purpose of keeping everyone employed. It was precisely because the Soviet distribution service was never truly effective that people throughout all the republics became utterly dependent on the few goods and services that did reach 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 their own goods and services. The efforts at centralized planning became so convoluted and inefficient that the Soviet Union came to a standstill. The system was simply too big and too bloated to make any effective transformation (despite the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev).

Peaceful Revolution

A second key factor led to hope. Widespread violence was virtually absent in the Eastern European revolution. Peace is necessary 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, which occurred without any deaths or destruction of property. In *Summer Meditations*, Vaclav Havel (1992, p. 5) writes about 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 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 much less visionary. He is horribly more realistic.

Change Leading to No Change

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. The same policies were often followed, though different words were now being used. The truth was still being distorted. Extreme statements were still being made. Only now, they were the opposite of what

was said before. In other words, the more that things seemed to change in the former Soviet Union, the more, in some sense, they stayed the same.

Is this still the case? Are Vladimir Putin and other leaders of Russia, as well as many of the former Soviet satellites (such as Orbán in Hungary), simply new versions of the old established 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 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 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, recurring patterns in former Soviet countries might also appear in their dominant epistemology (ideas about truth). Was this epistemology 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 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 newfound 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 consumers who are informed of everything from education to nutrition. This is because most of us have had the experience of buying empty packaging and consuming a whole lot of B. S. (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). During the early 1990s, Hungarians and Estonians confronted bureaucratic duplicity but not duplicity in the marketplace. Today, there seems to be greater awareness throughout the world regarding the prevalence of lies and premeditated dishonesty (Ariely, 2012)

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. Weiss and Bergquist witnessed or were told about the great celebration and euphoria that had accompanied the many tangible steps 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 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 people in Eastern Europe during the 1990s, freedom primarily concerned one's ability to travel, speak the truth as one saw it, and 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 as national liberation. National flags were flown for the first time. Native songs were sung in the home language. Governments were formed within specific national boundaries.

Freedom of Speech

The people who were interviewed spoke about newfound 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). By the 1990s, they could speak freely in public about their discontent. Citizens could openly express their opinions without fear of reprisal.

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). Profundity became apparent when Berne Weiss and Bill Bergquist listened to story after story about remaining silent on important issues. Stories were told about the pervasive uncertainty regarding what one could and could not discuss with other people. We listened to old men and women tell their stories of repression and discrimination. They recounted their confinement in concentration camps. Narratives were conveyed with deep remorse and with relief.

Those who were interviewed also recollected their recent experiences of freedom in their own home. Children and grandchildren sat in amazement and deep respect as their parents (and grandparents) 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 can speak up and recount stories from their youth that they couldn't share with family members before the revolution. One of the young Estonians, 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, older men and women in both Estonia and Hungary had remained mute about these experiences to avoid implicating their children and grandchildren. Memories of their youthful protests and/or arbitrary confinements were to remain imprisoned in the heads and hearts of these older citizens. One of the women we 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 adults in both countries who were interviewed 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. If you had lands before the Communist time and the Communists took them 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, and 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 interviewed leaders of the Estonian government noted, there was still much to learn throughout Eastern Europe about capitalism and entrepreneurial ventures. Bill Bergquist taught a course on marketing at a newly created Estonian business school, even though this is not remotely his area of expertise. Apparently, in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man or woman (or psychologist) is king. Bill was the temporary king. However, the Estonians are fast learners. They soon no longer needed Bill Bergquist as a marketing expert.

Many other newly minted entrepreneurs joined the entrepreneur who started this business school. 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 align with small business traditions prevalent 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 about doing business in the Western manner. 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 and Viktor Orbán as leading entrepreneurs. Once again, it may be that nothing ultimately changes in many sectors of a newly liberated society. Like nature, humans 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 a pull 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! 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 produced a vibrant electronics industry, producing many devices and processes for digitally based communications. We are not surprised that this has been a focus of Estonian entrepreneurship, for a majority of citizens in this country were using mobile devices even in the early 1990s – the landlines in Estonia 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:

> Estonians are more than just technologically hip. They are addicted to mobile phones and completely Internet literate. In 2010, Estonia rid itself of all 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 online via a national identity card. I believe that there are more cell phones in their country, percentage-wise, than in the United States.

It is instructive to note that Skype was created in Estonia—exemplifying this very successful focus on digital communication. While Theroux's

observations are now somewhat dated, the emphasis on technology and personal entrepreneurship still holds true in Estonia. One of the Estonian cities, Tartu, has become a new Silicon Valley. National economic policies concerning a balanced budget, low public debt, and a competitive tax system have enabled Estonia to sustain economic growth and be rated by the World Bank as having an "advanced economy."

Estonia seems to have 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. While living in the newly emerging Digital world, Estonians continue to live in an old, almost Medieval world (evident in the continuing preservation of the old town in Tallinn).

One of us co-authored a book with Ken Pawlak about the six cultures that existed in American higher education during the first years of the 21st Century (Bergquist and Pawlak, 2008). Two of these six cultures seem quite applicable to the description of Estonia's two worlds (and the two worlds existing in many other contemporary societies). These two cultures (virtual and tangible) stand in opposition to one another. The virtual culture is represented in Estonia's reliance on digital communication devices. The tangible culture is represented by the preservation of Old Tallinn. The tangible culture is also represented in a strong emphasis on national identity as witnessed in Estonian music, the pride Estonians take in their long-standing universities, and their retention of the Estonian language (understood by very few people outside Estonia).

We suggest that the "dueling" virtual and tangible cultures need one another. Without "anchoring" provided by the tangible culture, a virtual culture becomes nothing more than an artificial reality. There is nothing to test the validity of the virtual when a tangible foundation is absent. Conversely, the tangible culture requires the innovative vision of virtual technologies, much as it needed other technological innovations in the past to avoid stagnation. This dual emphasis on and dynamic tension between 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).

Freedom of Choice

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

> I hope my children know more than I, so they can choose, because 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 suggested:

> Now everything depends on their daily choices and 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 TV, and now everything is turned upside down. They can choose between twelve channels, and they have to walk to a shop and choose a car. 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 non-institutional 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 converts. They can freely 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 Middle East), there has been increased constraint on the practice of certain religions. Violent actions are even 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 so that we might eliminate freedom of choice for other people?

It should be noted that even after the Soviet Union's collapse, many Hungarians and Estonians felt that the state/party combine still sought to discourage them from following their religious leanings, and some of them felt compelled to circumvent the obstacles. Even though the governments in both Estonia 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 interviewed by Berne Weiss and Bill Bergquist during the early 1990s indicated that religious practice was not particularly important for them. They had either been "brain-washed" by the Soviet regime to devalue religion and spiritual practice or (more often) they 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 impact their lives. Other choices concerning consumer and economic activities had a much greater impact: what do I buy and where do I work?

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 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. More denominations were not vying for followers and the state's financial support. In various quarters, there was concern over the presence of religious sects and New Age spiritual beliefs. Many Estonians and Hungarians viewed these as an 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 who was interviewed provided the following observation:

> Cults were the subject of a panel discussion and a 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, in this state of mind, 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? Perhaps it is worth asking: Are any of us doing a much better job during the challenging 21st-century years of VUCA-Plus? How are we doing with the 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 collapsing barriers were among the most dramatic and concrete manifestations of newfound 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 those interviewed noted:

> Freedom for me means borderlessness, 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 sea beside 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. It may be one of the important, distinguishing features of freedom in the European communities, when compared to the freedom temporarily experienced in many Middle 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 Middle Eastern 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 Middle Eastern 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 assists? 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 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 and Bill interviewed during the early 1990s spoke about a collective sense of freedom in their country, coupled with a new nationalistic spirit. Citizens were now free to plot their nation's future course. They could pick their country's friends and enemies, determine their country's destiny, and make their collective mistakes. The spirit of nationalism that accompanied the new freedom created a desire for new interpersonal bonds. In *Freedom*, Weiss and Bergquist expressed their hope that these bonds would be based on trust. They hoped these bonds would replace the pervasive mistrust created when Soviet officials encouraged neighbors to spy and report on one another. Was their hope realistic?

Yes, in many ways, the foundation was laid during these early years of freedom for a nationwide 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). It should also be noted (regretfully) that this impending threat, along with the independent ambitions of Viktor Orbán, led not to freedom but instead to Orbán's dictatorial rule in Hungary.

Fortunately, the recent election in Hungary opens the opportunity for a new phase of freedom in this country. On the other hand, the ongoing actions taken by Russian leaders against other Eastern European countries (such as 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 distinctive history. It reinvokes memories and stories from the past that can once again be told about national heroes, aspirations, and achievements. During the early 1990s, this autonomy allowed both Hungarians and Estonians to mourn and celebrate individually and collectively. 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 by ideology.

The hope that Bill Bergquist and Berne Weiss expressed during the 1990s might not have been fully justified; however, the lingering impact of temporary autonomy might never be tamped 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. They are passed down from generation to generation, to be renewed repeatedly during the long search for autonomy and freedom among those living in these countries.

Clearly, history and the past are 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 can be made about the new sense of identity and autonomy that is 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.

Remarkably, 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 been remarkably short in recent years. Soviet books on Estonian history, for instance, only briefly addressed the life of this country before 1942 (the year of Soviet occupation), focusing instead on the introduction of communism into Estonian society. Both personal and public histories create and sustain unrealistic expectations (hopes) and skepticism. Ironically, they frequently reside in the same person (alongside an appetite for both the innovative/virtual and the traditional/tangible).

Skepticism About Freedom

As with hope, skepticism about freedom comes from both personal and collective experiences for Estonians and Hungarians. There was good reason for skepticism and pessimism during the early 1990s. These negative perspectives made sense, given the failure of many expectations regarding the positive impact of freedom. This failure was compounded by the deterioration of many domains of Estonian and Hungarian society beyond the low levels left by the crumbling Soviet empire.

Economic Hardships

The liberation of both Estonia and Hungary created major economic hardship, which heightened skepticism and pessimism in both countries. While the citizens of Estonia and Hungary were better off economically than those living in most 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 choice but no money." Men and women who had lost their government-guaranteed jobs were now unable to find new jobs, given 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 to at least short-term prosperity. They hoped for a longer-term transition into the prosperous status of their neighbors in Western Europe. They instead found economic decline and stagnation. Estonians and Hungarians often became weary during the early 1990s. They questioned whether real economic change had occurred in their countries, if it would ever occur, or if it had already occurred and left them in worse shape.

Many interviewees spoke of their daily struggles to survive in their communities. They were ready to embrace their Estonian and Hungarian identity—an identity denied them for the last forty to fifty years. Yet, they had to scramble to secure an economic base just at the point when the potential for a renewed identity was at hand. 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, greater economic prosperity is to be found in Estonia (and in most of Eastern Europe). It is found among a select few in Hungary. However, as we have noted, another existential threat has dampened economic optimism. This is the threat of Russian invasion. Once again, security reigns supreme.

Before leaving this skepticism regarding economic prosperity, we would like to dig a bit deeper. A sense of economic well-being is based in part on the daily realities of living with needs and wishes being met. There is also the matter of a comparative sense of well-being. In many instances, a lingering sense of economic privation is aggravated by the dreams 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. We are reminded of a similar condition found in South Africa during the same time period. 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 for all people had clearly not yet come to pass in either Eastern Europe or South Africa. Some individuals in Estonia and Hungary are now becoming wealthy (or are at least more publicly displaying their wealth). This further aggravates economic skepticism. Communication with the West's media and travelers from Western countries has become more common, thereby compounding the problem of contrasting economic conditions. In essence, for many years, liberation led to a worsening of perceived economic conditions in Eastern Europe. Citizens of these countries became more keenly aware of their own privation compared to living standards in the United States and Western Europe.

While there were major discrepancies during the Communist era, in terms of 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. For many years, Viktor Orbán offered his own display of wealth, as featured in the elegant hotels and restaurants located by the "Beautiful Blue Danube". This display has apparently grown thin with many Hungarians who have recently thrown him out of office.

Social Dislocation

Although by 1993, Hungary and Estonia had not yet inherited the West's economic prosperity, they had 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 who were interviewed spoke of the painful process of losing friends with differing opinions about politics, economics, or religion.

In the past, they had a common enemy: 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, the previously suppressed disagreements emerge: our past friends might now become our enemies. With freedom from external threat comes an internal threat. The re-emergence of a threat from the East (Russia) could lead to the reestablishment of old alliances and even friendships. The European Union and NATO might become stronger.

We 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 this polarization is often exhibited. When Berne Weiss and Bill Bergquist were in Eastern Europe, many of the citizens of these countries were not 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. They found that they did not hold the same beliefs as many 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? And have the citizens of other countries (such as the United States) leaned toward their own intolerance for many citizens of their own country?

Have conditions regressed in the "mature" democracies? Polarization in many countries has 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. The social fabric has been rendered. There is a lack of respect for the rights of other people. We suspect that social dislocation might be found throughout our contemporary world. However, it may have been greater in former Soviet countries.

Architecture and Societal Dynamics

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. Alienation was accompanied by social dislocation. Arbitrary reassignments of location or occupation were particularly prevalent among those who were defeated. Their country had been invaded. They may have been members of a

minority group. The sense of a viable self was defeated with the defeat of their country. Citizens of countries that had been independent were not forced to call themselves citizens of a new nation (the Soviet Union) that was a forced smashing together of diverse national identities and historically embedded cultures.

The dominant architectural style in the Soviet Union was known (bitterly) as socialist realism. Ironically, and sadly, this style approximates an architecture that was popular in the United States during the 1930s. By the 1950s, this style was widely applied in many US urban renewal projects. Housing projects of the Bronx are notable applications of this style (under the dictatorial leadership of New York's Robert Moses). Labeled "functional" in the United States, this model of urban development has often led to the same kind of alienation and anomie found in the Soviet Union.

Estonians have pointed to remarkable observations made by Robert Sommer, a 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. We suggest that "stone cities" have also littered the urban landscapes of most countries (such as the USA) that purported to be "modern" and "functional" during the late 20th century.

Back in the United States, Sommer wrote 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, such as fountains or plazas, that tend to draw people together. These spaces are labeled *sociopetal* by Sommer because 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 farmers' markets (Sommer, 1980)

By contrast, there are public spaces and architecture that drive people away from one another. Sommer used the term *sociofugal* to describe the outward-pushing dynamics operating in these spaces. These sociofugal spaces might be highway systems that lead people out of urban areas into the suburbs. These highway systems serve the sociofugal function of pushing people out

of the city. They also serve this function in a second way. The newly constructed highways often occupied space that formerly was the site of urban ghettos that housed closely-knit, sociopetal communities. An interstate highway running through a city like Chicago can destroy and replace many sociopetal communities. New public housing projects are constructed in place of these closely-knit ethnic communities.

The new high-rise Stone Cities are sociofugal . From the moment they were erected, these cities were an alienating form of public housing. Much as in the case of Estonia, the new "functional" architecture drove people away from one another. Those living in these structures were pushed into isolation. Evenings are no longer spent on the street, for there is no longer a street. Time was now devoted to watching TV. If there was a "neighborhood," it was now often found at work rather than at home. We also found sociofugal separation operating in other American communities during the second half of the 20th century.

Even in the suburbs, separation was in the churches and schools. Pews separated churchgoers. Congregants sat quietly throughout the service. None of these participating rituals. Students sat at individual school seats with side tables rather than at shared tables. Ranch-style homes allowed every family member to have their own bedroom. A den was included where family members could sit quietly beside each other, watching *The Ed Sullivan Show* or *I Love Lucy*. Homes were no longer built with front porches, given that no one stopped by while walking down the street. "Parlors" (French for "conversation") were a thing of the past. Living rooms often remained unoccupied. The parlor and living room were intended for the entertainment of guests. However, folks rarely stopped by unannounced and were only occasionally invited for an evening of conversation (and perhaps a meal).

Today, we can point to the rapid expansion in digital sales. No need for a farmer's market or even a standard supermarket. We can order food online. It is only an emphasis on fresh, locally grown food that attracts many people to the farmers' market (held several times a week in their community). The sociofugal spaces forged by freeways, suburban sprawl, home designs, and digital marketing are alienating for several reasons.

They not only disrupt one's relationship with other people (even family members) but also disrupt one's relationship with oneself. It is in relation

to other people that we forge our personal identity and sense of self-worth (Sullivan, 1953; Gergen, 1991/2000). Sitting in an isolating stone city apartment or an interpersonally numbing TV-based den is rarely conducive to either self-reflection or establishing a sense of life purpose and meaning. Neither the Estonians nor the Americans benefit from a sustained sociofugal existence.

Why is hard architecture and why are alienating cities of stone 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. Fascism had presumably been defeated, yet the architecture remains like the scars of a pox after the plague. Even today, in the mid-21st century, we find the push toward a fascist-era arch and golden ballroom being engaged by our American president.

When Berne Weiss and Bill Bergquist were writing their book, there was only elevated hope and an accompanying disappointment about their living environment in Estonia and Hungary. These alienating living conditions have not changed rapidly and still haven't changed much in the former Soviet countries. Nor, apparently, in the United States. What was once the utopian (and fascist-leaning) vision of the 1930s, as displayed in the *Life* magazine covers of the 1930s, has become something of a stony nightmare.

During their stay in Estonia and Hungary, Bill Bergquist and Berne Weiss observed that some people wished for the old ways of living in Eastern Europe. These traditionalists 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 societal rules and regulations, 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 setting? Sadly, adjustment was often the outcome. As a result,

the alienation experienced in the housing centers 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. This, in turn, seems to be linked to passivity. Apparently, the Soviet system was saturated with alienation. What is the relationship between depression, authoritarianism, and the experience of freedom? We would suggest that this is a fundamental question of our time.

We note that there is another side to the story about the societal dynamics of life in Estonia and Hungary. During their early years in both Estonia and Hungary (while the Soviet Union still existed), Berne and Bill experienced the remarkable peace and security that comes with knowing that one can walk freely on city streets or parks at night. While sociofugal forces operated in the homes of Hungarians and Estonians, a sociopetal force operated outside the home. This dynamic seemed to provide not only a sense of safety but also of hospitality.

Was this just a matter of repressive martial law, or did people really seem to care about one another out of the streets of Budapest or Tallinn? Bill and Berne realized at the time that this safety and civility probably would not last for long in Hungary or Estonia after these countries broke free from Russian rule (and strict law enforcement). Their 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 evident in the significant increase of begging and theft in Hungarian and Estonian cities. 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 must be cautious regarding our attribution of cause. These conditions of social collapse were widely found and still are found today in countries throughout the world. However, it is disturbing to consider that freedom potentially comes at the cost of safety and civility.

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 now less common.

Unlike the Hungarians and Estonians, who instinctively refused to believe everything that government officials told them, Americans have tended to accept what their government tells them—at least until the first two decades of the 21st Century. Americans, 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 finding (and 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, in the third decade of the 21st Century, we are witnessing a return to old ways of ruling a nation. Widespread support for strong leadership has been found in the rule of Russia's Vladimir Putin and, until recently, the dominant control of Hungary's Orbán.

For Putin, this authoritarian rule is associated with a desire to restore high international status and reclaim former Soviet territory. For Orbán, it was more a matter of stemming the influx of Middle 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. And for Hungary, another step forward. 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 was that the opposition of Western countries to socialist economic systems came with the recognition that these systems inevitably required political repression and 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 interpret 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 Western countries.

We can observe a mixed outcome from the perspective of almost thirty years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Clearly, in some Eastern European countries (such as the two countries Berne Weiss and Bill Bergquist studied), there has been a gradual and sometimes 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 is experienced in differing ways in various societies and cultures. There is no one formula for success. 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 may be even more firmly grounded in 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 accurate. As a well-traveled young banker said during one of the 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 by 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, 2024)?

Because the citizens of Hungary and Estonia were exposed to systematic lies for so many years, belief in public statements was lacking when freedom arrived in 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? Has this alienation spread widely to other societies?

We find renewed attention to these dynamics concerning truth and reality in the research conducted by behavioral economists, most notably Kahneman (2011/2013), 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 party rhetoric was clearly ideological and political, men and women joined the party for many reasons, only some of which related to sociopolitical issues. At a very basic level, for some people, membership in the Communist Party could 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) concludes 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 is a surrogate religion:

> [Communism]professes to answer the religious questions of the human soul and to give a meaning to life. Communism is integrated; it encompasses the whole of life; it relates to no one specific section of life. 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 as 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 Estonia exemplifies this strong desire for connectedness (even if it is now done digitally).

Bill Bergquist and Berne Weiss found that the urge to join was related not just to a desire for connections. It also aligned with more practical, economic motivation. Older men and women joined the Communist Party to get a job, hold a job, or obtain a promotion. An 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, it was very dangerous. A colleague of ours 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, our 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, reared its ugly head. Things also did not change in terms of economics. Ironically, many of the privately ambitious and most entrepreneurial of 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 the 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 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 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 as those attracted to the Communist Party in the Soviet Union. Do we find those men and women everywhere 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 Estonia's economic, political, and cultural world. We can look more broadly at the role played by epistemology in the experience of freedom. We are ready to examine our

fundamental approach to arriving at and acting 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 based on our assumptions about the information we receive, the analysis we make regarding this information, and how we turn observations and analyses into action.

Specifically, we 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." Right and wrong are 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, social status, or 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 Hungary and Estonia, particularly among former party members. They lost their idealistic dreams or never had them. They 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."

A story told by a famous Estonian scientist (we will call Endel) was particularly disturbing. What is Endel's Truth? His narrative of survival and even triumph under the Soviet regime is filled with 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 must 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 fare 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 party members 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 is one to believe about public pronouncements made in Estonia and Hungary over the past 30 years? Are the success stories we 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 the rules, so there's no way to know the consequences of 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 have discovered major glitches in 21st-century capitalism that they now openly viewed. 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 culture with disparate and often incompatible values, aspirations, and images of the successful life. 21st Century freedom inevitably seems 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, we propose that citizens of these post-Soviet societies were living and perhaps still live under conditions of the profound and pervasive contradictions found in VUCA-Plus. They are ironists (using Rorty's term).

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 historist 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. We are 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 Erikson:

> . . . 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.

At this point, we become ironists ourselves 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 allow a civilization to "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.

However, we are unwilling to halt our analysis at this point. This leaves 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

Theroux's questions that is offered in a general manner by 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.

Rorty is replacing the modern notion of enduring truth (a dualist frame) with a utopian thought in its continually evolving form.

Music and Social Cohesion

Is Rorty's utopian vision aligned with what was witnessed in Estonia following the Soviet collapse? What connects the present with the past – and an envisioned future in Estonia? While there was regression to a dualistic frame, many Estonians exhibited a remarkable ability to embrace both hope and skepticism. Without becoming too Pollyannish about the challenging circumstances still to be found in Estonia, a societal "glue" was evident. This glue (social cohesion) enabled citizens of this newly independent country to embrace both hope and skepticism. Furthermore, this glue was found in the enduring culture of Estonia, and in particular, 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 Estonians' 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." One rarely walks down a street in Tallinn without hearing a musical group in rehearsal. Bill Bergquist fondly recalls a Tartu University tradition 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 violence, the Estonians softly but firmly asserted their national identity and demand for independence through their music and related art forms.

Bill Bergquist 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 Part's music and Jarvi's musical leadership. We have identified many factors that contribute to the intermixing of hope and skepticism. We have also brought forth the sustained drive toward independence despite skepticism. However, there is something special about Estonian music. At the Tallinn Concert Hall, Bill witnessed the powerful manifestation of Ironic courage in the music produced by Arvo Part and Neeme Jarvi.

We are left with a unique Estonian version of Hope: Culture (and music) in this country can provide Hope by bridging the past, present, and future. At the same time, we are skeptical about our hopeful optimism about Estonia. We acknowledge the power of regressive authoritarianism in Estonia (and all other societies). We recognize the appeal of a dualistic frame when things get complex (and VUCA-Plus saturated). In a state of widespread disillusionment, we fully realize that a Multiplistic frame of reference will emerge among the citizens of Estonia (and other countries). A false Multiplistic dualism is likely to emerge. Truth either exists everywhere or it exists nowhere.

In conclusion, it is critical to assert that we need not regress into Dualism or embrace a cynical Multiplicity. One can instead choose to embrace and move forward with a commitment to the enduring virtues of a free society. This commitment can be made while embracing both hope and skepticism regarding the potential of true freedom. This freedom will be found in a social system where citizens have difficult but important choices to make about shared interests and the balancing of individual rights and collective responsibilities. Freedom comes with a price, but it also comes with great potential rewards.

Coda: Lack of Education and Negative Political Climate

In their reflections on life immediately after the 2024 election, Kevin, Bill and Suzi offered diverse perspectives regarding hope and skepticism. They focused not just on the state of mind and heart in the United States, but also on the often-disturbing way societies throughout the world are confronting challenging times. While looking elsewhere in the world and finding abundant reasons for long-term (if not immediate) Hope.

The three authors mostly found reasons not to hope. They shared a profound skepticism regarding the struggle for true freedom in all societies. They were particularly skeptical about the mindset that prevails in half of the adult population in the United States. The matter of education was often addressed by Bill, Suzi and Keven, as was the general sense of negativity regarding the state of life in the United States. Among those on the right-wing, negativity focused on the current state of American life, while among those on the left-wing, negativity was primarily directed to the prospects of a declining operation of the American government

The three of us share our perspectives regarding the current and anticipated state of the American government and its impact on the USA population. Kevin relates transitions in the United States to shifts that occurred in South Africa (the country in which he was born). Along with Suzi, Kevin expresses concern about the lack of education among voters and how this affects their understanding of political issues. Kevin tries to establish a balanced perspective regarding the potential benefits embedded in certain aspects of the Trump presidency.

Suzi similarly shares her hope about the potential maintenance of at least part of the current upturn in the American economy. She believes that the Biden administration's efforts to improve the economy are starting to show results—just as these efforts are about to be blunted by the incoming administration. On the other hand, Suzi conveys her deep concern about the impact of Trump's election on the tragic events occurring in the Middle East. Like Kevin and Bill, Suzi believes the 2024 election impact will spread throughout the world. She believes the shift in US leadership will negatively impact the unresolved conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians.

Like Kevin and Suzi, Bill looks to the world beyond when reflecting on the 2024 election. Following Kevin's lead, Bill turns to another country and

another time. He compares the current situation in America to the rise of antisemitism and fascism in France prior to World War II. He suggests that the current political climate resembles the climate that led to the Dreyfus affair in France. Bill agrees with Kevin and Suzi that the lack of education and understanding among voters is a significant issue in contemporary American life.

Kevin's Perspective

Let me link the 2014 election in the USA to my own experiences in South Africa. Both similar and different dynamics were operating in the political climate of these two countries. The dynamics were exactly the opposite during the early days of apartheid, when white men in South Africa dominated the political scene. More broadly, the South African church played a major role in the lives of those residing in this country. De Kerk, head of the Africana Reform Party, controlled everything. De Kerk and other members of his party dominated the government. They dominated the country. And, of course, they dominated the so-called indigenous population.

White Africans were in power. The black man was the danger. They were inferior. They were uneducated. They had to be kept in their place. However, over the decades, it became clear that anti-government "subversion" was not going to go away. It couldn't be dealt with. Nelson Mandela was beginning to become known to the average Whites, particularly the White South Africans. The danger, if handled correctly, was not there while he was in prison. Eventually, Nelson Mandela was released. South Africans found him to be a compassionate leader. There was no hatred in this remarkable man's heart. There was no hatred for the white man. There was no need for vindictiveness, despite being imprisoned for 27 years. South Africans in general started saying: "Hang on a minute, this is an intelligent, compassionate leader who has every right to be angry, has every right to be vindictive and isn't."

I think it was Mandela's leadership style of openness—of accepting the white man but wanting equality—that led many white South Africans to say: "You know, this is the way forward". Now, consider Mandela versus Trump. Two complete opposites. I thought Barack Obama would be that person in the USA who replicated Mandela's style of leadership. And I think in many respects, he was that kind of person. The leadership style he displayed

during his eight years in office was very similar to that engaged by Mandela. He's that intelligent, accepting, visionary. Despite that, here comes Trump. A quite different path is now being taken in the United States from that taken in South Africa after Mandela. Given our current path, we need substantially more education among citizens of the USA. We need an increased understanding of and constant involvement in addressing many critical issues.

There's no doubt that the Trump win was based in large part on concerns about illegal immigration in particular. His win was also based on the related threat perceived by white men and particularly Christians regarding their dominant role in society. Trump took advantage of the pervasive anxiety found among these men, lying about much of what is occurring in contemporary American society. Many fearful people believe what he says, even if it is an extreme, blatant lie. There are two aspects of that major phenomenon on which I think Democrats and liberals failed horribly. First, there is a challenge facing most modern countries regarding Illegal immigration. It is not acceptable from my point of view for people to simply walk into our country. As an immigrant who took 17 years to get my citizenship, I find it surprising, disappointing, and even insulting that people can walk into this country illegally. They know their entrance is not legal but think they deserve services.

On the one hand, we absolutely need immigration. We need people coming into this country for economic reasons, for reasons related to diversity, and for many other reasons. However, we should be doing it on the basis of legal processes. People should not be able to operate in this country as illegal immigrants. I wasn't illegal. They would have kicked me out, I'm sure if my entrance wasn't legal. I did it in a legal way. It cost me a lot of money, and it took me 17 years. Why should people come in despite the fact that we need them? I think there is another important factor: we need to ensure regular, constant communication about immigration with the American population.

Citizens must understand that Democrats are against illegal immigration. We must allow immigration. Our economy and effectiveness as a nation relies on a high level of diversity, but it must be legal immigration. I engaged in a legal process. If I'd come in illegally, I would have to go back to South Africa. I think that the lack of messaging and understanding of the law has

complicated matters. What is the law? We are a country of laws, and we stick to them. The Democrats seem to have softened that commitment to lawful processes.

I think this is a critical issue. Democrats could have simply said we need immigration, but it needs to be legal. We will make it easy. We will make it simple because we need the immigrants: We want you, but we need everything to be legal." As Democrats, we should have taken this balanced approach. But what do we do now about the issue of people fleeing and crossing the border because they would have been killed in their homeland? How do you deal with that? This is a very difficult question to answer.

I'll share my honest view of the role our country should play in the world. The world can be a tragic place. People are suffering terribly around the world. It is proper to be concerned about these horrible conditions—to wring our hands about it. But the United States cannot be the world's solution to all problems. You have to be hard minded about certain problems in the world, however difficult that is. I remember talking to my economics professor at Point Loma College back in 1978. He was probably only 15 years older than me at the time. He had a nervous psychological breakdown because he was so concerned about problems around the world. We had discussions about apartheid and how terrible it was. He was frustrated that he couldn't do anything about it. I eventually said to him as a younger person: "You can't be the solution to everybody's problems."

A similar struggle is occurring throughout the United States. If Venezuela is having problems and the gangs in Mexico and around the world are destroying their communities, then we can stand up and talk about certain principles of human rights. However, I don't think we can then actively be the solution to everybody's problems. So, however difficult that may be, we must be able to say we are first looking at the United States and its integrity. We must develop and apply our laws in a humanitarian way. But we cannot then go beyond our national boundaries and solve everybody else's problems, however painful that might be.

Now that we have these concerns, how are we handling them? My wife, Jennifer, and I have talked extensively about this struggle. My initial reaction was: "I'm going back to Cape Town. I am going to buy a house on the beach in Cape Town. I'm getting out of this country." That was a knee-jerk reaction. Of course, we're not doing that. But you know, psychologically,

I've had to work on how best to deal with the anxiety associated with the problems we are confronting. I don't want to end up like my economics professor. I've had to step back because, typically, I get fairly involved. I read the media a lot. The first thing I do at six o'clock every morning is grab my coffee and read the news. I'm not doing so much of that anymore.

It traumatizes me to view the Senate hearings of Trump's cabinet picks. Here's the drama all over. It upsets me. I read about Hegseth being appointed Secretary of Defense (now labeled War). Here's another person accused of sexual assault. He is limited. He's never managed an organization of more than nine people. He ran the only business he's ever led into the ground. He drove this nonprofit into bankruptcy and drank excessively on the job. This is the kind of person that Trump is nominating. It just upsets me. So, I've had to stand back and take the advice that I gave to my economics professor 50 years ago. I must remove myself psychologically from this anxiety-producing situation and mindset.

So, I am much more cautious about what I read while not disengaging completely. This is constructively psychological for me. Caution is a good thing for me. I'm saying, "OK, let's look at some of the good things that could come out of this." This mindset goes to an important point. Along with many other people, I have a fundamental problem with Trump. As Mitt Romney says, "Trump has an immoral character. You discard everything that he says." My immediate reaction to anything that Trump talks about is that it's bad.

So now I'm saying: "Hang on a second. Let me step back from that. Not everything that Trump does is bad. So let me be a little bit more balanced. If he says, and if his Treasury Secretary is saying, they are going to inject fire into the economy. Wonderful. I'm looking forward to seeing my stock portfolio improve dramatically. I'm hoping he will be successful in this endeavor." Rather than focusing on Trump, let me focus on what's happening there.

Although I disagree with mass deportations, I do agree with becoming stricter, perhaps about the way we manage people like me who are coming into the country. I think it is possible to be somewhat positive about the policies being promoted (and often enforced) by Trump. It is possible to look at some policies through Trump's lens, even though it is a very dark lens. We can examine the policies and say, "Okay, let me think carefully

about those policies in a more balanced way. Where could these take us?" We can monitor rather than dismiss a policy as purely a Trump-ism. So, I've changed my mindset regarding how to look at our country's role in the world. Mr. Trump and others are teaching us. I think this is also the case with people like Mitt Romney, Liz Cheney, and other deep conservatives. I disagree with much of what they say. However, I learned from them, too. Especially when it comes to things like their emphasis on character.

Suzi's Perspective

The election results are now even scarier because of what's going on in Israel. This is what's so upsetting about my Jewish cousins who think Trump is good for Israel. He's not. Because of what's going on in Israel, Israel is supposed to be the one safe place for Jews to be Jews when the rest of the world persecutes them. At the same time, Anti-Semitism rears its head again. It is already found in many European communities. The actions taken by leaders in Israel are aggravating this negative attitude toward Jews. The authors of the document called Project 2025, which has been Trump and Musk's playbook released in October of 2024, a little-reported-on supplementary document called Project Esther. It is supposedly about preventing antisemitism in our country. However, upon closer look and reporting by NPR, we discover that it has nothing to do with protecting Jews, and in fact will increase the antisemitism we have already been seeing in America during the Trump regime.

Basically, the Heritage Foundation wrote both of these documents, but the one that is framed to combat antisemitism is a political plan to dismantle the "free Palestine" movement and is the blueprint for the actions we've seen this administration take on Harvard, Columbia, etc. Here's the part that gets me. The authors did not include a single Jewish organization or leader. The extremist Christian fundamentalists who wrote it are not for Jews in America, whom they believe they are protecting, since "Jews could not do it themselves", but they intend to use legal, financial, and political maneuvers to ensure that Israel stays around for the second coming of Christ.

And it's been happening again here, and it will happen more now that Trump's going to be in office again. His base is Christian white nationalists. And he named Mike Huckabee to be Ambassador to Israel? Huckabee, who is a White Evangelical, was a former candidate for the US presidency. That's

Trump's base. It's not his religion. That's his base. Trump is not religious, but he has the opportunity, like Mr. Putin, to become very wealthy if his "company" is called the United States. I wish to return to the matter of Israel. There's something very important about Huckabee's naming. It's not about protecting Israel as a safe place for the Jews. It's about protecting Israel for the Christian fundamentalists who want to be there when Christ rises again. Trump is not actually interested in Israel, except as potential real estate. He's interested in keeping the brown-skinned Arabs in place. He would sacrifice Israel in a minute if he thought Israel was to go away, making the Middle East safe and Westernized.

I also want to turn to the matter of education as it relates to the election results. Most of us have been taught about government. We have had courses where we've learned how a government operates. So, when it's not operating as it should, the government becomes a massive source of dissonance. By contrast, other people have never received any education about citizenship. They can blithely live through any governmental dysfunction. That's why I was half-expecting the election results. Because now I know who's in our country. Now I know the mindset of many American voters. Now I know that they're predominantly voters who haven't been educated past about a fifth-grade reading level.

I know who we've got. They're not bad people. These are not even dumb people. They are actually fairly smart people. They just don't know better. They know that they're hurting. They know that their eggs are expensive. They know that their grocery store bill is expensive. They don't understand that everything the Biden administration has been doing to fix the economy is working. It just takes time for the economy to catch up. These voters don't know that the things they're seeing in the economy now are starting to work.

But not because of the election that took place in November. The economy is beginning to work because of what the Biden administration enacted during his years in office. The newly elected administration hasn't been sworn in yet. How can they take credit for economic improvement? Ignorance regarding the American economy abounds. Many voters simply don't know what is happening. They also don't understand history and how it may not repeat itself exactly, but there are always echoes. And we are living in a big echo. It's a republic, "if we can keep it". This is the beginning of us not being able to keep it. Our democracy is in jeopardy.

Bill's Perspective

I want to comment on the perspective offered by both Kevin and Suzi. First, there is the matter of Trump and religion. I have reflected on Suzi's observation of Trump's secular perspective (despite being strongly supported by many strongly religious citizens). I don't think Trump has any religion, but he's finding it convenient to link with religious leaders. Trump's own religion is money. A few years ago, someone asked him: Why is it so important to make money? Because he says that's the only scorecard. So, the notion of salvation is to be found in money. And by his own scorecard, he's not doing very well.

Second, there is the matter of South Africa. It was quite remarkable that the changes did occur, which could be a reason for some optimism here in America. I recall Desmond Tutu's analysis of South African character before the collapse of Apartheid. He believed that South African perspectives on race and segregation would never change. The heart of White South Africans was frozen! Yet, Tutu ended up being wrong. Perhaps the disconfirmation of Tutu's perspectives applies to the United States. Is the American character flawed, and will it never change? Is the ghost of slavery an external, haunting presence in the history and character of our country? Maybe we need our own Mandela in the United States to shatter that frozen racist framework.

Third, I wish to consider the significant role played by Israel in the Middle East. I don't think President Trump is genuinely interested in Israel. Rather, he is interested in maintaining the status quo in the region. The historical relationship between Europe and the Middle East is also very important--particularly the long-standing European perception of the Middle East region as exotic and the brown-skinned people as servants. The matter of discrimination may be buried even deeper in the American character—and more broadly in the character of many other people throughout the world.

I recently read an article about Saint-Saëns, a French composer. Every summer, Saint-Saëns would go to Egypt to compose. He prepared something called the Egyptian Concerto. His story reveals a common preference among many wealthy Europeans and Americans for vacations in "exotic" non-Western countries. We see this in the novel of Hercule Poirot (*Death on the Nile*). My own mother loved her journey to the Middle East. During the 19th Century and the first half of the 20th Century, the Middle

East was a compliant, exotic place where Europeans and Americans would go, since they "owned" this part of the world. Britain controlled Egypt and Palestine as "protectorate" states. India was a large but controlled member of the British Empire. Other Middle Eastern and African countries were under colonial rule, divided up among European states.

The brown-skinned folks were there as servants, as people to help us Europeans and Americans. If they were dirty and nasty, we just put them aside, and they didn't bother us. So, the problem is that those brown-skinned people are disturbing us now in the 21st Century. They have potential power or real power. So, Israel is a safeguard. This country plays much the same role as played by the original Dracula. Vlad II Dracula was a horrible human being who protected Europe against the invasion of the Turks. As the infamous Impaler, Vlad was known for killing people by impaling them on stakes. He was a hero at the time. His subjects probably thought: "I'm sorry he had to do those vicious things, but, you know, he protected us from the Turks." At the time, invaders were coming up from Turkey, entering what later became Yugoslavia. At the time, it was still a Slavic state. Vlad II stopped them with his impaling practices.

I suggest that Trump (and most Americans) believe that Israel serves as a bulwark against potential invasions. However, Trump could sacrifice Israel if it were deemed necessary for the greater good. Underlying this willingness, ultimately, to sacrifice Israel is the latent antisemitism in American society. The reemergence of antisemitism is happening again everywhere in the world. So, Israel is there as a bulwark to stop brown-skinned people. However, like Vlad, Israel is dispensable.

Vlad did horrible things, and Israel is filled with Jews! Antisemitism is alive and well: "The good thing is that we can sacrifice Israel because most of its citizens are Jewish. So, it's certainly a shame if they all die; however, you know, they're not as worthy as we white Christians anyway. Furthermore, they're half brown." This brings in the often-overlooked history of the Sephardic Jews, who can be traced back to Spain. They have much darker skin than the fair-skinned Ashkenazi Jews who fled from Northern Europe. The history of persecution for those Jews of darker skin began long before the persecution of the Ashkenazi.

At this point, I wish to pull back and discover (or create) a bit of Hope. Specifically, I suggest that History can serve a benevolent role. Some people

would say that History is neutral. It doesn't take sides. History is "one damned day after another." A second perspective on History is available to us: History is a sustained, universal pull between several forces (such as Hegelian thesis/antithesis/resolution). Perhaps, instead, History is an inexorable march toward some desirable utopian goal (such as Marx's universal communism). History might also be considered a teacher. Perhaps history is trying to teach those of us living in the United States an important lesson. History is offering us a specific, living example of authoritarian rule. History provides us with important insights into the nature and benefits of democracy. It is giving us a heavy dose of authoritarian rule/fascism for at least four years, to see how we like it.

It should be noted that Americans have already experienced fascism at a state level and for a relatively short term. Fascism was present in the Louisiana-based rule of Huey Long (Sindler,1956). He controlled the entire legislative, administrative, and judicial systems in Louisiana for many years. He soon expanded his outreach to attract "believers" from throughout the United States in his Share Our Wealth Society. Huey Long was not alone in his authoritarian rule. There certainly was one-party rule in the Southeast States for many years during the 19th and most of the 20th Century. But there has never been nationwide authoritarian rule in the United States.

Huey Long was the disturbing exception (Maddow, 2023, p. 15): "By the end of its first year, Long's Share Our Wealth Society counted nearly eight million active members in more than twenty-five thousand separate local clubs across America." In fact, Huey Long was leading Franklyn Roosevelt in the presidential polls during the first years after Roosevelt's first election before being assassinated in 1935. And while there was the threat of military-industrial rule that Dwight Eisenhower warned us about during the late 1950s, there was never the rule of a tech-industrial complex that Joe Biden has warned us about in the mid-1920s. The newly emerging powerful coalition between high-tech, digital communication, and politics offers an imminent threat in the USA right now.

In some regards, I was not surprised by the 2024 election results because I knew a bit about American history and had read of Huey Long's "reign." My appreciation of American culture over the past two and a half centuries left me both fearful of our future and skeptical about both the promises made by Trump and the prospects of a Democratic return to rule after

Trump's presidency. On the other hand, I also held out hope, having written about the emergence of freedom in Estonia and read about those moments in American history when we had overcome racism, sexism, and many of the other "isms" that have afflicted our country.

Unfortunately, this Hope came with a fair amount of ignorance. I had not paid sufficient attention to what has been happening in Hungary—the country that my colleague, Berne Weiss, features (with considerable optimism) in our book on Freedom. The dictatorship of Viktor Orbán speaks to the fragility of democracy and the potential success of similar steps being taken by Trump in his march to dictatorship and rampant kleptocracy.

Isolation may reside at the heart of the matter. A major gap resides between the real world and my own experiences of the world. Here I am living by the sea. Though Maine has its urban problems, especially drug use, my home is located many miles away from troubled urban centers. My wife and I (and other family members) also live a long way away from the financial struggles faced by many families in the United States. We certainly live many miles away from the existential threats faced by people living in many other countries. I have worked in many of these countries and know firsthand the challenges faced by those living in these countries. These, however, are not my challenges. I can always return home to live comfortably by the sea.

Then the boundary of isolation was shattered. Trump's reality was "trumping" my Maine reality. Cognitive dissonance swirled around my head and heart. My "highly successful" president and vice president were supposed to win the election. Instead, it was revealed that they were both viewed as "failures" by many US citizens. A woman was still not "allowed" to serve as the US president. The do-nothing, polarized US Congress was reinstalled with few changes. I read more about the love affair between America's right wing and Viktor Orbán. Like Suzi and Kevin, I faced the challenge of unmet expectations and a blown-apart reality. Part of the reason for reworking this book and adding codas is based on my recognition that Americans have strayed far from any pathway to true freedom. My dear friends and colleagues, Kevin and Suzi, join me in this revision because they similarly recognize the emerging barriers that prevent a successful journey to a state of genuine and enduring freedom.

What is Revealed

In this chapter, we have considered the interplay between Hope and Skepticism. The first section concerns the push and pull between these attitudes in Eastern Europe (particularly Estonia) while the Soviet Union collapsed. In the second portion of this chapter (the coda), we have shared some of our push and pull between Hope and Skepticism as these attitudes arose following the 2024 election. Several important insights regarding these two attitudes have been offered recently by those studying the social psychology of human cognition and affect.

Regret, Relativism and Polarities: A first insight concerns the relationship between Hope and the motivating power of Regret. The interplay between Hope and Regret speaks directly to the nature of skepticism. Behavioral scientists have recently concluded that the absence of Regret is probably a more powerful motivator than either the Hope for success or the Fear of failure. This being the case, we are likely to find that Skepticism primarily serves as a buffer between Hope and Regret. We defer Hope and embrace Skepticism so that we might avoid ever regretting our hopeful perspectives and actions. We search for someone with a silver bullet but find that our heroic savior can only shoot blanks. No one arrives in time to rescue us. This leaves us naked and stupid.

We wish never to make a fool of ourselves nor to be labeled "naïve" or "childish" in our exuberant charge out of the foxhole to fight a non-winnable war. Skepticism would seem to be the best alternative to the silver bullet. However, skepticism often evolves into cynicism and ultimately leads to escape, decadence, or resignation. Without Hope, there is only Fear and Despair. Or there is only an Absurdist perspective regarding our world and destiny. If that's all there is, "then let's keep dancing" (to quote Peggy Lee). In desperation, we declare: "Won't we have fun . . . the rich get rich and the poor get poorer. In the meantime. . ." This disturbing state of affairs is portrayed in the stories of 1930s Germany written by Christopher Isherwood (later transferred by Kander and Ebb to Broadway in the musical, *Cabaret).*

There is an alternative to escape from Regret. Much as Kevin has done, we can broaden our perspective and seek to appreciate all sides of an issue. Using William Perry's term, we can become Relativists. We find good reason to respect (if not accept) alternative perspectives and practices. We

slow down our thinking (Kahneman, 2011/2013) and reflect critically on our assumptions (Schön, 1983). Perhaps Trump and his minions are correct about some issues. Or they might at least be pointing to a governmental problem that needs to be addressed. There is waste in many government agencies. Funds are often allocated in a manner that produces results contrary to what was intended. Welfare "at home" receives less attention than the welfare of people living far away. Priorities do need frequent review. As Kevin has noted, we must discern what we can control and what is outside our control. We can't solve all of the world's problems.

As relativists, we need not Regret the perspective we have taken, for we have sought clarity regarding both that about which we are hopeful and that about which we are fearful or at least skeptical. Yet, there is still the matter of committing to some course of action amid this relativistic perspective. What can we control? Are we then obliged to take some constructive action on what we can control? Regret always hovers on the edge of those actions that are taken.

If we "truly" understand the other side of an issue, then how could we have decided to work against this side of the issue? How could we still campaign against Trump when there might be something valid and of value in what he is "preaching"? There is also the matter of sheltered ignorance amidst relativism. In seeking to find tolerance and appreciation in all points of view, are we forced to ignore some of the most outrageous claims? Perhaps our relativism reveals a certain level of what David Brooks (2016) identifies as elitism (which Brooks believes is widely found on the left wing of politics). We might justifiably be viewed as patronizing when ensuring that the "little guy" or "uneducated lady" is allowed to give full voice to their simplistic view of the world.

Another way to avoid Regret resides in the process of polarity management (Johnson, 1996; Johnson, 2020). We systematically identify the upside and downside of both sides of a political stance. We resist swinging back and forth from one pole to the other as the downside of one pole gives way to the upside of the other polarity. We carefully consider the emotional and cognitive downside and upside of each political stance. The downside includes any Regrets associated with the failure to act on behalf of this political position, or any Regrets about taking actions that yield outcomes other than those advocated or promised.

While engaged in polarity management, we identify alarms that signal the need for changes in the actions we are taking; furthermore, we are discovering the best way to incorporate the upside of both polarities in the actions we take—or at least the ultimate goals we wish to achieve. Engaging in this management process, we retain a commitment in the midst of relativism; however, we also try to retain a broad, appreciative perspective regarding the multiple factors that must be considered when taking action based on that commitment. Perhaps of greatest importance is our commitment to forgiveness (of our own shortcomings) alongside our commitment not to forget (learn from our mistakes and be mindful of alarms being sounded).

Permission and Defense: In addition to the social psychology of Regret, we can point to the concept of Permission Structure (which has become a "coin of the realm" among many current political pundits). A political party, a media outlet (such as a cable news outlet), or an influential political figure justifies one's attitudes and beliefs. If not justification, then this influential and "credible" source provides "forgiveness" for one's anti-social choices or unethical behavior.

A Permission Structure is established, which enables one to avoid or eliminate existing cognitive dissonance. We need not "feel bad" about our beliefs, for important people share these beliefs, or at least do not condemn these beliefs. "Dog whistles" (implicit messages) provide permission structures that enable us to escape into close-minded comfort. We can form a Bubble of Belief that allows us (even encourages us) to escape from freedom of choice. We need not open our eyes to other belief systems or lifestyles (sexual preferences and identities).

When effectively engaged, the permission structure supplements the many other defensive structures we embrace when confronted with cognitive and affective challenges. Ego Psychologists, such as Anna Freud and Heinz Hartmann describe the functions served by primitive processes, such as denial and repression, that keep uncomfortable thoughts and feelings from coming to consciousness. Similarly, object relations theorists such as Melanie Klein and Wilfred Bion focused on the containers that protect us from unregulated anxiety and the processes of metabolism that enable us to manage and transform anxiety that is generated. We find that denial, repression, containment, and metabolism are primary "architects" of our

Bubbles of Belief—especially those Bubbles that contain thoughts and feelings unacceptable to many members of a society. A permission structure enables the Bubble of Belief and accompanying defensive structures to remain intact. The fortress of distorted belief is fully defended by those leaders, media outlets, and political groups that consciously or unconsciously affirm these beliefs.

Viruses and Peremptory Ideation: We offer one another perspective regarding human cognition and affect as related to Hope and Skepticism. Both Hope and Skepticism can spread like a virus (or avalanche) in a society. However, skepticism (and fear) spread more quickly and more forcefully than Hope, because Skepticism and Fear are amplified by anxiety that is neither contained nor metabolized. We would push even further, borrowing from George Klein, an Ego psychologist who conducted research on unconscious processes and provided theory on the interplay between thought (cognition) and motivation (affect). We turn specifically to his concept of peremptory ideation (Klein, 1967).

Klein proposed that in our internal world (psyche), we create a specific idea or image that begins to "travel" around our psyche (head and heart). This train, already filled with ideas and images, picks up fragments of unconsciously held material (memories, feelings, and thoughts) along the way. The ideational train operates much like an avalanche and other forms of "strange attractors". The train becomes increasingly rich and emotionally powerful as it picks up new intra-psychic material. It gains increasing energy from this unconscious material. The Bubble of Belief is formed by this ideational train, its initial, primitive content often coming from parental figures and peers.

At some point, this ideation begins to pull in material from outside the psyche. External people and events suddenly take on greater saliency (more emotional power and vividness). Media, leaders, and political parties contribute content to the train, while also providing the permission structure that makes the train's content (and passengers) credible and socially acceptable. Klein suggested that this ideation takes priority when valuing, attending, and remembering in the external world. It assumes a commanding ("peremptory") presence. A positive (reinforcing) loop is created, with the external material now joining the interior material. They all cluster around the original ideation.

Trains and Boomerangs: While Klein focused on the internal dynamics of peremptory ideation, we propose that this internal ideation might align with an external ideation arising from challenging political polarities. We can envision the internal ideation "hooking on" to the ideological "train" passing by us from an external source. We hitch our thoughts and emotions to an outside train—be it a political party, individual leader, or informal social "movement." Other people of similar mind and heart (and similar peremptory thoughts, feelings, and images) join us on the train. It now becomes a collective train. The virus of shared skepticism and fear is carried by the train to other communities.

Irrational and anxiety-saturated external ideation can be particularly attractive if tied to internal ideation that is likely to be quite primitive (often taking on a "haunting" presence). A "perfect" storm of prejudice, intolerance, fear of the "other," and (eventually) violence can be created by "passengers" on the train (our primitive fears, the emotionally charged speech of a charismatic speaker, etc.). One final point. It is more likely that this ideational train will be fully operational and pulling on external images when we are individually and collectively tired and overwhelmed. Such a state is not uncommon when living in the world of VUCA-Plus. We step on board the train in an anxious and fatigued condition. We soon find that the train is filled with passengers who match our anxiety and fatigue. Together, we create and maintain even more bizarre fictional accounts of the menacing world of VUCA-Plus in which we live and work. Bubbles of Beliefs become even more distorted and reinforced.

The peremptory train can be the vehicle for rapidly spreading ideological viruses. This virus train, in turn, is further energized by the "loyal opposition" that stands on the tracks alongside the train as it races by. There is a *Boomerang effect*. The stronger and more strident the opposition, the stronger and more protected our Bubble of Belief. Our peremptory train rapidly moves down the track and will destroy any obstacles placed in its way. For instance, we find major, emotional mandates coming from a party in the USA after being voted out of office and becoming the opposition: "Look at what a mess they are making of things!" "Our fundamental way of life is now in jeopardy!" "Give me liberty or give me death!"

The peremptory train of those in defeat is perched on the edge of a teetering trestle. All can easily be lost. Cognitive dissonance hangs over the Head and

Heart of all passengers on the train. Bubbles of Belief are endangered. The initial sources of peremptory train content come from a primitive dualistic framework. Either we are right and good, or we are wrong and bad. Our train can fall off the trestle, destroying our thoughts and feelings. What have we lost? How could we have failed, given that "God/Good is on our side"? The three of us found that each of our peremptory trains was falling off the tracks in November of 2024. We each experienced some psychic death.

Conclusions

There is an option. We can choose an alternative form of cognitive and affective death. Like Paul in the New Testament, or many contemporary political leaders, we reverse our position on many (and potentially all) important public policies and social priorities. In our primitive Dualism, we can easily flip to the other extreme (thus returning to consonance). The other side is not only strong and active (winning the election). The other side must also be righteous and deserving of victory; otherwise, God/Good is not in control. God/Good must reign supreme forever. We must switch sides. However, the three of us can't do this. We must retain our current position regardless of its existential status. It is at this point of choice that we should seek to understand something about the other side (as Kevin has done).

And perhaps we attend to the voice heard in the back of our head and at the corner of our heart. It is the voice of forgiveness. To quote from the New Testament: "Forgive them. They know not what they do." The challenge for each of us resides at an even deeper level. To borrow from the wisdom of Judaism, we must observe moments of *Yom Kippur* (atonement). It is appropriate for us to reflect, repent, and seek forgiveness regarding our own distorted and distracting Hope and Skepticism. Perhaps the first step on the path to True Freedom is the forgiveness of others and, ultimately, the forgiveness of ourselves.

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Chapter Five

Nationalism and Freedom

Authoritarianism was evident in Estonia when one of us [WB] 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, and specifically 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 tensions inherent in these structural elements.

Authority and Freedom of Thought

Some of the Estonians who were interviewed commented on feeling a new sense of freedom of thought after the liberation of their country. Thought police no longer controlled the public dialogue. The reality, however, is that how people were thinking and what they 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.

Repeated invasions and occupations from both East and West shaped the historical narratives of this country. 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. The following question was asked during the Estonian interviews: “Has your life changed since the political changes?” The response was often: “How much do you know about our

history?" And then the interviewees would often provide a 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, 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, indicated that "many years of socialism have led us 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 the 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 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 (given their dislike for collective action).

Estonians have seemingly been glad to delegate authority to outside people, though obviously they would prefer to delegate these tasks to other citizens of their country rather than invaders with foreign customs and values. We

turn once again to the outside observations made by Alexander Theroux (2011, p. 37):

> 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 concentrated discipline to revolt?

We would take some exception to Theroux's conclusions regarding revolt. The Estonians did revolt during the early 1990s. However, it was a gentle and orderly revolt—a 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, Theroux correctly assessed the Estonian preference for order and regulation. These preferences are evident in their adherence to the old town plan in Tallinn and their admiration for the choral arts being performed throughout their country.

Similarities between Estonia, Finland, and Switzerland are noteworthy. Singapore might be added to this list. Clean streets and social courtesies are abundant in each of these countries. 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. This pull might still be strong among some Estonians.

The lingering desire in Estonia for order and restraint was countered during the 1990s by the perspectives and actions taken by some Estonians. "Outliers" like Tiit tried for many years to keep alive an alternative to authoritarianism. Tiit fought against authoritarian regimes in his own country and in Central America (regardless of the prevalent ideology).

Such courageous and idealistic anti-authoritarians often find themselves unappreciated by the old and new orders 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

The Estonians who were interviewed voiced a strong critique of their country's authoritarian tradition. These expressions came from those hoping that Estonia would use the Soviet collapse as an opportunity to move toward more democratic ideals and less hierarchy in its political and social systems. We might speculate that this idealistic dream of a truly equitable and nonhierarchical system is rooted in the collective residual memory of a social system that existed in some pre-Christian European communities.

The Old Europe was saturated with a feminist spirit of community and support (the chalice), contrasting with the New Europe's emphasis on masculine conquest and control (the blade) (Eisler, 1995. These remarkable Old Europe communities were pre-patriarchal and dominated by partnership. For many Estonians during the early 1990s, the ghost of Old Europe might have lingered in what has been identified as their social unconscious (Hopper and Weinberg, 2019).

Our 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 abundant. There is a long, esteemed history regarding the major universities that have flourished in

Estonia, notably the University of Tartu. In existence since 1632, this university has served as a 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 the creation of new taxonomies in many fields.

A thoughtful and knowledgeable appreciation of the arts is found not only at the university in Tartu. It is found everywhere in Estonia. Rarely do we find the arts flourishing as much in other countries. Along with this unique artistic heritage was a profound hatred among many Estonians for the flamboyant architecture of the Eastern Orthodox churches that came to Estonia from Russia. While walking through the towns of Estonia, an Estonian guide would point to the ornate (and often very large) Russified 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). The carefully laid out plan for Tallinn came with the provision of a location and a church for each social unit of the city. The butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers (or at least the merchants and warriors) each had their religious institution where they could worship and "network" with others in the field.

Here is where the irony of Estonian freedom resides. The yearning for a more Western perspective was matched by a subtle form of authoritarianism manifest in the daily actions taken by the Estonians. While there was a dream of equity and reform in Estonia, a propensity for authoritarianism was evident in the passivity of many Estonian men and women who were interviewed or observed in action (or inaction). As an "impatient" American, one of us [WB] doing the interviewing 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 Eastern European countries before and after the Soviet collapse. This willingness to listen, be persuaded by, and follow the directions of a single

leader (whether from the old regime or the new one) seems to be a lingering ghost of Soviet rule. This ghost might reside at an even deeper level in the Estonian psyche. It might exist in the rule of many other repressive and occupying regimes in Eastern Europe before the Soviet invasion. The social unconscious might be alive and well in all of these former Soviet countries, as it is in many other countries, such as Israel and Singapore, where authoritarian rule has been intermixed with trauma to create a lingering, toxic brew of fear and rigidity (Lim, 2018; Hopper and Weinberg, 2019).

More generally, there was a strong (often unconscious) search during the early post-Soviet era for wise leadership in Estonia. The desire for wise leadership was based on the assumption that a great person would come forth to lead citizens of this embattled country out of their troubles. As Wilfred Bion (1961) proposed, there is a pull in many groups and societies toward the wise leader as well as the courageous leader and visionary leader. 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 they could project new societal needs, these needs were often only met with a return to old structures. As Bion (1995) and other object relations theorists have noted, when there are high levels of anxiety in an individual or group, structures and procedures ("containers") must be in place that can hold this anxiety. Having been contained, the anxiety can be "metabolized" (converted from anxiety into acceptance and action).

While the seeming passivity regarding authority is disturbing, we appreciate the willingness of Estonians to listen to other people. 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. Heather Cox 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 two of us 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 tolerant of nothing more than a ten-second sound bite. A longer exposition providing multiple perspectives on an issue is set aside, especially if one of these perspectives challenges our belief system. A substantial minority of Americans 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 opinion rather than truly listen to someone else's opinion. Third, if we did listen, we might find that our beliefs and our "reality" are being challenged. Our world of distorted Serenity is being invaded. We experience the deep pain of cognitive dissonance (Bergquist, 2025d). Consonance is best preserved by remaining in our bubble. Serenity is protected by closing our ears (as well as our Head and Heart) to any external voices.

Have our colleagues and friends in Estonia moved beyond those of us living in the United States? Have the Estonians moved beyond an escape from freedom and Serenity 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, which were saturated for many years with the propaganda emanating from 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 the more general passivity of one-way communication. The Estonians who were interviewed provided little evidence of extensive interaction between 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.

We must find our own voice and share it in constructive dialogue with other members of our society Belenky and others, 1986; Gergen and Gergen, 2004; Gilligan, 2023). Today, we are 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 our own rabbit holes.

We must pause at this moment to consider an alternative interpretation of Estonian passivity that might also speak to American passivity. In Estonia, it was never quite clear whether passive listeners were actually taking in what was being said by the speakers. Were they instead just deferring to authoritarian leaders and structures? Are we being passive recipients of information in the mid-21st-century United States because we are afraid to question authority?

There is also the matter of interactive biases to be found among those of us who work in the behavioral sciences [WB and KW] and marketing [SP]. Does true freedom require interaction among peers, or is this just a now-

outmoded bias? Is dialogue required for any community to discover something that rings true and credible (Gergen and Gergen, 2004)? Is this just a naïve vestige of old-fashioned American town hall meetings 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 chalice-based, nonhierarchical structures of the original American inhabitants (the aboriginal Indians) overwhelmed by the blade-based plunder and domination of the invading Europeans (Graber and Wengrow, 2021)? Did the Europeans bring over infectious authoritarian perspectives along with infectious diseases? Are we, contemporary Americans, influenced by a social unconscious memory of non-listening conquest and colonization? Are we trying to make up for our blade-based proclivities by over-emphasizing chalice-based collaboration and care?

Distorted Identification

There is much more to be said about the nature of authoritarianism as it relates not only to Estonian freedom but also true freedom in mid-21st-century America. 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/ They are driven not only by internal psychological predilections (trait-based determinants) but also by the challenging VUCA-Plus environment in which they live (state-based determinants) (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024; Bergquist, 2025d).

These differences are particularly important to keep in mind when examining Estonian and American society, for the cultures of both countries have been "hybridized" over the years. Many Russians were exported to Estonia after World War II. They come to Estonia from a 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 (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 noted among Estonians during the early 1990s—and might also account for variance in attitudes about authority.

Similarly, the United States has been a melting pot since it was founded. Immigrants have entered our country from many different cultures and societal structures. While they may have been escaping the tyranny and oppression of authoritarian rule, this is the social structure in which they grew up and with which they are most familiar. Furthermore, under conditions of VUCA-Plus induced collective anxiety (angst), it is understandable that many of these immigrants revert to their authority-based perspectives regarding the restoration of law and order. As Shils has suggested, authoritarianism is induced not just by internal, psychic dynamics, but also by the many external, challenging forces of the society in which one lives.

However, we suspect that the ambivalence and contradictions witnessed in Estonia and the United States have gone beyond the competing perspectives of diverse constituencies. Many intra-psychic contradictions have been at play, some of which we have just identified in turning to the work of Wilfred Bion. There was profound irrationality swirling around Estonia at every level during the early 1990s. Similar irrationality is swirling around the United States today (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024; Bergquist, 2025d). The container for diffuse anxiety, which we identified earlier, was not consistently present in 1990s Estonia or in 2020s America. Even with a wish at some level for the old Soviet structure and security, there was the reality in Estonia of a collapsing Soviet system. Even though many of us living in the United States seek out the Serenity of authoritarian rule, many forces are operating that keep any sustained authoritarian rule from taking permanent hold—at least until late 2024.

Identifying with the Aggressor/Projective Identification

Nothing was making much sense in 1990s Estonia. 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"? In contemporary American society, uncertainty is also reigning supreme. We have our own fears about "aggressors". The new enemy is not another country at our borders. We have had no occupying force that ruled America for many years. Our cosmic "cold war" struggle with the Soviet Union is far behind us (though our antipathy toward "Russia" lingers).

The "aggressors" are now apparently those people who are coming over our borders to escape impossible living conditions in their native country and/or seek out a better life in the United States. They come with no weapons nor any political or economic force. Yet we somehow view them as the enemy. They threaten to take our jobs, sell us drugs, challenge our values, and live off the hard-earned money we give to the government each year. It is hard to make these men, women, and children into powerful, evil-intended adversaries. Yet, we have done just that.

We have to dig much deeper if we are to gain a full appreciation for what has happened and is now happening in Estonia and the United States. A psychological process called *identification with the aggressor* is in place. This very disturbing process has been described by Viktor 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 when trying to understand the dynamics of child abuse. Why do people who were battered by their parents tend to batter their 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 we

mentioned above. We also find its softer form in the uncritical allegiance to the leader 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 those 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 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 unique strengths and potential to the leader and, as a result, diminishes or even destroys one's sense of self-worth and one's 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. Perhaps it is still operating in Estonia. This hard and ugly authoritarianism is certainly operating in many other societies today, especially those in which there is profound personal and collective stress and uncertainty.

In the United States, we are afraid, but don't know what to fear. The brief invasion of our country on September 11, 2001, alongside the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21, leaves us uncertain about the security of either our country or our health. We feel powerless to do much about a foreign attack or an attack mounted by a virus. Two projections take place. One projection is centered on our anger. We would like to harm those who hit the Twin Towers in New York. However, we have no direct access to them.

Our anger must be redirected (projected). It is reassigned to people from other countries (especially those with darker skin pigment) even though they had nothing to do with 9/11. The people who want to enter our country (illegally) must hate us at some level as much as we hate them. Obviously, they want to do us harm. Furthermore, the more we harm them, the more we assume they want to harm us. We become the aggressor (enforcer of border laws) because we see these brown skinned folks as ultimate aggressors (taking our job, drugging our children, living off our tax money, and so forth).

The second projection concerns our leaders. Though we feel powerless to do anything about the people trying to enter our country, we can expect our elected leaders to "do something" that is tangible and dramatic. We want our leaders to build a tall wall or tear apart families. These actions might not change anything. However, at least we are freed, indirectly, from the demobilizing fear of helplessness. We might be creating a menacing enemy in our mind and heart that doesn't exist. However, we can also rely on an "imaginative" leader to create a weapon that will defeat this enemy (people who are wading across the Rio Grande or the virus waiting to invade our body). We believe that some injected Chlorox will repel the virus's invasion. We support the idea that a fence floating in the river will discourage the waders. Identification with the aggressor and the wayward leader is never a rational process, nor is projected identification ever a solution to VUCA-Plus challenges.

Identifying with Consumption

It is not only the aggressor to whom 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 in 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. It is conveyed 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 a new, miracle cleaning fluid. The economy of a country is bursting at the seams. However, the ultimate happiness and welfare of its citizens stand at the end of the line. Those who are most in need of assistance are not the beneficiaries of a robust economy.

What about Estonia? Was soft authoritarianism prevalent in the 1990s version of Estonia, and is it still present? In their assessment of life in Estonia and Hungary, Bergquist and Weiss (1994) found this type of soft authoritarianism widely manifested in Estonia and Hungary, especially in the 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 they could see, feel, and taste. They often purchased products manufactured in the West. They were lured to these products by radio and television broadcasting that emanated from non-Soviet countries (despite Soviet attempts to block transmission). Freedom now means that goods could actually be delivered and consumed rather than just promised via the latest five-year Soviet plan.

What about contemporary Estonian life? We suggest that this soft authoritarianism still exists –and might have grown even stronger. We 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. It is even prevalent big-time in China (Ma, 2019). We might be wrong, specifically about Estonia; however, we wish to justify our conclusion by returning to the analysis of social systems offered by Erich Fromm.

As early as 1960, Erik Fromm noted this pull toward the valuing of goods and services as a mode of subtle authoritarianism. In *The Sane Society* (Fromm, 1955), he introduces the theme of alienation when describing the impact of a marketing orientation on the human psyche. This is similar to what he did before when describing the alienation associated with Nazi rule in Germany (Fromm, 1941a). 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. Their work is no longer primary. Rather, consumption is primary. Workers are nothing more than intermediaries ("things") between the workplace (production of goods) and the marketplace (consumption of goods). In this orientation toward consumption, contemporary members of society can escape from freedom. They are told how to be successful workers and what to purchase (via marketing). Difficult choices are no longer required. The agony of freedom is exchanged for a much more "blissful" life devoid of major challenges or any purpose other than consumption. We escape VUCA-Plus by creating a distorting world of consumption-based Serenity. Goods and services are marketed that promise a serene world of stability, certainty, simplicity, clarity, calm, and consistency (Bergquist, 2025d).

It only takes a hot bath, clean clothes, strong deodorant, and a 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 convinced that meaning is 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 own the best that money can buy. However, the "best" is often equated with quantity rather than quality. We walk out of a big box store with the largest TV screen that money can buy. Or maybe we have purchased a full case of mayonnaise at a discounted price: "the best buy on Mayo that we have ever seen!"

Perhaps this is one of the distracting narratives we should add to Bertrand Gross's (1980) list of collective myths. It is a matter of what money can buy.

We are told convincingly that there is no reason to complain, because the great leader ensures that a free market is available for the exchange of goods and services. They got the money. They can buy us what we most want in life. Big screen TVs, large jars of mayonnaise, happiness. We are told, as Gross suggests, that there is also an open market for the exchange of ideas in our society. Great leaders will look after our collective interests. Even if ideas are unlikely to be shared freely in a soft authoritarian society, there is always the option of purchasing the TV and Mayo at discounted prices. If we work hard, there is even a new pair of Tuscan Italian shoes or a vacation in Spain awaiting.

It is important to note that 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 folks who are a bit older) learning to bond virtually 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. No need for the "thinking time" on the way to the mall. It is not necessary to pull out the checkbook or a credit card. Everything is done in a moment, with no tangible exchange of anything between two people.

Is it possible that Estonians are immune to this digital pull? As members of a now prosperous European community, are the citizens of this Eastern European country different in any important way from those living in other prospering countries around the world? Have their teenagers embraced a different orientation? We don't think this is the case. Remember that Skype was invented in Estonia.

We offer one tangible way to compare consumer behavior in Estonia and the USA. We can measure the percentage of disposable income in each country that was devoted to various kinds of consumer behavior. Before doing so, we had to alter the amount of disposable income in both Estonia and the USA, because health care is a major component (20%) of disposable income in the USA but not in Estonia (which has universal government-

supported health care). Using these modified disposable income figures, we find comparable spending in areas of clothing (5% in Estonia and 3% in USA), hospitality and restaurants (6% in Estonia and 9% in USA), and general household goods (4% in Estonia and 5% in USA). Expenses related to more "essential" items such as communication (2% in Estonia and 3% in USA), transportation (1% in Estonia and 1% in USA), and housing (20% in Estonia and 21% in USA) are also comparable. It is only the cost of food that differs greatly (15% in Estonia and 8% in USA).

While these percentages are gross measures of consumer behavior, they suggest that citizens of Estonia are aligned with those of the USA when it comes to their proclivity to spend money on non-essentials. While Estonians seem to focus more on the value of food than Americans, they join with Americans in liking to purchase some new clothes, indulge in some meals out on the town, and pick up a new on-sale toaster. We might be wrong in the conclusions we have drawn. After all, gross measures such as percent of disposable income never tell the "real" story. We invite an assessment by our Estonian colleagues.

Escaping to 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 for 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. Loyalty to one's own country becomes the coin of the realm. 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.

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 curved and dangerous world represented by David Smick (2008) might currently 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. Two new questions emerge. First, 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? Second, from a more positive perspective, what do we need to learn about nationalism if we are to achieve 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, 2011/2013). Quick, manageable explanations reduce levels of anxiety (Bergquist, 2020a). However, 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. It also incorporates a sense of birthright, homeland, and ancestral ties.

One is not free to choose the ethnic group into which one is born. And within our birth-group, certain characteristics are also beyond choice: skin color, mother tongue, and 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 renewed 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. Hatred between nations was alive and well!

The rise of nationalism was hardly surprising in the wake of socialism's collapse, dissolution of the Soviet Union, and Cold War's end. Much to the chagrin of political progressives and centrists, nationalism seems an inevitability in our rapidly changing world. We should hesitate to condemn all aspects of this rise. After all, no one should object to expressions of love for one's country or a positive national identity. Those are essential ingredients of self-esteem. Concerns, however, arose during the 1990s because the baggage that typically accompanies such patriotism includes xenophobia, aggressive posturing toward neighboring countries, and updating 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 Middle East). Once a process of nationalism is set in motion, it often takes its course. Those 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, 2011/2013) 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 establishing a clear and distinctive national identity. Self-esteem for men and women in this country was directly linked to national recognition. During their interviews, Estonians talked about the frequent invasion of their country. They spoke with deep emotion about other people's lack of respect for their country's boundaries, their deep cultural roots, and their intellectual resources. Interviewed Estonians 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 a 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. We offer the following example from the 1990s of the Baltic states being overlooked by the rest of the world (or at least the American press) regarding world affairs.

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 symbolically and in terms of the enormous effort and devotion 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?

One of us [WB] witnessed the impact of ignorance and indifference on a successful physician from Estonia. During the late 1990s, she decided to attend an international health care conference held at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. She checks into 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, our colleague was assigned to the Russian group, since Estonia was once a part of the Russian-dominated Soviet Union.

Our colleague was upset and quite angry regarding the "stupidity" of those assigning rooms. She was about to leave the conference and return to Estonia. We provided a brief history to those assigning rooms regarding animosity among many Estonians about the Russian occupation of their country. Subsequently, our colleague was reassigned to rooms in a hotel populated by English-speaking physicians from several Western European countries. A long-term discussion ensued about how this ignorance of history and politics is found even among educated conference planners. The lingering sense of being ignored and considered unimportant on the world stage was (and probably 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 who were interviewed during the 1990s wanted most of all to be left alone. 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 allow them 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 challenge of language might exacerbate the isolation of Estonia and outside ignorance regarding its history and heritage. Estonians embrace a language spoken by very few other people in the world. The question of language was often posed during the interviews: How do we get people to understand us if they can't speak our language? Do we abandon our distinctive language and always speak their language in order to communicate? Several of those interviewed noted that the interviews were being done 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. The languages of three countries are quite different, though much of the world clumps these countries together and refers to them collectively as the "Baltics". National identity was (and still seems to be) very important to Estonians because of their distinctive language, 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 blocs. The West benefited from the loss of competition from countries such as

Hungary and Estonia that have had periods of economic prosperity and have embraced 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 blocs 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. The leaders of these two blocs would only disagree on who dictates the terms of this universality. Countries such as Estonia and Hungary were caught in the middle of this universalistic dispute.

Europeanism or Nationalism

The tension between East and West was apparent in the psyche and perspectives of the Estonians 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 reclaimed their national identity, citizens of both countries may have been hesitant to sacrifice it in favor of a broader European identity. There was a lingering question among the Estonians who were interviewed: 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. Hesitation fell away during the 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 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 Russia's recapturing of former Soviet satellites, there is an equally strong pull toward firm alliances with other European countries (especially through 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. 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 Middle 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 vent 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 case 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 assigned to work in Estonia by the Soviet regime. In particular, a large Russian population was relocated to Estonia

(primarily 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)?

Most of these former Soviet citizens 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 Russophones 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. Amid this controversy, we see the interplay 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 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") with 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" consists of 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 specific to Estonia and other Eastern European countries.

Politics and Policies

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 the law's overturning. 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 existing parties. In part, this volatility resulted initially from the successful engagement of many young, inexperienced citizens in Estonian politics. 30-something women and men provided this leadership. 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 are at least temporarily secondary to economic prosperity. It is to the Estonian people that we have looked for the source of many technological innovations, including 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.

We might even suggest that this prosperity reinforces the commodity-based identification of self that we introduced previously (in alignment with the critical observations offered by Erich Fromm). A commodity-based and market orientation might prevail over a political orientation. The young people are introducing new, Western Europe-oriented business practices and a technological focus to Estonia. 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 the 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 repeal 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 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 Estonia (and by extension in many other 21st-century countries). First, it is important to note that nationalists are unabashed 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 a pride and valor existing 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 Trilateral Commission. More recently, we find QAnon and the governmental "deep state" (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). These conspiracy-prone citizens are often not 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 individual proponents 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 (1948/1966) 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 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 a 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 would not be replaced by less messy authoritarian rule (as has occurred in Russia and many other countries). We suspect that the intellectual giftedness 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 soon. This threat is coupled with and exacerbated by current health emergencies and the virus-influenced temporary (or long-term) collapse of European (and worldwide) 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? Our observation previously in this book regarding this psychological condition in Estonia has 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 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 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 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." (Tóibín, 2020, p. 381) Mann could imagine humanism; however, this made no difference in a time that exalted the crowd's will. "He could imagine a frail intelligence, but that meant little in a time that honored brute strength." 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 son. What he said is still haunting–especially when we think about aspirations we have for our 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 activated by a search for national identity and perhaps even a continuing identification with aggressive forces?

The Open Questions Regarding Estonia

What then are the implications of predictions we (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 in 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, 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 Russian occupation? More generally, the question remains open regarding the future of democracy and nationalism in most European countries (and many other countries). 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 interviewed Estonians noted during the early 1990s: "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 North American countries], then I could be a cosmopolitan and an internationalist, too." What will be the outcome in Estonia? Will we find cosmopolitans or nationalists? Consumers or reformers? Who will prevail? Those who embrace True Freedom or those seeking to escape the profound challenge of freedom.

Coda: Challenges of Democracy and True Freedom

We have completed the first section of this book on True Freedom. Many perspectives have been offered regarding the nature of freedom, particularly as Estonians have struggled to find this freedom following the collapse of Soviet rule in this country. We have also shared our initial reactions to the potential threat to American freedom and democracy posed by Donald Trump in his re-election as president of the United States.

While we hope that you can appreciate the candor we offered regarding the strong emotional reactions of all three of us to the Trump re-election, there is a lingering matter regarding why our reactions were so immediate and profound. In the Coda to the first four chapters, we mentioned such matters as the traumatizing background of our precursors, as well as the immediate experiences of at least one of us when growing up in a repressive society. Critical observations were offered about the factors that put the United States at risk. We have addressed the specific characteristics of Donald Trump and his followers that lead one to predict authoritarian rule and many acts of injustice and cruelty. We have also offered a wide variety of questions that remain unanswered. We should recall that Bob Dylan was observing from an American perspective when suggesting that many answers are "blowin' in the wind."

While these factors all contributed to our profound reactions regarding the Trump re-election, there might be an even deeper source. While our "befuddlement" might reside in the large domain of unanswered questions, there is another force that takes our befuddlement to another level that more closely resembles despair. This source is to be found, surprisingly, in the world of economics, coupled with what might be called *political theology*.

Negative Utility

Many economists offer a concept that many find hard to grasp in their Head and Heart. This concept is called *Negative Utility*. The cost of broccoli provides us with an example of negative utility. It costs us more to purchase broccoli with its stems cut off than to buy broccoli with its stems intact. The broccoli stems actually cost us something. They have negative utility. Many things in our world are of little use (low positive utility). They draw money and time from us rather than giving us anything. We can include our growing grass on this list. Cutting the grass costs money or at least time. What about the dirt accumulating on our floor, or the meal we are hosting with an unliked client? Eliminating the dirt and entertaining the client costs money and time. Both the dirt and the client offer negative utility.

We can grudgingly accept the conclusion that something we have bought or some action we have taken yields little of value (minimal utility). It is much harder to live with purchases or actions that cost us something. It is like "sunk costs" and "getting out while you're ahead." We don't want the economist to remind us of these disturbing "facts of economic life." We

certainly don't want to think about the "sunk" money and time we put into that dinner we cooked for Mr. Annoyance. And dirt? Why does it keep coming back into our home?

Negative utilities are a "pain in the #*$^%." They can be a source of frustration: "Why don't they just chop off the damned broccoli stems as a service to be provided!" "Why do I have to spend time and money with some client I don't like?" The frustration can expand and lead us to a state of despair: "Vegetables are getting so expensive that I don't think I can afford to eat those that are fresh and nutritious!" "I don't want to sacrifice my time, money and integrity any more for those damned clients!"

This economic analysis provides some interesting insights into vegetable and unwanted clients. However, we are more interested in how the economic concept of Negative Utility applies to democracy and True Freedom. We wish to provide this application by expanding on the concept of negative utility and further exploring the dynamics of despair. We expand by considering our reactions to the November 2024 re-election of Donald Trump. In the past, each of us has been disappointed when someone from the opposing party won the presidential election. We anticipate that little of any value will emerge during their term in office. They present us with very low potential utility. Sadness and perhaps a touch of depression linger over us as we adjust to the prospect of four low-quality years of presidential governance.

Something quite different occurred when we were faced with the prospect of Donald Trump returning to office. A chasm opened up before us. We looked down into a pit of despair. As exhibited in the comments we offered in the first four chapters of this book, the three of us imagined (and anticipated) profound inequities, climate disasters, and the potential collapse of our democratic institutions of government. We did not experience the disappointment that comes with low anticipated utility. Instead, we experienced the dread, despair, and deep pain (angst) that comes with a negative utility. We are about to lose money in a broken economy and devote time and energy to defending our way of life. We anticipate losing money while wasting time; however, something of greater importance might be taken from us. We fear the loss of personal freedom and the collective loss of American ideals and purposes.

The three of us recognize that our society is highly polarized, meaning that our pit of despair is undoubtedly matched by a dome of delight among those who wished for (and voted for) the return of Donald Trump to the presidency. Elsewhere, two of us have written extensively about the Bubble of Belief that protects many people from facing the realities of contemporary life (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). The Dome of Delight is a collective version of this Bubble. Because it incorporates the feelings and thoughts of many people, the Dome of Delight is particularly powerful. Upon receiving news that Trump was triumphant, the MAGA crowd envisioned high levels of utility.

MEGA believers looked forward with great glee to the next four years of the Trump presidency (and perhaps even longer). The immediate "high" for them was highly rewarding. MAGA believers anticipated that this "high" would continue as they set up shop in the Dome of Delight. We can imagine the Ecstasy that was experienced in particular by those MAGA folks who have often felt dishonored by the Elite and isolated from the tools of government (coveted by old-line members of their own party). An intoxicating mixture of reaffirmed beliefs and reactivated hope must have been coursing through their heads and hearts.

This brew was matched in strength by the toxic brew coursing through the despairing heads and hearts of those (like the three of us) who (absolutely) did not want Trump's return to power. The pit of despair was deep. There may have been many unanswered questions that were blowin' in the wind; however, many of the possible answers to these questions were now quite troubling. Negative utility can be just as hard to accept or even harder to accept in the world of politics as in the world of economics.

Negative Utility and Freedom

The perspective offered by a political theologian provides us with further insight into the nature of negative utility, the pit of despair, and True Freedom. This political theologian is Nicolai Berdyaev. We referenced his work in Chapter Four regarding the nature of Russian communism. A prolific Russian author who crossed the boundaries between political theory, philosophy, and theology, Berdyaev had much to say about the unique nature of Freedom. He captured many of the profound feelings the three of us experienced in witnessing the "freedom" of the American electorate to re-elect a tyrant. Berdyaev (1939/1944) portrayed freedom as

existing in nothingness. For Berdyaev, true freedom is bottomless and without foundation. Authentic freedom is lost with the introduction of restraints, presuppositions, and foundational frames of reference.

As a political theologian, Berdyaev would suggest that the three of us (and many other people) encountered true freedom in our exposure to a pit of despair. We found the fundamental, existential basis of freedom in this pit. Our nation was "free" to elect a tyrant. As voters, we are free to vote against our freedom. We are free to select someone who doesn't "give a damned" about us. Berdyaev believes that the alternative to freedom (and our pit of despair) is self-imposed "slavery of mind". Embracing this slavery, we turn to a certainty regarding political outcomes and a feeling of Serenity regarding the stability of a secure American democracy. We find and secure a way to ensure that voters are not free to vote against freedom. We offer a patronizing restriction on "stupid" decisions made by citizens to vote against their best interests and welfare. As citizens of Germany are now considering, the Nazi-oriented right-wing citizens of our society can be banned from forming a political party or holding office. What should we do?

We can't have it both ways. Either we risk loss of democracy, or we risk losing freedom to collectively determine the fundamental nature of our society. As Ben Franklin declared when freedom was first secured in a fragile American republic, we must engage in an ongoing struggle to keep this republic. We must engage this struggle in a society (and world) where valid and useful expertise is being dismissed and our fundamental beliefs are being challenged (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). Mistakes will often be made on behalf of our desire for democracy and freedom. We can readily fall collectively into an authoritarian trap. We can also stumble into an exceptionally liberating democracy. Most importantly, we can learn from our mistakes (Argyris and Schon, 1978). Furthermore, we can forgive ourselves and others for these mistakes and the harm that has been wrought (Bergquist and Pomerantz, 2020).

Democracy Curriculum in a Learning Society

What then is the nature of a society in which mistakes can be made (and forgiven), valid and useful expertise can be honored, and a stumbling journey toward True Freedom can be embarked? A society that takes on these existential tasks can be identified as a *Learning Society* (Hutchins, 1970;

Schön, 1973). We can collectively reflect on and constantly redefine what democracy and True Freedom mean in a Learning Society. A related task accompanies this creation of a Learning Society. We must learn how to live under mid-21st-century conditions of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence, and contradiction (VUCA-Plus) (Bergquist, 2025d). Quite a tall order. How do we best address these two tasks?

To find an answer, we return to Berdyaev and his political theology. Berdyaev relied on spiritually based courage for the support he needed when expelled from Russia in 1922. As a man of conviction and action, Berdyaev believed that a spiritual source of courage is required if we are to face the freedom of nothingness. This spiritual perspective might not be an option for all three of us. It is certainly not an option for many people living in our highly secular society. We must look to other sources for our courage.

Perhaps, we find support in the frame of reference we apply to the elusive and perhaps bottomless phenomenon called True Freedom. This frame of reference could be founded on a desire to learn. In seeking to create a Learning Society, we might envision the Trump presidency as one in a series of courses offered in a cosmic classroom. The full curriculum consists of a diverse set of courses in which we are to learn about the best ways to build and protect a democracy. In this regard, the Trump presidency course operates much like the COVID-19 "course" of 2020-21. COVID could be considered a teacher from whom we learned (or at least had the opportunity to learn) how best to address the challenges of much more severe pandemics that inevitably will occur in the future (Christakis, 2020). President Trump and his governing colleagues could be teachers of a democracy in peril.

The challenge is not inherent in the COVID-19 or Trump crises. Rather, the challenge resides in our willingness and capacity to learn from these crises. A Learning Society requires that we extract insights directly from the crises. In mid-21st-century life, we also must learn from the conditions of VUCA-Plus. We must transform these conditions into opportunities for anchoring, curiosity, and enablement. We must entertain multiple perspectives, engage with others in collective learning, and integrate emerging polarities (Bergquist, 2025d). In confronting these challenging tasks, we will achieve some successful outcomes. We must learn from these

successes. We will also often fail to resolve the elusive issues that we face, for they are multi-dimensional problems, dilemmas, and polarities (and sometimes profound mysteries) (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). We must collectively learn from these failures and avoid repeated engagements of the failed strategies.

We focus a bit more on the character of the classroom in which learning can take place. On the one hand, we know that it is possible in college or graduate school to gain important insights from case studies, simulated experiences, and internships. Perhaps we can learn similarly from COVID-19 or the Donald Trump election. We can set aside time to reflect on what we have learned from our practices in confronting one of these crises (Schön, 1983). We can think slowly (Kahneman, 2011/2013) and systemically (Meadows, 2008) about what we might do in the near future.

On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic and Trump elections are "disasters" that have occurred on a much bigger stage than the academic classroom. The stakes are much higher. And we can't choose to exit either the Pandemic course or our currently operating course on the potential demise of democracy and True Freedom. We need the level of courage that Nicholai Berdyaev proposed. If this courage is not to be found in the engagement of a spiritual perspective, then perhaps it is found in a communal perspective.

We might generate the requisite courage if we gather with other people who are similarly committed to addressing and learning from a specific crisis (Gergen and Gergen, 2004). A Learning Society might ultimately require collaboration. It might require recognizing that collective wisdom is embedded in the diversity of perspectives (Page, 2011), the capacity to take risks in the midst of complexity (Stacey, 1996; Stacey, 2000), and the capacity to learn from mistakes that accompany these risks (Argyris and Schon, 1978; Taleb, 2012).

Conclusions

We propose that the curriculum for a program on democracy and True Freedom might be based on what has been learned from the journey toward democracy in Estonia, and what occurs during Trump's second presidency.

As part of this program, the validity of three pillars of True Freedom should be tested against Trump's challenge. Our preparation of the manuscript for this book has provided us with the opportunity to participate in this program.

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Section Two

The Pillars of True Freedom

Chapter Six

Balance: Ensuring Both Personal Rights and Collective Responsibilities

In examining the nature of true freedom, we recognize that the journey to genuine freedom is quite challenging. As Walter Lippmann (1929) 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, we believe it is possible to undertake this journey successfully. Our optimism is guided by three independent though related dictums.

First, we propose that true freedom requires balancing a concern for individual personal rights with a concern for collective, shared responsibility. Second, the three of us 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 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. We consider all three of these pillars to be essential to true freedom. The first of these three pillars is considered in this chapter, with the other two pillars being considered in subsequent chapters.

The Conflicting R's: Rights and Responsibilities

As we address the challenge of achieving true freedom, it is appropriate to turn, as we have previously, to Erich Fromm's social-psychological analysis. Fromm believed that the affirmation of others and the union of the individual with others are 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, 1941a, 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 (1941a, 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.

We suggest that Fromm's terror of aloneness relates to the terror associated with Otto's and Jung's numinous. It is also associated with 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 (1941a), 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 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

According to Fromm, the polarity between individual rights and collective responsibility 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 a relationship with other people. Love as an organizing feature of society helps us overcome the inherent

insecurities we associate with the immediate confrontation of VUCA-Plus. Furthermore, as Fromm suggested, love helps us overcome the existential dread 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 ("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 no longer need to act alone. We 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. There will only be 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. Consequently, this dynamic stance of genuine freedom requires continuing community support (May, 2007).

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 States:

> "[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-down doesn't seem to work very well. Rather, there is a flow upward of money to a few at the top of the economic food chain. Any sense of collective responsibility disappeared 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) write about 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 America (and many other countries) that an attempt was made to fill this emptiness. Perhaps the pursuit of happiness through consumption in mid-20th-century America (Fromm, 1955) can be traced back to an earlier era. Might Fromm's critical analysis be equally applicable to Andrew Carnegie and his Gospel of Wealth?

Like Robert Bellah, Carol Gilligan (1982) identifies 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 infused with an emphasis on distinctiveness and separation. This contrasts with emphasis on connectedness and similarities between people. The distinctiveness and separation emphases, in turn, have 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 interviews conducted in Hungary and Estonia, concerns about the balancing of personal rights and collective responsibilities were pervasive. 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 of 1991 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 similarly declared, "Freedom is . . . a willingness to give up something, to make choices." Yet this Czech professor and this Estonian reformer minimally understood what freedom meant regarding 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) is to be responsible to their friends and future generations, then how can

they be assured that they 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 society as well as in other societies operating in our 21st-century world? The balancing act is becoming increasingly 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 the Soviet collapse 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 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 we would suggest that VUVA-Plus is making the balance of personal rights and collective responsibility much more difficult.

Hunkering Down or Lending a Hand

On the one hand, at a personal level, we are threatened by all the elements of VUCA-Plus and wish to hunker down. We are preoccupied with defending our own home, our livelihood, and our 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. We experience shared angst about 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 appreciate 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 then-Vice President Harris 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 recalled 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 lift 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 concerning the nature of this societal balance. We offer several ideas and one powerful tool that could be of assistance when introducing this dialogue in various forums.

The Balancing Act

As human beings, we are not inclined to balance off major priorities, such as personal rights and collective responsibilities. To balance these priorities, we must 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 balancing rights and responsibilities.

Such a balance will only be achieved through constructive dialogue. To successfully convene this dialogue regarding future policies, we must consider several psychological factors. Behavioral scientists and behavioral economists have something 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 tend to view our complex world in single terms. It is challenging to consider multiple interacting variables at the same time. Many years ago, members of the M.I.T. community designed a powerful modeling tool called system dynamics. This tool enables us to simultaneously consider multiple variables (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 offered that 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. 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 a parallel to the exponential power of nuclear explosions. This parallel has often been drawn by members of the Santa Fe Institute (who were often those involved in both the nuclear research done at Los Alamos, located near Santa Fe, New Mexico, and the more recent study of complex social systems).

As concerns for individual rights increase (resulting from 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: complementary schizogenesis. As a cultural anthropologist, Bateson describes 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 underserved. They go to war (or at least lead protests) against graven individualists. Banners arise declaring that "freedom for only a few is no freedom at all!"

We look out at our world one day, 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. It is hard to think of true freedom amid 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 do 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 don't happen overnight. It takes time. And time is precious under conditions of major societal stress and VUVA-Plus-induced angst.

Delay creates polarities. Mobilization of opposing parties is quick and dramatic because the underlying concerns have been festering for 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 may be just as important as the Nuclear Effect. And it will often complement this effect. This is particularly the case when it comes to a major societal dilemma, such as the balance of rights and responsibilities.

Counter Intuition

A third important insight can be offered. The results generated by system-based analyses are often counterintuitive. That is to say, the models often produce 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 underserved

may grow dependent on the government. They might even resent the "patronizing" and often repressive control being exerted by their government.

A quite different strategy might have to be deployed. We act in a counterintuitive 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 counterintuitive strategy. As the system dynamics theorists declare: "don't just do something, stand there [and reflect more deeply on what is actually occurring]."

Complexity, Chaos and Butterflies

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 found in a VUCA-Plus World. An emerging interdisciplinary field of study (Complexity Theory) produces these insights. 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. These systems usually operate in a turbulent environment (such as we described earlier in this book). These complex systems are quite tippy. They readily shift 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 (producing subsystem four: stagnant).

While many other troubling and unanticipated insights emerge 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 provide 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.

A small part of a complex system can have a major impact on the entire system because it is composed of many interdependent parts. 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

widespread 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. The system falls into the aforementioned state of unpredictable chaos (white water system three) or a highly predictable and deadly state of stagnation and authoritarianism (white water system four).

Slow Thinking

Jay Forrester, the original architect of System Dynamics, often declared: "Don't just do something—stand there!" One of Forrester's esteemed students and colleagues, Donella Meadows (2008, p. 171) 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 challenging 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-counterintuitive outcomes of these considerations? 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. We 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 our view of this problem. Like Forrester and Meadows, Kahneman urges us to pause 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 decide.

As a sidebar, we 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." The same principle could be applied to 21st Century problem-solving. We 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 in 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 recurring 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."

We are all 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 think fast 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 schizogenesis 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 systemically, as Forrester and Meadows propose. However, this might 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 lead 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 might once again 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 we have noted, there have often been strong pulls back to authoritarian perspectives and

practices. We know that VUCA Plus issues are usually not handled thoughtfully. These issues tend to be heavily laden with anxiety. And this anxiety impacts the way we think about and feel about its source. Anxiety must be metabolized (transformed) in a way that contains and reduces the anxiety (Bergquist, 2020a).

Typically, metabolism occurs 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 arrive with mythic force. We make 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 up to a leader who can fight against or flee from this evil. This leader will offer simple ways we can reduce our anxiety (Bergquist, 2020a). These ways often include the identification of an evil enemy 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" 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 saturates our thoughts and actions. As we have already mentioned, tools are available that can aid our slow, systemic analysis of pandemic problems, despite the challenges we face in confronting these problems. We are about to introduce a process that can help us make balanced decisions based on this analysis.

Polarity Management

We must leave the universities of Cambridge, Massachusetts, so that we might further refine a perspective offered at several points in this book. We return to a process that may be one of the best ways to find true freedom through the balancing of rights and responsibilities. Specifically, we once again consider the work of Barry Johnson (Johnson, 1996; Johnson, 2020), the "dean" of polarity management. Johnson's perspectives and his related tools can guide our future actions.

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 particularly relevant 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 already involved in deliberation regarding individual rights and collective responsibilities have framed the policy as an either/or option. Instead, we will frame our analysis around these two polar-opposite stances as a both/and. We begin by identifying some of the benefits and disadvantages associated with each perspective. The benefits in each case yield both short-term (tactical) and long-term (strategic) outcomes.

BENEFITS: FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS	BENEFITS: FOCUS ON COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY
Motivation to Achieve	Motivation to Cooperate
Freedom to Innovate	Support for Innovation
Absence of Arbitrary External Control	Absence of Arbitrary Internal Control
Ability to Protect Personal/Family	Ability to Collectively Protect Both Personal

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

COSTS: FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS	COSTS: FOCUS ON COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY
Abuse of Unregulated Personal Power	Abuse of Overwhelming Collective Power
Infringement on the Rights of Those Without Power	Infringement on the Creativity and Initiative of Individual Citizens
Uncontrolled Accumulation of Individual Wealth	Uncontrolled Growth of Government
Lost Sense of Caring for Other People and the Greater Good	

The following are the typical action steps taken to maintain and defend each of these societal positions:

ACTION STEPS: FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS	**ACTION STEPS: FOCUS ON COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY**
Emphasize personal achievement (advertising/public figures)	Emphasize Cooperate attitude (advertising/public figures)
Reward personal innovation and creativity	Support and fund collective innovation
Enact public policies and regulations that protect individual rights	Enact public policies and regulations that protect against inhumane and destructive acts
Enact laws that Protect	

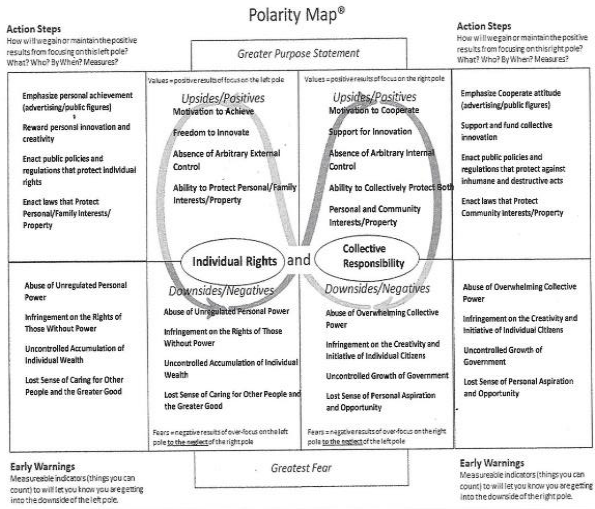
Here are the early warning signs that typically indicate that this societal policy is not working well or is creating unintended problems (We will have more to say about this analysis a bit later):

WARNING SIGNS: FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS	WARNING SIGNS: FOCUS ON COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY
Abuse of Unregulated Personal Power	Abuse of Overwhelming Collective Power
Infringement on the Rights of Those Without Power	Infringement on the Creativity and Initiative of Individual Citizens
Uncontrolled Accumulation of Individual Wealth	Uncontrolled Growth of Government
Lost Sense of Caring for Other People and the Greater Good	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 begins from the left top to the left bottom to the right top. The movement is then to the right bottom, back to the left top. We are whipped back and forth. The vacillation increases in both intensity and rapidity as concern (and anxiety) increases regarding each perspective. This is what the dynamics of polarization are all about. inadequate time and attention is 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 attempt to *maximize* the benefits of one side at the expense of the other. 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 identified as negative freedom.

Furthermore, we now know that an emphasis on personal rights does not inevitably lead to an increased desire to achieve or innovate. The "have-nots" are much more likely to fall into a state of despair and lethargy. They are 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 an increase in charitable contributions. However, we 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. These constraints on freedom are 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. This ignorance was evident among the Estonians who were 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, deeply felt (though often ill-defined) concerns would be felt within a short time regarding the ultimate "heartlessness" of the collective responsibility perspective. Those advocating collective responsibility might have the best of intentions; however, the outcomes can be counterintuitive. Citizens end up feeling just as alienated from the sources of power as they would be in a world dominated by personal rights. We would inevitably find specific projections regarding the potential number of people served by the new public policies and priorities. There would be numbers without a focus on the individual. These would be BIG numbers without reference to the 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

These stone enclaves existed in Estonia during the 1970s-1990s. As Robert Sommer noted, 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 transferred from another country to work in Estonian factories 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 who were interviewed spoke of the "stone hearts" that were bred in these "stone cities." Similarities between Tallinn high-rise communities and the urban "development" projects of metropolitan New York were readily apparent. When driving by high rises in the Bronx, one wonders if similar "stone hearts" are to be found among the residents of these buildings (Bergquist, 2025c). Was Robert Moses' dream of "clearing slums" to produce a better New York just another example of collective responsibility and centralized hubris run amok? Do the stone cities really offer a 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 have feet—or at least should have felt—disappointed. They might even have felt 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 and High Stakes

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 when considering and potentially enacting this side. How serious are we focusing on this one side? And how long can we 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 requires us to find a reasonable and perhaps flexible set-point as we act in favor of one side or the other. 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 the integration of personal rights and collective responsibilities achieved (e.g., Lodge, 1995).

The fundamental recommendation concerns the management of this particular polarity. We remain in the positive domain of each perspective long enough to identify all (or at least most) of the key benefits and potential actions 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 identifying potential ways in which the two perspectives can be brought together on behalf of an integrated response to the challenges of 21st-century life.

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 adjustment. The second option regarding collective responsibility is aligned with this recommendation of dynamic vigilance. Caring public policy can easily evolve into 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 allow the world

to enter—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 of consideration and compassion in seeking to eventually find a balance of 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.

Alarms of Personal Rights

As 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, TV (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). (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024)

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 are further indirect measures that concern 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 (percentage-wise) 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 more easily formulated and more credible metric can be used when considering the 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 the income gap. It is also a matter of very few people holding great wealth. The

super-wealthy possess power along with their 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.

The fourth signal that we have already identified is most elusive and perhaps ultimately of profound 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. Is the sense of personal worth lost (Bergquist, 2025a)? Is there a reduced concern about the welfare and worth of other people (Bergquist, 2025b)? How many members of society lose any sense of caring for other members of their community? Do they only worry about their immediate family or perhaps their neighbors (members of 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 in concern for other people is occurring? At some level, we all "know" when inequity and indifference are 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?

Alarms of Collective Responsibility

The alarm system for safeguards against collective responsibility is running amok, given the abuse of overwhelming collective power (usually assigned to the state) and infringement on the creativity and initiative of individual citizens. As with the signals for those advocating personal rights, the responsibility signals are not easily measured and are often misunderstood or ignored. We can use such inadequate measures as the number of new laws and regulations passed during the past year that restrict 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 national wealth (GNP) found in governmental agencies. The number of government employees can also be measured, as can the ratio of funds given to governmental agencies and those given to non-government organizations (NGOs) that provide human services.

At what level can we consider any 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 concerns an underlying assumption that the government can be more effective and equitable in doing this work than private enterprise. When is this assumption regarding government effectiveness no longer questioned? The other side of the polarity can be examined. When is an assumption that private enterprise is a more effective agent than government no longer being questioned? Alarm bells should go off on both sides if critics have been silenced and oppositional voices are no longer heard.

We offer a personal reflection related to the oppositional voice. For several years, one of us [WB] served on the Board of Trustees of a private college in North Carolina (St. Andrews). He was flying to a graduation ceremony at this college on a small airplane, where his co-passenger was George McGovern, who had recently lost the national USA presidential election by a large margin to Ronald Reagan. The following is an account of what transpired:

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 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, governmental support is required.

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 inadequately afforded an opportunity for social advancement. Why assist them, given that they are unlikely to benefit over the long run from this assistance? The cycle of poverty is sustained and intensified (think system dynamics). As those identifying and describing the cycle of poverty have noted, the culture and psychology of poverty (hopelessness and helplessness) might be even more difficult to overcome than the cycle (Lewis, 1968). True freedom is nowhere to be found in either the culture or the cycle of poverty. Alarm signals should be sounded for those advocating a pure form of collective responsibility.

Hopefully, with the safeguards in place and the alarm signals clearly articulated, we can address the negative consequences of each option

constructively. As a result, we might even be in a position to formulate an integrative policy regarding the handling of complex societal problems. We, along with our Estonian colleagues, may be able to move toward true freedom in our respective societies. Optimally, this formulation could be considered slowly, with broader, often counterintuitive, and systemic dynamics taken into account. 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 those we 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.

Coda: Personal Rights and Collective Responsibilities

Kevin, Suzi, and Bill have all found the events of the first 100 days of Trump's presidency to be troubling. Even terrifying. The legally protected rights of both US citizens and noncitizens have frequently been ignored. Suzi is particularly concerned about these losses of personal rights as a woman, Jew, and one generation away from her ancestors escaping the Holocaust. Bill relates his concerns to the work he did in Estonia and his previous writing about the matter of individual rights. He recalls narratives about the deportation of innocent people to Soviet Gulags. Kevin is saving his comments for Chapter Seven, where he reflects on growing up under a repressive regime in South Africa.

Suzi

The magnitude, scope, and scale of the created chaos are profound. The destruction that has occurred during the first four months of the Trump presidency is great. His decisions and actions impact not only individual lives but also our collective lives. He has inflicted damage on all Americans, on our economy, and on our world standing. It's mind-boggling to witness the magnitude of the disruptions and how fast the dismantling of our democracy has occurred. It didn't even take 100 days. These actions have a

lasting impact that will take generations to repair, if it is even possible to do so.

Within the first 30 days, the impact of the devastation and destruction was palpable for many people, including me and my business. The life and work of all my clients at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) were completely disrupted. Anyone who's a federal worker is in a state of trauma. Drama and chaos reign supreme right now. The NIH workers literally are being tortured at work and show signs of PTSD. Chaos is caused by flip-flopping and nonsensical pronouncements. Trump and his team are declaring changes that aren't lawful and taking unconstitutional actions that produce trauma among those seeking to be lawful and guided by constitutional guidelines.

*Fast and Destructive Dismantling***:** What we're witnessing is happening so fast that it is indeed incredible. It's fascinating that people are saying, "Oh, I didn't know he was going to do all that". I'm gobsmacked. People who voted for him. How did you not know? How are you so uneducated as a voter that you didn't know about the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025? That 900-something page document is the roadmap for what's exactly being done so far. It's the roadmap to destruction. This entire administration's plan is just wholesale destruction of the government. I don't think people really understand all the ripple effects. They don't fully appreciate how all of this is going to affect (and already is affecting) everybody's day-to-day lives.

It is traumatic to live through these contemporary times, especially in the context of understanding American history and what happened in the lead-up to World War II. It is disturbing to witness the fragility of democracy; however, fragility doesn't surprise me. In 1787, when leaving the Constitutional Convention, Ben Franklin was famously asked, "Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?" "A republic," Franklin replied, "if you can keep it." So, our democratic republic has always been fragile and tentative.

Things that we thought were set in stone as laws turn out to be only norms of well-intentioned civil servants. When you have an authoritarian, power-hungry fascist, the fragility becomes fully apparent. The checks and balances don't work. During his first four years in office, our current president identified the location of checks and balances and how to dismantle them. He removed the guardrails so that we now have none. He returns to the presidency with complete understanding and a plan. This time, he quickly

figured out how to dismantle all the checks and balances. So, it doesn't surprise me that democracy is so fragile.

Loss of Individual Rights: The loss of individual rights is deeply concerning to me. We don't have rights anymore. This is a touchy subject for me as a woman, because the Equal Rights Act was never passed. I know Biden did something with it before he left office, but who knows where that stands now? In particular, I am concerned about the SAVE Act. It essentially takes away any married (or previously married) woman's right to vote, because this act requires that you have a driver's license and a passport that matches your birth certificate. So, any woman who has taken her husband's name doesn't have that match. She can't vote. Even as a divorced woman, my passport and driver's license are still under my married name. They don't match my birth certificate. That requirement will prevent me from being able to vote in the next election. That's a problem. I do not intend to formally change my name back to my maiden name, since I have 30 years of professional recognition under my married name. Why should I be in a position to have to change my name just to vote? Especially when votes are being "disappeared," and there's a systematic dismantling of the election process?

I'm also worried about the American citizens who are being deported under this immigration scam. The deportations are being conducted without due process, without any respect for the citizens' rights. They are being sent to Gulags in other countries. This is a terrifying time to be an American. Furthermore, the impact is being felt by non-Americans. I have friends in Canada who often come to the United States. They will no longer cross the border. I have family in other countries who won't visit America anymore. It's too frightening to be in America right now because everybody is vulnerable. It's apparently fair game for this administration to send anyone out of the country to a Gulag in another country.

The Heritage Foundation is an extremist organization that created Project 2025. Essentially, as I have noted, this is now the playbook that the current administration is following for the destruction and dismantling of democracy. This past October (2024), the same organization released Project Esther. It's not as long a document as the 900-pager, but Project Esther is specifically focused on supposedly combating anti-Semitism in our country. In reality, it did not involve any Jewish leaders in its writing. It was prepared by right-wing Christian fundamentalists through the Heritage

Foundation. The actions that we've been seeing this administration take against universities are all part of Project Esther. The big financial impact on universities is being taken to "punish" these institutions for allowing Free Palestine protests to happen.

On the surface, Project Esther seems to be about combating anti-Semitism. However, this project is actually going to create more anti-Semitism, because this action is being used to marginalize those who have beliefs or ties to the Free Palestine movement. I don't believe in marginalizing anyone in our country. That's the whole point of America. It is the melting pot that promotes inclusivity. So, these attacks on DEI and attacks on universities that allowed the free speech protests are counter to the fundamental spirit of America. Sure, I may not be an advocate of the Free Palestine movement, but I do believe that human beings have rights or should have rights, regardless of race, religion, or gender. I believe in the rights of any American to protest. It's just the fact that anyone who's not a cisgender, white, male Christian is being marginalized more than ever before. Most troubling is that this marginalization is being done as a governmental act or an act of the Oval Office, which elicits echoes of Hitler. Military deployment against American citizens and military parades for the birthday of the President? Pure dictatorship.

Need for Collective Responsibility: Let me turn to the other side of the equation: collective responsibility. A key question needs to be posed: What is our responsibility as American citizens with all this? Has the responsibility shifted? As Franklin noted, our republic and our democracy are wonderful if we can keep it. So, what is our role as citizens to keep democracy? What is our responsibility? That question is hard to address. I have many friends, colleagues, and clients who call themselves activists. They self-identify as activists and engage in activities such as street protests. I hold a more pragmatic perspective. I don't believe that protesting is going to stop a madman who's hellbent on destruction.

I also am not optimistic about calling your representatives when they are no longer representing you. Telling them what you want doesn't have any real impact against a would-be king who considers himself a strong man willing to use government resources for his own gain. I think writing and calling one's senators and congressmen just makes people feel like they're taking action and being responsible American citizens. I don't know if their actions

have any impact whatsoever when those very same senators and congressmen are afraid of losing their power. They are discarding their votes and their loyalty. They are bending their knees to the person of whom they're most afraid. So, I offer a short answer to the question about collective responsibility; I don't know what our responsibility is in addressing this matter.

At one level, I think our responsibility is to put things back in order. However, I don't even know if that's possible. I don't know enough about how much has been destroyed on the back end. We're not privy. They're not publicizing the news regarding what's happening behind the scenes. Since that's all secret, we don't know what's being destroyed and if it's going to be rebuildable. It is unknown whether there is a chance to rebuild it after this. Or is our society destroyed for generations to come? Must we create some new kind of republic if there's an aftermath to the current chaos?

We are already in an ideological civil war. I fear that we're going towards an actual civil war, so I'd say our responsibility is not to take our guns out and start shooting each other. I'd say our responsibility is to amplify sane and grounded voices. We must value and support voices that have a plan for the betterment of all, not just a few rich billionaires. How do we amplify these voices? Social media and the Internet were tools that were used to create the polarity and divisiveness that led to our current situation. There were active misinformation and disinformation initiatives coming from both China and Russia since the early 2010s, if not longer. Leaders of these two countries were trying to create these echo chambers with false narratives.

This has essentially been propaganda. These false narratives have crossed the border into the United States. A propaganda machine has been operating inside America in a way of which many citizens of the United States are unaware. The Internet has been the primary vehicle for this disinformation. I believe that the Internet could be used for good and not just for evil. I think it could be used to un-radicalize those who were radicalized, perhaps by using the same strategies of radicalization that are deployed by social media. These strategies might now be used for good rather than evil.

There is one other possibility. We begin by saying, “You might be right about some things. Trump's not right, but you might be right.” This helps reduce the dissonance of people who say, “Oh my God, what did I vote for?”

I mean, I do agree that there are, or have been historically, places of inefficiency, or bloat, or excess funding in bizarre governmental locations. Could it use an overhaul for the sake of efficiency? Sure. But do it within the way we operate, within the Constitution, within the congressional rights, not with just wholesale doing whatever the hell you want. It's not saying, "because I'm president, I can do whatever the hell I want". And not sending these 20-year-old DOGE bros to destroy government agencies using technology.

It'll be interesting to see how things evolve. What will it be like if the Democrats come back into office? Could it be that they can rebuild it better than it was before? I don't have any faith in the Democrats. I think a whole new party is needed. I've always been a registered independent. I support many policies that align with a more conservative agenda. So, what would the new party look like? Well, it should look like America, for starters. It should be comprised of the same percentages of all the different kinds of Americans that are now present in this country. People of color, people of different genders, people of whatever. It would take a more conservative stance. I'm fiscally more conservative. In terms of social networks and taking care of people, I'm more liberal, but I am not wholly into either party, given how polarized, power hungry, and politically motivated they have both become.

Our political landscape has veered to the far left and far right. I still dance in the middle. I'm wondering where the other moderates are to be found. I guess if there were a new party, it would be a moderate party. It would be populated by people who, like me, are in the political middle. They can't buy into either of these extreme sides. In some ways, I am a Rockefeller Republican: fiscally conservative and socially liberal. I've always registered as independent, just because I don't believe in throwing my hat into any one team and becoming a cult member.

Tornadoes and Snow Globes: What's coming up repeatedly in my coaching conversations with leaders is that in this time of chaos and unpredictability (VUCA Plus), we can't plan, envision, or innovate as leaders. We Americans have to wait for things to settle. There are two metaphors that I've been using with my clients that seem to resonate right now in these times.

One is that of the tornado. When you are in a tornado, there's an abundance of debris flying around. And you're flying around. You're swept

up in this tornado. You can't see through the chaos to the other side. While you're in that situation, you can't start thinking about what addition you're going to put on your house next fall, because you don't know if you're going to have a house.

Your job right now is to avoid getting hit by a flying cow, or a flying barn, or a flying tractor, or debris from a high-rise. Wherever this tornado is causing danger. We can't see ahead because we don't know what it's going to look like. You might not have a house on which to put an addition. You might have to figure out where you are going to rebuild the house. Can you rebuild here, or is the devastation so complete that there will be no infrastructure left of this town? We may have to move somewhere else. We must wait. This is one metaphor.

The other metaphor is that of the snow globe. It's both an inner and outer snow globe. We've talked about the environment we're in, whether it's your organization that's under siege or our entire country. There is a macro-level snow globe that is being shaken up, thrown down the stairs, and kicked around. There is "*flitter*" (a combination of flakes and glitter) that exists inside the globe. And the globe's inside never gets a chance to settle. We can't see the scene in the middle. We can't see through the snow globe, because all the flitter is in the way. That's the macro-level example. We have our internal snow globe. The flitter inside is clouding everything. The globe is constantly shaken and thrown around, so the content inside never settles.

Our central nervous system is rightfully triggered by all of these external circumstances. We can't control external circumstances, but we can take actions to calm our internal flitter. We can settle the flitter in our internal snow globe, so that we have some clarity about the choices we want to make in response to the environment, the government, the administration, the loss of democracy, whatever. For example, one very minimal example would be not watching the news. We can choose not to watch the news if it unsettles our internal flitter. We can choose to spend more time in nature to settle our flitter before the next time the environmental chaos whips us up again.

I'm trying to get myself into the eye of the tornado so that I'm not tossed around by the debris and the winds. Then, while I'm in the eye of the tornado, I'm focused on my internal snow globe, so that I can settle down the chaos internally. I can't do anything about the chaos around me, but I

don't have to participate in it. I don't have to let it impact my internal state. So that's my mantra. *Settle your flitter.*

Bill

When reading about the current ongoing loss of individual rights in the United States, I find myself recalling the interviews I conducted in Estonia when the Soviet Union was collapsing. Citizens of this long-occupied country were suddenly free to openly share stories about lost rights. I was there to listen to and report these stories in the book I co-authored with Berne Weiss (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994). Echoes also have bounced around my brain from the essays and books I have authored or co-authored concerning the craziness and unconscious life of so-called "rational" men and women when facing the stressful conditions of our postmodern world (Bergquist, 1993). I also hear the words I have written about mid-21st-century conditions of VUCA-Plus (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence, and contradiction (Bergquist, 2025d). I share some of my reflections on these recollections and echoes.

Gulags and Freedom: To use Suzi's term, it is mind-boggling to find that American citizens can be imprisoned for no apparent reason without due process. We have no rights anymore. In many ways, our country is replicating the disenfranchisement processes found in many authoritarian countries, such as the Soviet Union. History doesn't repeat itself, but it echoes, and these are echoes of behaviors that we've seen before in history. Suzi has used the term Gulag, when identifying the places to which citizens and noncitizens are being sent. She is speaking of "assignment to a Gulag" as opposed to "wrongful imprisonment" or "unlawful imprisonment." This speaks to the Soviet historical echo. Just like the actions being taken by ICE agents are more like those of the Gestapo than those of American law enforcement officers. We're living in an American time of Gestapo and sending folks off to Gulags. The use of those terms, I think, is not hyperbole and not an exaggeration in these times.

Gestapo and Gulag are characterizations of history's echoes that we're seeing now and living through. People need to hear these terms. They may not have heard those words before and don't understand what they mean. These newly informed citizens go to Google and discover the meaning and historical context of these terms. Citizens now understand, "Yes, this is

fascism we're living through right now. This is not a democracy anymore. We don't have freedom anymore."

Specifically, going to a Gulag in Russia meant you traveled a long way from your home. Typically, you were assigned to a Gulag in far eastern Russia (Siberia). It was not like going to a local prison. You were going far away. That's what's going on now. We are shipping citizens and noncitizens to a distant country. Like the Maryland man who was sent to El Salvador, Venezuela. The Germans killed people. We haven't gotten there yet, thank God. Russians sent them far away. So, two types of extermination occurred. For Suzi, there's a whole other level of terror for her as a Jew. She mentioned Project Esther.

It's terrifying and sad to see what's happening to our country. We can explore the issue of trauma that Suzi brought up regarding some of the NIH people. Obviously, one way we effectively deal with trauma is to take action so that we're not frozen. As Suzi indicated, people are demonstrating or contacting their congressperson as a way to reduce their own trauma. However, as Suzi suggests, these actions probably are not having much of an impact. I agree with Suzi that Violence is not the answer. I think we have a responsibility not to take out our guns and start shooting our neighbors.

Another way to deal with trauma is by over-medicating and seeking to escape from the pain and suffering of trauma. This alternative action is frequently taken in contemporary American society. A third way in which to address trauma is by seeking support and finding ways in which to confront trauma in a carefully measured way. A colleague of mine, who still suffers from the PTSD of service in Vietnam, recently attended a week-long residential workshop with his wife. Along with several other veterans of Vietnam (and Iraq), he was first treated to a celebrative event in which a cluster of volunteers came together to praise the heroism and dedication of my colleague and his fellow soldiers. This never happened when he returned from Vietnam. Instead, my colleague was advised to never wear his uniform in public, since the actions taken by US soldiers in Vietnam were despised by many American citizens.

During this week-long program, my colleague and his wife attended powerful morning sessions about the matter of trauma and its impact, then spent time in the afternoon with a couple's counsellor, accompanied by sessions with masseurs, opportunities for meditation, and many delicious

and healthy meals. All of this was offered under a grant that was directed toward the deserved support of those men (and their spouses) who suffered from the trauma of warfare. While this form of carefully conceived, holistic support is not available to all traumatized mid-21st-century Americans, more widely available services incorporating at least some of these activities might be made available.

Loss of Collective Responsibilities: Like Suzi, I was not totally surprised that the second Trump presidency has taken its current destructive course. The focus on individual rights and expectations that powerful people will get what they want is deeply embedded in American culture. The powerful myth of the American cowboy exemplifies this focus and these expectations. While Ronald Reagan was often portrayed as a virtuous cowboy, Donald Trump might best be portrayed as one of the powerful landowners who controlled the entire valley. Both the cowboy of virtual and the powerful landowner serve as mythic expressions of individualism without constraint.

What is the source of this profound individualism? We can refer historically to the quest for individual freedom (especially in the expression of religious beliefs) that was prominent among the early European settlers in America. Prominent among the religious beliefs brought to America's shores was the Calvinism of many early refugees from European repression (including the Puritans). Calvinist faith embraces a strong commitment to individual identity. One's relationship to God, in particular, was immediate and personal rather than being mediated through any institution (such as the Catholic Church).

For many Calvinists, personal prosperity was a sign of being specifically chosen by God for eternal salvation (Weber, 1958). Those who were destitute had received a divine sign that they had been predestined to a hell that was to be even more miserable after death. Nothing that their community could do would save these poor souls from eternal misery. Collective responsibility was absent in this Calvinist world. A bit of charity for those who had cap-in-hand (handicapped) was nice, but of no ultimate value. Everything was locked in place by God, as the omnipotent and omniscient architect of human destinations. With predestination as the prevailing doctrine, there is only individual salvation. The salvation of an entire community or nation is not to be found in the divine master plan.

Max Weber provided this deeply troubling scenario regarding the potential role of religious belief in the assignment of individual rights and collective responsibility. However, there is an even more troubling (or at least discouraging) scenario being offered by those with neo-psychoanalytic learnings. Psychologists and psychotherapists such as Earl Hopper and Haim Weinberg (Hooper and Weinberg, 2019) have written about something they call the "Social unconscious". As in the case of a child's personal unconscious that is established early in life, the social unconscious is established primarily at the birth of a society or nation. For children, the unconscious content is often based on a powerful traumatic event—be it birth (Otto Rank), separation from mother (John Bowlby), or some form of abuse. Similarly, for a society, there is collective trauma associated with its formation or an existential threat to its continuing existence.

We find that the trauma associated with America's founding concerns the remarkable (revolutionary) breaking away from royal rule and the turning to democratic rule. Citizens of this new country were no longer to be guided by a king who was assigned by some divine source to the role of omnipotent ruler. This meant that United States citizens were now allowed to rule themselves. It also meant that the challenge of freedom was laid on their shoulders. With this challenge came a compelling desire to escape into some way of life that was free of freedom. (Fromm, 1941a; Bergquist and Weiss, 1994).

Alongside this challenging (perhaps traumatizing) experience was a loss of collective responsibility. Under divine royal rule, citizens look to their king/father or queen/mother as the source of not only guidance, but also the source of their bread and butter, and most human services. As supplicants, those who lived in a kingdom could expect to be nurtured by the benevolent king or queen--or to suffer (without opposition) under a king or queen who was not so benevolent. Dependent on and beholden to this divinely appointed custodian of all benefits, members of a fiefdom were to devote themselves to serving the royal family in a manner prescribed by tradition, precedent, or royal command.

Distortion of Individual Rights: The noted Jewish theologian, Martin Buber (1958/2000), writes about the movement beyond individual identity and rights to a sense of collective identity and responsibility. He reflects on the *I/Thou* relationship that may exist between two or more people. This *I/Thou*

relationship is based on shared commitment to a higher order entity. This entity can be sacred (a deity) or secular (a higher societal good). It is in the shared identity and sense of collective responsibility to a greater good that two or more people find the foundation for their relationship (and their love for one another). Similarly, in a society ruled by a king or queen, *I/Thou* relationships are expected (ideally) to be established between the ruler and those being ruled. A collective covenant is established. This divinely delivered covenant is based on expectations that each party will serve the other in a diligent, dedicated, and enduring manner. Collective responsibility is fully in place.

When royal rule is abandoned, then a new form of collective responsibility must be established. It now must be secular in nature, though perhaps declared to be "inspired" by a divine source. A constitution might be constructed to guide collective responsibility. However, a printed document can never be enough. All too often, it is used to establish a distorted sense of individual rights. As many observers of the American experiment in democracy have noted, collective responsibility (civic responsibility) must be established in the character (hearts, minds, and actions) of the nation's citizens (de Tocqueville, 1835/2000). In such a society that is based on secular principles and expectations, it is tempting (and quite easy) to ignore or discard collective responsibility in favor of a distorted sense of personal rights and benefits.

We find this distortion of individual rights operating in the so-called "Tragedy of the Commons" (Hardin, 1968). The tragedy occurs when those grazing their cows on a Commons (frequently established in 19th Century New England), decide that they can increase their wealth by increasing the number of cows they bring to the commons each day. While this strategy benefits the one user of the commons who brings in more cows, it benefits no one if everyone decides to bring in more cows, thus depleting the commons of sufficient grass for grazing. The tragedy is inevitable without a sense of shared responsibility for the welfare of the commons. This tragedy might exist right now in the large commons we call the United States. A small number of people have decided to graze all their cattle (control large shares of the market) in order to become and remain wealthy.

All these dynamics occur in a public setting. Struggles regarding personal and collective are to be found in the history of early American democracy.

These struggles have involved not just cows, but also business practices, public policy, and social welfare. At a broader level, we can even find it played out in the tension between states' rights (equivalent to personal rights) and federal rights. The fundamental issue regarding the right to own another human being (slavery) was engaged under the banner of personal rights (and "liberty") set against the banner of collective responsibility (and "justice").

The Social Unconscious of Rights and Responsibilities: As those who have introduced the notion of social unconscious have proposed, challenging public events can become embedded in the private psyches of those who witness and participate in these often-traumatizing events. These events are often associated with discrimination against one's nationality, religion, or skin color (in the case of European Jews or Chinese Malaysians) (Hopper and Weinberg, 2019; Lim Say Teck, 2018). For the citizens of a newly formed secular republic in North America, the traumatizing event could be the loss of royally based collective responsibility. Dynamics associated with the social unconscious lead one to predict that a counteractive portrayal will be enacted in one's personal psyche and in a psyche shared by all members of this society.

Much as the Freudians write about the counter-acting functions operating in the interplay between Id and Ego, and Jungians write about the shadow function that counter-acts the perspectives and practices of one's public self (persona), so the counteraction engaged in the social unconscious of US citizens can be a distorted emphasis on the individual and the personal rights held by this individual. If collective responsibility is not readily available (as found in a kingdom), then we don't need it.

We don't have to struggle to establish and reinforce this collective responsibility. We can operate as individual vigilantes, "taking the law into our own hands." As "patriots," we can storm the Capitol in Washington, D.C. to overturn an "unfair" election by force. We can assassinate the unethical healthcare insurance executive and be praised for our actions. It is all a variant on the shoot-out of the good guy and bad guy on the dusty streets of a Western town. New, powerful, and pervasive archetypes of the strong, masculine, independent cowboy and the all-powerful landowner (grazing many cows on the Western commons) have been established as central figures in the social unconscious of those living in the United States.

Established early in the history of the American Republic, this individualistic social unconscious was further enforced (and expanded) when this nation's continuing existence was threatened. It was during the Civil War that citizens of the United States confronted a civic responsibility that had long been ignored. This concerned the conditions of slavery that had been imposed on many Americans—those who had been captured in Africa and forced into a state of slavery when arriving in North America. If there are responsibilities that should be assumed by all citizens of the United States, then one should be concerned with the welfare and freedom of all members of the American community. As I noted above, states' rights were pitted against national concepts of equity and justice. This struggle was an expanded version of personal rights versus collective responsibility.

The massive trauma associated with a war that was waged among citizens of the same nation was to filter down from the public setting to the private psyche of those living in this nation. How do we make sense of the barbarism of slavery as a "caring people"? Individual actions were not sufficient. The dissonance between profound discrimination and caring could not be easily resolved. Counter-action in the social unconscious yielded consonance. Those with a darker skin pigment were automatically considered the "Other." And those who were "other" need not be a source of "caring" by those with a lighter color of skin who happened (by divine decree) to be in power. This separation of the "right" ones and the "wrong"/Other ones could readily be expanded to include a differentiation of those in power from those who were immigrants, were not heterosexual, were not "normal" (physically or psychologically), or were of an inferior gender (women) or ill-defined gender.

Heroes and Open-Mindedness: As we expand the size and complexity of our social unconscious in the United States by adding the Civil War-based isolation and defeat of the Other, our mythic image also expands. The Western hero with a gun in his holster is not just standing down the black-hated man on the streets of Loredo, he has changed clothes and is now garbed as a soldier in a Navy-Blue uniform chasing down the savage Indian just in time to rescue the homesteading mother and child. The owner of a large ranch has been replaced by the owner of a major business or by a successful, though ruthless, financier. The myths have grown larger and uglier as Americans expose their proclivities toward violence, xenophobia, and unethical/unregulated business practices. A toxic brew is being mixed

in the social unconsciousness of Americans as these proclivities are blended with American individualism.

It should also be noted that the search for a heroic man with (or without) a badge and the earnest wish for a fearless cavalry or benevolent man of wealth to arrive just in time is not absent from the liberal's mind and heart. We want another Barack Obama (or, better yet, an even more active Michele Obama) to save our democracy. We wait for a cavalry of committed progressives (or at least moderates) to pass our liberal agenda. We want Warren Buffett and/or either Melinda or Bill Gates to funnel their money into the salvation and rebuilding of America. The liberal theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr (1932), once declared that morality is to be found not in a social system (society) but in the individual person of faith and conviction. We are all "infected" to some extent and in some ways with the individualism of an American social unconscious.

As Suzi indicates, there is another option. We can listen to the other side. An animated documentary was narrated by Orson Welles many years ago. Two conflicting groups of people were portrayed in this extraordinary documentary. The two groups stood on opposite sides of a chasm, shouting out their beliefs about reality while hurling accusations and threats at each other. Finally, someone says, "You know, you might be right about some things". Huh? And then they begin to have a dialogue. So, how is it with social media for those who said, "I didn't know Trump was going to do this. However, I do understand, in part, that he has taken action because some legitimate critiques can be made about the way the government has been running." Huh? The dialogue begins. Maybe . . .

In this chapter, we focused on Rights and Responsibilities. We might find that rights and responsibilities are not a polarity. Rather, there is a continuum of concern about these two fundamental perspectives. There might be a balancing baseline that provides a foundation and constant/daily reminder at an "unconscious" level regarding the importance of both individual rights and collective responsibility. This baseline might be parallel to the continuo provided in Baroque music and the use of a strong base offered by Johnny Miller of the King Cole Trio or John McVie of Fleetwood Mack. Am I being too optimistic in suggesting that this strong bassline of balanced rights and responsibilities continued to beat in American culture? While this beat may no longer be present in our

consciousness or prevalent in American public life, it may still be experienced in our abiding beliefs and practices regarding the protection (or restoration) of human rights on behalf of the greater, collective good. I choose to remain an optimist . . .

Conclusions

Fundamentally, we must consider the nature of a society that balances rights and responsibilities. Is balance necessary 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, we move, in the second chapter of this section, to our second pillar. This is the quality of shared concerns and priorities (a "harmony" of interests) in a society of true freedom. In the third chapter in this section of the book, we suggest ways this harmony of interest can be projected forward through the formulation of (and engagement with) a compelling vision of a society's future.

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Chapter Seven

Harmony: 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. A fundamentally political perspective was first offered in Chapter Six. We wrote about the balance between individual rights and collective responsibility--offering several tools (especially polarity management) that can help society achieve this balance.

In this chapter, we 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, the three of us 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 perspective regarding harmony of interest is often attributed to the initial observations made by Adam Smith (1776/2003), the father of modern economics. In addressing the emerging challenges of an emerging commercial economy, Smith recognized that new principles and perspectives ("merchantalism") 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 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, we turn to a framework recently presented by behavioral economists (e.g. Kahneman, 2011/2013). 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 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 a 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 was usually 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, 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 deeply embedded 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 shifting 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 later with the newly baked bread. The chairs were either home-built or acquired from a local all-purpose craftsperson in exchange for grain or perhaps some of the baked bread.

A premodern economy required diversity in the operation of a viable farm. This was especially important given the unpredictable character of Mother Nature. A modern economy was based, instead, on specialization and economies 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 learns to do one thing very well and to repeatedly engage in 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 specific society were becoming increasingly dependent on one another. They would "naturally" trade with one another to get what they need and want. Both parties 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 interference and to the assumption that true freedom requires maximum freedom for each member of society. We 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 known only 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 putting their hand to the plow (agriculture) and those running the looms (manufacturing) in mid-19th-century America.

Specialization and Consumption

Beginning with Adam Smith's observation of modern-day specialization, 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 are often 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 began 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 valuing and protecting 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?

Expanding Role of HRD

In contemporary organizations, protective integration is typically engaged 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. HRD oversees the so-called "employee life cycle". This department provides or contracts for employee training and development. HRD offers new employee orientation and retirement planning.

The scope of practice for HRD begins to expand. Those in this department often assume responsibility for administering compensation plans (including profit-sharing) and health care plans (Including employee assistance programs). The protective, integrative services of HRD could also include policy enforcement (regarding matters such as equitable and nondiscriminatory treatment of employees and prevention of harassment). We 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 mid-level managers in the organization, as well as by those providing diverse services such as in-house employee communications, coordination of volunteer community services, and support for non-work-related activities (e.g., company celebrations, recreational activities, and special interest groups). One of us recently worked with a high-tech organization that surveyed its employees only to find that they were most interested in receiving instruction in woodworking! Training and development might take on this broader role of supporting "hobbies." The bar continues to rise for HRD. Expectations expand in size and scope. We increasingly find that workplace "wellness" and the creation of high morale and high productivity work environments are promoted, 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 the quality of interpersonal relations in the workplace and meaningfulness of work are being added to the traditional list of employee interests (such as the aforementioned concerns about job security, fair wages, and nonhazardous work environments) (Bergquist, 1993). With governments in many societies requiring traditional employee interests to be honored in organizations, we are finding that the often-undesired role of HR as policy police is becoming increasingly prevalent. HRD personnel no longer formulate equitable policies. They are now primarily in the business 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 percentage of direct services being provided. Many integrative functions 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 the production of goods and the delivery of services to customers or citizens. Integrative (indirect) services would include all forms of management as well as operations required for the coordination of direct services and those we 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 protecting as a means to establish and maintain harmony of interest requires the attention and energy of a large percentage of those working in management systems and, more recently, HRD systems. Providing "integration", these members of an organization serve as a buffer between those who own or lead the business and those who labor in the organization. While managers are hired to do the bidding of ownership, they also (under the best of circumstances) are expected to support and protect 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 large, old organizations, as well as 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 the interests of those employed in the organization become more diverse. Greater integration and protection are needed, given 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 primarily concerns profit motives and the equitable distribution of revenues.

Anonymous is optimistic that profit-related discord 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. There is an enduring push toward profitability, along with the expanded list of interests that we have already identified.

Furthermore, we have not yet addressed several fundamental questions. Is everyone invited to the table? If not everyone, then 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 American workplace during the past two centuries.

Following the lead of better-known observers, such as Charles Dickens, Anonymous often writes in glowing terms about the quality of work, the thriving of those working in the mills, and the accompanying financial success of mid-19th-century New England mill owners. (Anonymous, 1849, vol II, p. 6). Yet the working conditions of those running the looms were horrendous. The Mill Girls and others working in the mills found few invitations to the table. They had little to say regarding their 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. These same conditions are found in other countries and at other times in history (Sun and Bergquist, 2021). Sun and Bergquist conveyed tales of women for whom there was nothing in their lives other than the daily drudgery of work. There was nothing to look forward to but increasing debt. For these women, there was only wage slavery, as is often the 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 aware of ways 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 the 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 the work in New England mills that Anonymous extoled.

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 relied on one product (potatoes), based on 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 or 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 recover 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 the quality of land for raising crops and the quality of machinery for producing goods. Anonymous's 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 Lowell's 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 the apparent harmony of interest in the United States). Anonymous notes that "colonization is urged on all hands, and all unite in the effort to force emigration in the direction needed 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 favor 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, the 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 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 presidency in the 1980s, Jimmie Carter seemed 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 io 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."

Heather Cox Richardson (2024g, p. 245) concludes with a brief comment:

> 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 heard, other than 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?

Understandably, 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 is noteworthy that premodernism is still dominant in many societies. And with this premodern status comes the stronghold 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 Middle East. It is hard to build countries when the fundamental identity of their 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 a strong national identity difficult to establish, given the familial and tribal dominance in their societies. Countries have often been created artificially, with national boundaries being established arbitrarily. This is notably the case with many middle-European countries (such as the former country of Yugoslavia), and many Middle Eastern countries (such as Iraq).

Even more notable were the many African countries (such as the Congo Free State established by Belgium) created during the colonizing "African Scramble" of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These arbitrarily created countries, often formed by colonial powers, are likely to find 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? How are the many conflicting Iraqi tribes going to discover any alignment of interests other than their shared hatred of certain other Middle Eastern countries?

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. For instance, initial concerns in Estonia were soon put to rest regarding the boundaries that existed between Estonian farms before the Soviet confiscation of the farms. While, during an interview, the new Secretary of Agriculture in Estonia shared her fears that the old boundaries could not be identified and restored, she indicated 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 William Bergquist conducted with his colleague, Berne Weiss, during the years when the Soviet Union was collapsing (Bergquist, and Weiss, 1994), considerable attention was given to how the citizens of two countries (Estonia and Hungary) were addressing the challenges associated

with their newfound 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? Is there a mutuality of interests?

Berne Weiss became intrigued with this question of mutuality. In particular, she focused on the notion of an inner voice that is central to mutuality found in the newly established state of freedom. Her interview with Vaclav Brichacek in Prague was particularly insightful. 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? Many of the Hungarians that Weiss interviewed 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 the individual's disposal. With this foundation of shared truth comes the opportunity for finding mutual interests. Did some of this inner truth run astray during the Orbàn years?

Moral Man and Immoral Society

In returning to the insights offered by Berne Weiss and her Hungarian colleagues, we are reminded of the analysis offered by Reinhold Niebuhr, the theologian 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 heart of the matter in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Niebuhr offered his basic premise in the preface to this book (Niebuhr, 1932, p. xi):

> 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 check impulse, less capacity for self-transcendence, and less ability to comprehend the needs of others. Therefore, there is more unrestrained egoism in the group than the individuals who compose the group are likely to reveal in their personal relationships.

At this point, Niebuhr (1936, p. xii) 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."

We 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 in the work of moral people, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and Nelson Mandela. Even closer to home 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" we have identified, there are acts of morality-based courage (to coin the term used by John Kennedy). These acts 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 the impact of interpersonal behavior on the overall harmony of one's society. Harmony requires truth. Information is

ephemeral: events accumulate, casting ever-changing perspectives on motivations, intentions, and 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 inner voice, then perhaps the whole is like a mosaic, no one piece of which contains the whole, 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.

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 a 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 the 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. Most states rarely encourage attention to one's unique inner voice. Doing so would be antithetical to the continued exercise of state-based power. Individual thinking has always led to questioning authority. And disrupting at least one form of societal harmony.

Collaborative Voice and Reform

Despite the widespread discouragement, there is one possible inner voice that may prevail. This voice is often dismissed because it doesn't fit the prevailing image of individualistic thinking. A different perspective on societal harmony is offered. This is a voice that strives toward relationships.

This is the voice of someone who builds interpersonal webs and networks. Pronouncements are made about compromise, collaboration, and cooperation. As Riane Eisler (1995) suggested, this is a voice that provides a container for collaboration and conflict mediation. Rather than providing leadership through use of a blade (as found in the Communist oppression of dissent), a chalice is provided to contain the anxiety inevitably associated with bringing together differing points of view.

Two people in Hungary, who were dissidents, told Berne Weiss a story about the doctor who decided that his mission in life was to bring the values and experiences of scouting (relationship with nature, culture, interpersonal relationships, and so on) into the Pioneer youth movement of the Communist system. So, he joined the Communist Party and became an influential participant in the Pioneer movement. His position gave him advantages in his career, but the couple who knew him saw his motivation as essentially related to a true relationship-based calling. Given the clamor for Party loyalty rather than personal loyalty, it is hard for relationship-oriented people to hear their inner voice, let alone act on this voice. Those who want to make a positive contribution within a corrupt system, and who find a way to enter and avoid being corrupted, are probably in a difficult place.

What about The American voice? Do we find a blade or a chalice? There is good reason to conclude that the American voice (and ideal) was shaped over a couple of centuries. First and second-generation Americans looked with optimism across a vast stretch of land populated by Aboriginal civilizations. The newly arriving Euro-Christians didn't know how to understand or respect a new form of freedom that came to be associated with the unlimited horizon of American opportunity. All they knew was the old, limited Euro-Christian form of freedom confined to those with a dominating blade. The Aboriginal societies were to find subjugation in exchange for a "saving" Christianity.

From an American perspective, the harmony of interests, as extolled by Anonymous, allowed for and even encouraged the expansion of enterprise in both size and location. The entire North American continent could be conquered! We can compare that to the Eastern European penchant for responsibility. Collaborative arrangements were established between long-existing tribes and nations. Perhaps, Anonymous offered a biased

perspective when casting many European societies (and other societies in the world) as examples of failed harmony. America was to exemplify the successful inculcation of a harmony of interests. This inculcation was to be introduced via the blade rather than the chalice. The interests of the powerful were to take precedence over the broader interests of the entire society. This broader-based harmony would require constructive dialogue among all members of American society. This dialogue (and the anxiety it roused) would require that a societal chalice be in place. This is not an easy order to fulfill, especially given the diversity of American society.

Where do we look for guidance in this matter? What is a societal chalice to be found? 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 when he declared that self-interest is built into the human psyche. But doesn't this mean we are only inviting self-interests to the table? Where do we find harmony at such a table? What would a facilitating chalice look like if engaged in the task of bringing together these interests?

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 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 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 the common good, then we are likely to recollect other times when we have worked with others, shared the joy of collaboration, and found that personal joy was resurrected amid collective joy.

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. However, it is also important to follow Saunders' 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. Saunders identified several important factors that lead to the dismantling of 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 carefree 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 don'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 self-forgiveness. When we are accustomed to being helpless and hopeless, it is frightening to consider finding agency and hope. This is a variant on the escape from freedom. Perhaps it is often the primary reason for this escape.

In Saunders' portrayal, we find a more mundane portrayal concerning 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 "bandwagon" effect). They left, along with other Bardo residents, when the excitement was gone, and there were other places to be. There was a lack of willpower. People were indifferent. They 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 the 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 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. As Professor Brichacek declared, freedom might ultimately be found inside us. We might also find that the experience of freedom comes with a shifting sense of self. Perhaps the concept of freedom resonates with people worldwide because of its potential impact on one's own psyche. Some qualities of freedom are universal, while 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 are embedded in the social context.

The Western world, and particularly the American "Wild 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 is infused with a sense of infinite possibilities. This

optimism, in turn, was initially nurtured by the seemingly infinite expanse of the North American continent. The challenge was to establish a process for pursuing a rational harmony of interests. A large chalice would be needed to capture the attention of diverse citizens populating all corners of the North American continent.

The great expanse of land that opened 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—or perhaps ever achieved- in the United States. Polarization exists alongside silo perspectives. The center does not hold. 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 reintroduce (or, for the first time, introduce) an actual harmony of interests that involves all members of American society? What would a containing chalice look like that provided safety for all Americans to speak their mind? And how would such a state contribute to the emergence and maintenance of true freedom?

Communities of Coherence and Grace

We propose that a lasting harmony of interests requires our society to provide for the inclusion of all members and the honoring of all privileges assigned to them. 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 lives of those living at the time of Lincoln. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852/1983) 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 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 to be heard, understood, and appreciated by everyone else sitting at the table. Those entering Lincoln's body could enter one another's bodies without asking for permission. Everyone has the opportunity to "know" any of the other residents (as well as Lincoln) at a quite intimate level. This same "free-for-all" was 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 we 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 on 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. However, several notable observers of the American community have identified means to bring about these favorable conditions.

One of these 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 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. We suggest that the glue of coherence is also 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, the three of us propose that coherence and a sustained harmony of interests require 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? 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, we turn to Emile Durkheim (1893/1933), whose own analysis regarding social structures aligned with the proposition regarding specialization and the harmony of interests offered by Anonymous. Durkheim suggested that specialization (he labeled it "division of labor") is to be found at all levels of society. It begins in the home and extends 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 there is a "mechanical solidarity" in a premodern society brought about by shared values and perspectives associated with the very confined world in which members of this society dwelt. This solidarity was often founded in an even deeper commitment to specific traditions that seem more sacred than secular.

We are reminded of the emphasis on tradition to be found in Anatevka, 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, integration had to be engaged through more formal, secular structures—as Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) proposed many years later. Anonymous anticipated this secular move. The government was often required to provide "protection" and integration. According to Anonymous, management structures were secular requirements for integrating 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 family members. 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. We return to an insight offered by Erich Fromm (1941a) 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 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?

Bock and Harnick's Fiddler is still precariously perched on the roof. He must now move along with members of the Anatevka community to dispersed communities (and cities) throughout the world. The new challenge becomes one of preserving traditions while settling into new communities where the same traditions may not be present. It is poignant to note that the musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*, is very popular in societies throughout the world (including Asia). Perhaps similar challenges are being faced by traditions found in many different mid-21st-century societies.

Preserving Coherence

We devote the remainder of this chapter to reflection on and an attempt to answer these critical questions regarding coherence. We first turn 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 what deserves the greatest amount of care—and about what, as a result, the community focuses its caring actions (Erikson, 1963).

Bellah and his colleagues (1985, p. 282) have provided 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, we offer both a secular and a sacred vision of community. These visions are accompanied by 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 *Paideia*, the term 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 finds home 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 (Peters and Waterman, 1982). 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 work satisfaction 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 tum out to have major consequences for family life as well.

The continuing exposition of civic virtues 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.

At this point, Bellah shifts focus and considers the possible role played by a concept (borrowing from William Perry) that we have introduced in this book: epistemological relativism. Cultural relativism (and appreciation) might serve as a foundation for harmony and coherence (Bellah, et al., 1985, p. 289):

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 the 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 community 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 in a community for its citizens. They provide a community with *Rocks*.

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. This mode creates the harmony of interests that Anonymous described almost two centuries ago. As Bea Boccalandro (2021) has 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, rewards for this investment should be accrued by all these stakeholders.

Kitchens identifies 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 a coherent community. Regardless of their status in the workplace, all members of the community are invited to events that take place outside the workplace. One finds that both employers and employees attend local concerts or city council meetings. 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, which is the specific quality of interactions among those living in a coherent community. These interactions are respectful and inviting for all community members. They are harmonious interactions and provide the *Sand* that embraces and encases the rocks and pebbles. The quality of interaction at the table is particularly important. 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 its institutions and participate in its events. All members of the coherent community are encouraged to engage in its diverse activities, so that they might have the opportunity to interact with one another (regardless of differences). 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 attending one of his sessions 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 takes one further step. He adds sand to the bowl (representing the third type of community capital). He 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. Kitchens 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, we 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 narratives occurs at the level of governance and at the national level, while the second narrative is about the engagement of harmony and coherence in 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. The second narrative takes place in 2020, as Americans face the equally great challenge of coping with the COVID-19 virus.

Protecting the Five Freedoms

We begin with the declaration made in 1941 by President Franklyn D. Roosevelt, regarding what he identified as the four (and later expanded to five) freedoms. We start at this point because Roosevelt is articulating a vision that the three of us believe is directly aligned with our own more modest and less finely phrased proposal in this book 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 freedom from fear, freedom from financial dependence, freedom from financial obligations, freedom from our 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 required 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.

Roosevelt can thank one person, in particular, for helping him build a credible record of political and legislative achievements during the 1930s. Frances Perkins was the person most responsible for the provision of this protection (labeled "social security"). 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. As noted by Heather Cox Richardson (Richardson, 2021), this act not only produced the now widely recognized protection of older Americans. The act also established unemployment insurance and assistance for the homeless, dependent, and neglected children (tragically prevalent during the depression). Funds were also provided for maternal and child welfare, as well as public health services.

Individualism and the Role of Government

The wide-ranging social security enactments envisioned by Perkins were navigating 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 eventual 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 observed:

> [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 one another. 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 challenge 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 an 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's Professor Brichacek, that there is an "inner voice" that can still be heard amidst all the declarations regarding "rugged individualism." This voice can prevail against the traditional declaration that the male head-of-household should serve the primary role of leader and bearer of financial burdens.

We 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."

De Tocqueville may have been essentially correct about American culture; however, we do need to add Anonymous's correction regarding the 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. We may not need Government agencies to provide the rocks, pebbles, and sand. However, government is required 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 was timely when one of us [WB] began to prepare the second version of 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. The owners of this company have asked all their employees to help meet the unique challenges COVID-19 posed at that time for this company (and virtually all other companies in the United States).

The American Roots Business

We first offer some 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 hired a staff of about two dozen people to produce these products. The Waxmans founded their company to demonstrate 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, we 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, as provided by Ben Waxman, are directly aligned with the spirit and vision of Anonymous' harmony of interest and are 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 residing 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. 25):

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

Openly communicating with 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 a 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.

We provide more of Slade's narration (Slade, 2020, p. 95):

> 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, abundant voluntary support. It is 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 the 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. 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 identify 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 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-19 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.

The protocols at American Roots—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 organization-wide problem-solving and decision-making processes 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 precut 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 2025. What has happened? We can turn to a 2024 statement provided on the American Roots website:

> 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. https://americanrootswear.com/:

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. Change can be interwoven with continuity.

When there is a compelling sense of purpose for those working in an organization and when employees are involved in plotting their organization's direction, then a sustained commitment to the long-term welfare of the company is retained, even when it must shift directions. Under conditions of 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

We 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's 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. 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? We offer the following perspective to provide some credibility to the claim of sacred presence. 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 embraced by the hunter/gatherers were founded on the belief that these forces and entities are embedded in the physical environment traversed by these people. The spiritual and sacred in contemporary societies are embedded in the meaning which people assign to their work, if those endeavors 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 Hawaii), one can retreat temporarily to a sanctuary, so that forgiveness can be found (before returning to society). Other people might grant this forgiveness (serving as a profound source of inclusion). Or those in the sanctuary might forgive themselves, finding a way to discover or renew personal privilege. Spiritual and Sacred elements are also to be found in the ceremonies we perform (whether a wedding, funeral or birthday party) and the processions we join (whether a church service, parade, or New Orleans Second Line). The animism of our ancient ancestors is still alive—it just takes a 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 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

A guide is to be found in our exploration of the sacred. He is the aforementioned Martin Buber. Guidance is found in an overarching visionary perspective on relationships and its associated spiritual tradition offered in *I-Thou* (Buber, 1958). Buber's *I/Thou* relationship is formed on behalf of some greater devotion or cause. The concept of *I/Thou* reveals 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 Beautiful 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 relational binding 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 is Ron Kitchens *Sand*. The shared dedication blends the secular and the sacred. *I/Thou* and *Agape* dwell in the threshold between sacred and secular. This is also where we find covenants and charters.

Charters, Harmony, and I/Thou

An *I/Thou* covenant points to a shared commitment that extends beyond the interests or even welfare of either party. An organizational, community, or nation-based charter of harmony envisions outcomes that go well beyond personal or institutional interests (Bergquist, 2003). Consider the Declaration of Independence. On the one hand, it is clearly a flawed secular document "hammered out by fifty-five young white men sweltering in Philadelphia in summer 1787 to permit individuals to have an equal say in their government without succumbing to tyranny . . .[this document] was an astonishing feat, but it was not perfect." (Anderson,2018, p. 186) On the other hand, this declaration took on an I/Thou perspective. It was something more than a declaration about demanding an "equal say." As a document about commitment to a higher cause, the charter might even be considered spiritual rather than secular in origin.

Pagels (Pagels, 2025, p. 97) notes that while the Declaration of Independence is a charter we Americans hold dear, it contains an acknowledgement that limits its human-based scope. According to Thomas Jefferson, the primary author of this document, fundamental commitments do not come from human sources:

> In drafting the Declaration, [Thomas] Jefferson cited the "sacred and undeniable" truth that "all men are created equal." . . . The final version of the document . . . referred to human natural rights as "self-evident." . . . The founding fathers [who signed the Declaration] agreed that because these are innate rights, they can only be recognized, and not conferred by human beings. [The

> declaration] went on to state, "To secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

If we choose to consider the Declaration of Independence to be a charter, and exemplary of what all charters should be, then we might conclude that the principal mission, vision, and values presented in a charter are somehow derived from an entity or agency greater than that of those individuals who commit themselves to honoring this mission, and accompanying vision and values. As an I/Thou document, the charter brings a third, higher-order perspective to the table. A charter is being honored on behalf of the welfare of something or someone greater than those who prepare and sign this document. As Pagels points out, the principal features of a charter are "recognized" rather than being "conferred" by those who have chosen to operate under the auspices and guidance of this charter.

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 members of a community to a larger sacred vision of coherence. It is a vision that guides the future of an organization, community, or nation. It is when an organization, community, or entire nation has a clear and compelling image of its own future that this organization, community, or nation is more likely to endure (Polak, 1973). We 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 found in the religious and philosophical traditions of 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 life) 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? The three of us 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 guided by a sacred vision, we reference the concept of Grace as introduced by the noted theologian, Paul Tillich.

Grace, Love, and Collective Memory

Tillich (1948) writes 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 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 recognition, understanding, appreciation, commemoration, and (finally) a 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 the 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 is the experience of love to 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?

An ongoing process of forgiveness, reconciliation,and mutual caring should be engaged within Robert Bellah's community of coherence. This process should help build or restore Bellah's community, and ultimately ensure a harmony of interest. In alignment with Robert Bellah and his colleagues, we propose that two ingredients are essential to forgiveness, reconciliation, and mutual caring, on the way to building and sustaining their 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 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 and brings in 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 will be stuck in "dirty" pain—whether they be those who are abused, those who do the abusing, or those who allow for the abuse. 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 harmony of interests. Thank you, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Resmaa Menakem for helping us identify the requirements and conditions of love, forgiveness, grace, and clean pain.

Coda: How do we find freedom through convergence?

In the polarized America of the mid-21st century, where can we find a commonality of interests? What do we all care about other than our personal survival (or perhaps the survival of our family or "tribe")? Is there any societal glue that holds us together? We have introduced Talcott Parsons' concept of latent pattern maintenance as a critical function in any viable social system. Even if there is no convergence of interests, is there at least a pattern that keeps reappearing in our secular society? Unfortunately, a latent pattern of polarization is not apparent. In its place is polarization and marginalization. This is not a viable, functioning dynamic. And it certainly offers no glue or integration.

What if we turn to the spiritual realm and reintroduce the Greek term, *agape*, as well as Martin Buber's I/Thou relationships? These seem to be even less operative in our fragmented, secularized society. If God or some other spiritual presence enters our shared discourse at all, this divine entity is being used to beat up those people who differ from us. Our divine source—be it God, Yahweh, Allah, or Buddha—is telling us that we must cast aside the "other people not only because of their religious beliefs, but also their political beliefs and even the "inappropriate" color of their skin, their gender orientation, or their "foreign" accent.

To address our concerns about a convergence of interests in contemporary societies, we hand the pen over to just one of us (Kevin), who shares his perspectives based on freedom.

What is freedom? Guess what … it's not free!

Freedom, in psychological terms, is often assumed in our society to be a fundamental human need that is closely tied to individual autonomy, self-determination, personal development, and the fulfillment of individual needs and desires. From a psychological perspective, freedom is not merely the absence of constraints, but the ability to act on one's own values, desires, and beliefs without external interference. But this lack of constraint is always bounded – no human being is ever truly free to act entirely on their own values, desires, and beliefs. Because, as these desires and beliefs develop and expand, they ultimately encroach on the values, beliefs, and desires of others – your freedom encroaches on mine!

- Your need for more guns encroaches on my sense of safety.

- Your religious beliefs and views of Christian Nationalism and its encroachment into government and education encroach on my need for an alternative religion or secular milieu.
- Your freedom of speech encroaches on my need for safety when it becomes hate speech.
- Your loud music encroaches on my need for peace and quiet.
- Your need to smoke cigarettes encroaches on my need for clean air.
- Your freedom not to wear a mask during COVID encroached on my need to remain healthy.
- The Trump administration has blocked research reports on the spread of Bird Flu (and also did so on research on the spread of COVID in his first term). This limits the knowledge and decision-making freedoms of both medical experts and citizens about their health (reported on NPR).
- And so on …

How does an alienated and destructive set of beliefs such as these get generated? What enables members of a society to build a bubble of belief that protects these beliefs?

How Trumpism created a sense of freedom for the MAGA cult

How do bubbles of belief and cults develop – in the case of MAGA, a very large cult? A simplified process is as follows:

- Individuals who believe they lack agency tend to be less educated, lack critical thinking, and fear that they lack influence against powerful forces that threaten their way of life. They become susceptible to influence and manipulation.
- A charismatic leader emerges who employs powerful, persuasive techniques to recruit these individuals into the group. This leader uses the language of "only I can solve this problem," and I will be your savior from those evil forces.
- This expanding group is indoctrinated by emotional stories of the existential threats facing them – they are rapists, drug dealers, they are poisoning the blood! A religious theme can elevate this

indoctrination – “We are the chosen people, everyone else is evil or dangerous to our way of life” – an Us and Them mentality is developed. Rituals (rallies), icons (MAGA paraphernalia), and teachings (the media is the enemy, liberals are the enemy, and I am going to save you) create an increasingly unmovable way of thinking.

- These leaders typically exploit their followers: Campaign donations are used for legal fees. Some of the items Trump sells to his MAGA followers are as follows:
    - Make America Great Again" (MAGA) merchandise: This includes iconic red hats, T-shirts, and other apparel.
    - Trump-themed Bibles: Special editions like the "God Bless the USA Bible" and "Trump 2020 Bible".
    - Coins and medallions: Items like the "Victory Gold Medallion" and various silver coins featuring Trump's likeness.
    - Footwear: Sneakers such as the "Trump Won" shoes and "Trump Landslide" boots.
    - Watches: Limited-edition watches, like the "Trump Victory Tourbillion" and "TRUMP Watches".
    - NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens): Digital collectibles featuring Trump's image and branding.
    - Sunglasses: Branded eyewear with the Trump name and logo.
- These leaders often demand absolute loyalty and obedience, leveraging fear, guilt, or manipulation to maintain control. This is evidence of Trump’s dominance over his administration and Congress (threatening to “primary” them if they go against him in any way).

So, while to many MAGA enthusiasts, Trump’s presidency may initially feel like freedom has been restored – just wait! Unless you toe the line, you are done!

People desperately want and need to connect with others and to feel special – feel that they are respected for their beliefs and have significance. We need to feel we have unique value and worth. We need to know that we are connected to a community that recognizes our unique contributions and values. Only then can we feel free. When I'm with "my People," I feel free. When I'm around "those Others," I feel constrained and imprisoned. With his unique style of communication, Trump has been able to make MAGA people feel special and heard. They are part of something special and righteous.

This combination of uniqueness, belonging, and feelings of importance – individually and collectively – has created a powerful sense of freedom and power for MAGA. But that freedom is severely limited by strict boundaries – as described by Trump (and Project 2025). If you are MAGA, you are good. And you are OK if you toe the line. If you are gay, you are not OK! If you are transgender, you definitely are not OK! If you are Muslim, you are not OK! If you are not white, you are not OK unless you kiss the ring!

Freedom is never absolute!

Humans are never completely free because they develop and grow in the world, and this world always has constraints, limitations, barriers, and counterbalances. Erich Fromm notes that to survive in this world, people need to consider and respond to the constraints around them, including the differing needs of other people. There is no complete freedom. Indeed, complete freedom implies breaking away from the world and, most importantly, other people – and this is the ultimate constraint – complete aloneness and isolation. Man or woman fades and dies in this state of alienation.

The contradiction, therefore, is that connection with others is essential for life and growth and development, and yet this comes with inevitable constraints – a lack of freedom. As Fromm (Fromm, 1941b, p. 34) observes, this identity with nature, clan, religion (or political group or ideology), provides us with a personal sense of individual security. It provides us with the serenity that takes the place of challenging VUCA-Polus conditions. Fromm suggests that we desire a state in which we belong to and are rooted in a structuralized whole where we have an unquestionable place. We might profoundly distort reality while dwelling in the wonderland of Serenity; however, it does feel like home for us. Each of us may suffer from hunger

or suppression; however, under conditions of Serentiy and collective identity we do not suffer from the worst of all pains—complete aloneness and doubt.

The Uneasy Balance – Freedom-Individuation versus Isolation-Fear

Why is it that many people who shout loudest about freedom ("No one will take my guns", "I can say anything I want, even if its hateful and demeaning", "I can ransack the Capital and attempt to hang the Vice President and kill the House Speaker, and its egregious when I'm held accountable", and so on), subsequently vote for a strongman leader who "knows everything and can do anything because he is of superior intellect."

This supreme leader says things like "Only I can fix it", when it's obvious that no one is able to know and do everything. Effectively, what these people do is hand over their power to a "strongman" leader – they want someone to protect them because, at some level, they lack agency. The imagery at MAGA events often resembles a religious fervor and adoration of a higher power. They hand over their power to this individual.

Erich Fromm (1941b, p. 28) describes it well in the context of personal growth from our youngest years, becoming increasingly aware of ourselves and our capabilities:

> ... the one side of the growing process of individuation is the growth of self-strength (and independence). The limits of the growth of individuation and the self are set, partly by individual conditions, but essentially by social conditions (for example, a nurturing home life and effective education – and the demands and restrictions that come with those). For although the differences between individuals in this respect appear to be great, every society is characterized by a certain level of individuation beyond which the normal individual cannot go (for example, most of us are reliant to some degree on others). The other aspect of the process of individuation is growing aloneness (and fear).

The desire to be unfettered from the control of others (parents) begins remarkably early (as my 2-year-old granddaughter clearly demonstrates). This desire and drive escalate significantly during the early teenage years (and I certainly recall this vividly in my own teenage life). I wanted fulfillment.

Sometimes this wanting was expressed forcefully. I was giving my parents a tough time as I tried to resist being told what to do. But as the teenager transitions into adulthood, it can be a harsh wake-up when Mom and Dad are no longer close by to help when they are struggling. This reminds me of the TV ad where several young kids are playing in a treehouse and complaining about their parents – until one of them mistakenly kicks the ladder down to the grass below. Once they realize they are stuck, they all yell "MOOOMMMM"! We want freedom until we need help or when we simply need to coexist with diverse others. The Trump administration is trying to force a particular view of life onto all "others".

As my co-author, Bill Bergquist, and I described in our book, *The Crises of Expertise and Belief* (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024), people with less education and especially those with an authoritarian personality type (our book dives deeply into this personality profile) tend to be insecure and stressed in a modern VUCA-PLUS world in which they don't fully understand. They feel out of control – they lack a sense of agency about their lives in a scary and confusing world. There is a tendency for these individuals to blame their uncertainty on others. Often, blame is attributed to powerful and super-wealthy shadowy figures who are conspiring to control the world and everyone in it.

The Great Replacement Theory, which suggests that powerful international elites are attempting to replace white populations with non-white peoples, especially of Muslim origin, is part of this fear and anxiety. Authoritarians tend to align with a strongman leader who "knows it all" and to whom they defer power and responsibility for protection. They prefer statements from leaders and experts that imply "I and only I know it all and can fix it". They surrender much of their own freedom and responsibility to this leader. Trump and MAGA are good examples of this phenomenon.

Conclusions

Kevin's perspectives and those of both Suzi and Bill lead to a conclusion that five options are to be found in abundance regarding the convergence of interests in mid-21st-century societies:

1. We don't know what their interests are.
2. We couldn't care less about their interests.

3. We discount/minimize their interests.
4. We don't accept their interests.
5. We wish to ensure that their interests are not met, given that these interests are labeled "socialist", "communism," "fascism," or "filled with rampant and greedy capitalism!"

Is there a sixth option? Is a convergence of interests not only desirable, but also possible? Perhaps, it is a matter of extending our perspective on these interests from the present to the future. We might require the third pillar, to which we turn in Chapter Eight. This third pillar is the collaborative creation of a compelling image of the future.

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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 (1941a, 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, 1941a, p. 256)

Arendt’s Vision of the Future

Hannah Arendt (1948/1966) arrives at 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 (Arendt, 1948/1966, 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 anything under the sun.

To what extent does Arendt's description of 1920s Europe ring true today in Europe and elsewhere? Perhaps the world 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 concerning 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 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 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 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, 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 which 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. The need for illusions, accordingly, is more intense than ever.

While freedom provides us with the opportunity to open our eyes to alternative lifestyles, different amounts of skin pigment, and varying political points of view, it is just as likely that we will focus on what Lasch identifies as the "restoring" of some primary foundation of or connection to a firm reality. We don't have time or inclination to take on even more challenges.

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 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 be 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 only child in

Mad Max's society is an abandoned foundling who receives no care from anyone. Worlds without a future apparently have no need for and no interest in 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. This same type of negative image 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 (Gergen, 1991/2000) suggests that the challenge is not one of confronting a single, distressing future. Instead, it is confronting multiple images of the future (and images of the present day as well).

Gergen (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.

It is difficult to achieve a single coherent image of the future. Furthermore, 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 to find clarity (what we have identified as a pull toward distorted serenity).

In advocating a clear, coherent, and compelling image of the future, do we mean to imply that only one image in any one society is required? 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 (1950/1964) 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 beliefs 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 can resist "deterministic forces of socialization”. This is what we have described as pervasive illusions of freedom. He or she can 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 how 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.

We 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, a society finds its coherence and sustaining integration in its political, economic, psychological, sociological, and even spiritual attempts to formulate a new

compelling image of the future. To successfully construct 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 us to formulate a detailed plan for Hungary, Estonia, or the United States. However, the 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 William Bergquist suggested that we must do an effective job of creating, recognizing, and making use of the wide variety of institutional types, societal functions, and cultural characteristics found in our communities. We must engage in 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 the interweaving of differentiation and integration.

With the achievement of freedom comes the potential for greater diversity, specialization, and individualism. As we have already noted, with the opening of freedom's door comes the potential for fragmentation and alienation, allowing for the 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 caring for other people, countering individual rights with collective responsibility, and identifying interests that are in harmony.

Weiss and Bergquist found that integrative initiatives must accompany the differentiation emerging from a social revolution. 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 are 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 of other people or doctrines. Shared interests must be identified and enforced. People must feel safe and supported by their community. Integration must occur at both 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. Sometimes, we liberals must 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 (1948/1966) 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 when imposing "justifiable" authority. We fail to acknowledge what is really happening when intervening in the life of another person to introduce (or even introject) "true" knowledge, values, and perspectives into their life. At these moments, are we acting as conquerors rather than caregivers?

We once again bring in the challenging insights offered by Bertrand Gross (1980). We should first note that Gross is an avowed liberal with 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 sophistical 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 often relied on economic images of the individual and society to provide integration. This is no longer appropriate, if it ever was. It appears that Marxism was flawed or at least limited from its inception. 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 transformed all of Europe into a sweatshop. He ignored many variations in economic life and the presence of non-economic 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 econonicus*.

The economic person was in essence a product of the modern world, whether from a Marxist or a Capitalist perspective (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" that primarily contained economic and political content was constructed during the modern era. It took on several different forms. There was communism in Eastern Europe. N*oblesse oblige* guided colonization by Western European nations (Arendt, 1948/1966). Manifest Destiny was a motivating and guiding vision and narrative for 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, 1948/1966, p. 208). As we enter a postmodern world, we find that postmodern people (and 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 remains valid. The composite also contains newly emerging, postmodern images of men and women as ecological, international, and equality-oriented learners. They also exist, according to Huizinga (2008), as those seeking a challenge and accompanying display of competence (*homo ludens*). We are 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.]

A 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 resulted from an inability 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 poses a major challenge when striving toward true freedom. What we call the interweaving of six disruptive conditions (VUCA-Plus) 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 socialist systems, especially with 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 William Bergquist concluded from their 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 divergent forces in each country (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994). This would be both the strength and the challenge of experiencing true freedom in Estonia and Hungary.

Their 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 violent political extremism. With considerable concern, they have observed the failure of Americans to support a successful transition in national leadership. The ousted president remained adamant that he won the 2000 election. For him, the past remains the present. There is no room for any of the VUCA-Plus conditions. Distorting serenity must prevail, especially now that he is back in office as President of the United States.

The future for Estonia, Hungary, and many other societies may require a mixture of perspectives and elements. This mixture will also be necessary 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 we turn in the third section of 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? We seek to provide a viable answer to this challenging question by looking to the 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 we have already offered in this chapter. As in the case of *Harmony of Interest*, written by Anonymous (1849) during the 19th 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.* We 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 we 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 representing our Future is compelling yet shadowy. It provides direction and motivation, yet it is forever changing. We would suggest that Polak's Future resembled the powerful and elusive "numinous" 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 in creating the future yet are inspired by 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, we point to the horrible and dreadful images and pictures of gods in primitive cultures. They continue to enthrall us, leading to feelings of profound admiration. Often, at the same time, they produce 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 extended 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) At the present time, this experience is often described as a "thin place" where the secular (earth) and sacred (heaven) seem to join together. Thin places exist not only at physical locations (such as Lourdes, Findhorn, and Sedona) but also as moments or spaces in everyday life where the sacred is felt more intensely. They can be

the sources of Awe that Dacher Keltner (Keltner, 2023) identifies—such as enthralling landscapes, beautiful or historic architectural sites, or dynamic, changing seashores. The experience of a thin place often brings clarity, spiritual renewal, and a sense of intimacy with the Divine.

Jung's notion of numinous is founded on experience, and not just ideation. Similarly, Polak 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 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). As one aspect of the Numinous, the forces of evil have a strange attraction. "Soft evil" attracts us when we slow down while passing a traffic accident or when a highway patrol officer has pulled over a speeding car. The "hard evil" pulls us in when we once again watch the planes crashing into the twin towers of New York or when we once again watch a movie filled with tragedy, such as *Sophie's Choice* or *Schindler's List*.

A specific term is now being used to describe a similar dynamic operating in sports. This term is "gravity." A highly skilled basketball player, for instance, exhibits a high amount of "gravity" when members of the opposing team devote all (or most) of their attention to this "high gravity" player. Attention is drawn away from this skilled player's teammates. Evil forces would also seem to have considerable "gravity." They draw attention away from the positive features of a society and from the anticipation of beneficial outcomes regarding some social initiative. A strong gravitational pull is associated with violent acts, much as bad news makes for great circulation and profitability for media outlets. Most importantly, it is important to note that strange attractors, such as evil and violence, recruit outside objects, events, and people. Evil forces grow in size. Violence begets more violence. Put simply, evil and violence, like all strange attractors and other numinous experiences, are seductive.

There is one final point to be made. It is important to note that strange 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 dynamic attracting systems. Evil is filled with evil images, and violence is filled with violent motives. Perhaps strange attractors were avoided by scientists for many centuries because they are self-organizing and deeply engrained. They may be called "strange" because (like all numinous experiences) they avoid all rational calculation and understanding. It is interesting to note that these dynamic elements reside in many (if not all) systems. Furthermore, they are now of great appeal to many scientists and non-scientists who are studying complexity. Perhaps it is because many conditions in our VUCA-Plus world are "strange" and elusive. Sooner or later, attention must be devoted to these "strangers".

Before we leave this consideration of numinous, strange attractors, and gravity, we must consider the presence of positive forces and the acts of altruism. Do giving and sacrifice have "gravity"? Are we attracted to gifts and sacrifices that are delivered by someone seeking to do greater good? Do we listen when someone declares that we should be the change that we wish to see in the world? On the one hand, we are very busy and have to contend with our own VUCA-Plus-related challenges. We rarely have time for gracious giving to people outside our immediate family and tribe. Under conditions of Trumpian self-aggrandizement, there is even less of an incentive for most of us to be looking out for the welfare of other people in our community.

On the other hand, it would seem, at the very least. that the thin places provide these positive attractors, as do many of the conditions of Awe that are identified by Kelner. However, do acts of generosity attract additional generosity? The now-popular theme of "giving forward" would also seem to be based on the assumption that generosity is an attractor. Robert Sapolsky (Sapolsky, 2017) proposes that altruism is an evolved, biologically grounded behavior that is deeply embedded in human nature. Rather than conceiving of altruism as a moral ideal, one can think of it as a trait with survival value, shaped by evolutionary pressures. It is a matter of reciprocal altruism.

This perspective is closely related to our emphasis on anticipation as a key feature of the human psyche. We help others with the expectation of future reciprocation. This is of evolutionary advantage because it strengthens

group cohesion and resource sharing. Thus, for Sapolsky, altruism is both a biological adaptation and a social necessity. However, is it also a source of Awe? Do we marvel at the enactment of generosity and altruism? Is it in some way even a strange attractor that is self-organizing? As a scientist, Sapolsky is inclined to steer away from this more ethereal notion of altruism and generosity as being something more than a social necessity. Could it possibly be that "genuine" altruism, such as we find with the saints and martyrs, occurs in a "thin place" where the spiritual I/Thou relationship and forms of *agape* love touch the earth in a display of awesome giving and the bestowing of forgiveness and Grace? Is this higher-order positive attractor required for us to find a viable pathway to true freedom?

Five Perspectives on the Future

Given that our Future is a source of numinous uncertainty and even terror, as well as the strange attraction of evil, violence, and perhaps altruism, we are likely to treat this Future in a wide variety of ways—in alignment with our own psychological type and perspectives, as well as our distinctive fears and apprehensions (Jung, 1971).

Polak (1973, p. 2) specifically offers five ways in which we tend to orient our perspectives on life to this challenge of our Future being the Other.

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 aforementioned pessimistic, existential images offered by the post-World War novelists and psychoanalysts. This perspective is perhaps found in Lasch's description of an individualistic, narcissism-based future. It is directly aligned with the

Sensing (reality-based) and judging functions of Carl Jung's personality model.

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. This perspective (whether sacred or secular) is aligned with the Intuition (vision-based) and Feeling orientation offered by Jung.

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 compelling. Others have a numinous and strangely attractive appeal that has driven decisions made by and actions taken within specific societies. For Polak, it seems essential that we fully appreciate the way an idea is translated into a specific, tangible image. For Jung, it seems essential that we appreciate the underlying Psychological (and often unconscious) predispositions that we bring to our construction of an image of the Future.

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. (We 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 of 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 constructing monuments, enacting parades, and faithfully repeating family rituals. These enactments move us beyond idea to image. We suggest that, as human beings, we are *homo eidetics* (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 eidetics*.

Images are formed and changed by producers and consumers. They are created by capitalists and by communists. Images saturate the lives of artists, bohemians, scientists, entrepreneurs, and laborers. 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 women, along with rugged individualists and family members, are guided by tangible images of possible, potential, and often attainable goals. The images of the future ultimately bring everyone to the table, as we have repeatedly noted regarding the characteristics of true freedom.

Spatial Eidetics

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.

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 soon will 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 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 goodwill and competence? Is this secular image sufficiently compelling (numinous) to lead a mid-21st-century society into the future? Many 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 propose, 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 do not just have 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. For instance, the shifting state of generativity in human development aligns with a temporal perspective on the future (Bergquist and Quehl, 2021). We care deeply about that which we care about—to quote Erik Erikson (1963). However, this sense of deep

caring shifts over time during our life. It takes on a broader temporal perspective as we grow older.

Obviously, we should care deeply about members of our own family (especially our children). However, for young adults, this caring should extend to other people, and eventually to the long-term welfare of our community as we grow older. Furthermore, if we are genuinely generative, this caring must be sustained over time. It is a matter of finding ways 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 centuries revere a much more recent past. It is 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 Show 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 protected by a brave, often stoic, sheriff. The 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 ensures law and order. 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 threats 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 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, ignorabius* 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 writer)—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.

Though Heilbroner offered this observation in 1959, he seems to be anticipating a world that we have identified as filled with the conditions of VUCA-Plus. This 21st-century world certainly "portends" what the future could be—and, as eternally optimistic Americans, we are shocked and look for an exit into a wonderland of Serenity.

It is in the framing of Future Images within a 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 control our destiny rather than us, 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 dwelling in a specific historical context, being swept away by powerful forces that provide us with the aforementioned 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 align 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 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? . . .
>
> 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 imagined 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 described in written form but also enacted in often-short-lived utopian communities. These coherent images also appear in a very negative form, such as the dystopian novel and the highly destructive utopian communities that have turned inward on themselves.

We 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) were often envisioned and portrayed by secular writers. While the utopian vision offered in 1516 by Thomas More in his book, *Utopia*, is usually considered the first in Western civilization, the concept of an ideal society is found in historical records that predate More. Utopian visions are prevalent across diverse nations and communities, with variations in content 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 paradisal 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 occurring with 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.

In *Erewhon* (nowhere, almost spelled backwards), one of the well-known utopian visions, Samuel Butler (1872/1967) offers the following preliminary description:

> It was a monotonous life but it was very healthy, and one does not much mind anything when one is well. The country was the grandest that can be imagined. How often have I sat on the mountain side and watched the waving downs, with the two white specks of huts in the distance, and the little square of garden behind them; the paddock with a patch of bright green oats above the huts, and the yards and wool-sheds down on the flat below; all seen as though the wrong end of a telescope, so clear and brilliant was the air, or as upon a colossal model or map spread out beneath me. Beyond the downs was a plain going down to a river of great size, on the farther side of which there were other high mountains, with the winter's snow still not quite melted; up the river, which ran winding in many streams over a bed some two miles broad, I looked upon the second great chain, and could see a narrow gorge where the river retired and was lost. I knew there was a range still farther back, but except from one place near the very top of my own mountain, no part of it was visible: from this point, however, I saw, whenever there were no clouds, a single snowclad peak, many miles away, and I should think about as high as any mountain in the world. Never shall I forget the utter loneliness of the prospect—only the little far-away homestead giving sign of human handiwork; the

> vastness of mountain and plain, of river and sky; the marvelous atmospheric effects--sometimes black mountains against a white sky, and then again, after cold weather, white mountains against a black sky—sometimes seen through breaks and swirls of cloud—and sometimes, which was best of all, I went up my mountain in a fog, and then got above the mist; going higher and higher, I would look down upon a sea of whiteness, through which would be thrust innumerable mountain tops that looked like islands.

As is the case with many utopian images, Butler has offered a regressive image of the perfect world. He has regressed to an older time and regressed to a more primitive mode of life. This is a pastoral scene that might easily be found in a wonderland of serenity, rather than in a realistically conceived utopia found in a carefully designed city of beauty. Butler continues:

> I am there now, as I write; I fancy that I can see the downs, the huts, the plain, and the river-bed that torrent pathway of desolation, with its distant roar of waters. Oh, wonderful, wonderful! so lonely and so solemn, with the sad grey clouds above, and no sound save a lost lamb bleating upon the mountain side, as though its little heart were breaking. Then there comes some lean and withered old ewe, with deep gruff voice and unlovely aspect, trotting back from the seductive pasture; now she examines this gully, and now that, and now she stands listening with uplifted head, that she may hear the distant wailing and obey it. Aha! they see, and rush towards each other. Alas! they are both mistaken; the ewe is not the lamb's ewe,· they are neither kin nor kind to one another, and part in coldness. Each must cry louder, and wander farther yet; may luck be with them both that they may find their own at nightfall. But this is mere dreaming, and I must proceed.

It is worth noting that Butler portrays a world in which human beings are seen from a distal perspective (as a distant hut) and where the only proximal view is of animals rather than people. Perhaps the perfect world should be devoid of homo sapiens, since we seem to be the ones who mess everything up. Butler continues in this initial portrayal of utopia:

> I could not help speculating upon what might lie farther up the river and behind the second range. I had no money, but if I could only find workable country, I might stock it with borrowed capital,

and consider myself a made man. True, the range looked so vast, that there seemed little chance of getting a sufficient road through it or over it; but no one had yet explored it, and it is wonderful how one finds that one can make a path into all sorts of places (and even get a road for pack-horses), which from a distance appear inaccessible; the river was so great that it must drain an inner tract—at least I thought so; and though every one said it would be madness to attempt taking sheep farther inland, I knew that only three years ago the same cry had been raised against the country which my master's flock was now overrunning. I could not keep these thoughts out of my head as I would rest myself upon the mountain side; they haunted me as I went my daily rounds, and grew upon me from hour to hour, till I resolved that after shearing I would remain in 1 doubt no longer, but saddle my horse, take as much provision with me as I could1 and go and see for myself.

But over and above these thoughts came that of the great range itself. What was beyond it? Ah! who could say? There was no one in the whole world who had the smallest idea, save. those who were themselves on the other side of it-if, indeed, there was anyone at all. Could I hope to cross it? This would be the highest triumph that I could wish for; but it was too much to think of yet. I would try the nearer range, and see how far I could go. Even if I did not find country, might I not find gold, or diamonds, or copper, or silver? I would sometimes lie flat down to drink out of a stream, and could see little yellow specks among the sand; were these gold? People said no; but then people always said there was no gold until it was found to be abundant: there was plenty of slate and granite, which I had always understood to accompany gold; and even though it was not found in paying quantities here, it might be abundant in the main ranges. These thoughts filled my head, and I could not banish them.

We see at this point that Butler's utopia is already beginning to crumble as his protagonist begins to look for something even better around the next mountain range. Butler's protagonist also begins to worry about making a living in the present world and begins thinking about encounters with actual human beings. Gold enters the picture. And as in many tales, the lure

of gold can lead humankind astray. Perhaps we have something to learn from Samuel Butler (as he hoped would be the case).

We can also learn from more recent portrayals of a utopian life. It is particularly important to note that a paradise of innocence, as conveyed in many recent utopias, will often come with little or no structure. It exists in a world where there are no social institutions to regulate our behavior. It often appears and feels like a wonder world of serenity. This is a simple world that is free of both sin and restriction—a bit of hippy mentality mixed with a sip of anarchy. 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 Lennon just a dreamer. A noted (and controversial) political anthropologist, Pierre Clastres (1987, p. 22), appears to suggest 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 does exist 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 true freedom might exist in a society that lacks formal authority structures. However, it has to be a society in which coercion and violence are absent. Butler might suggest that this is a world without human beings—and without gold. If our perfect world does include human beings (and gold), then we must imagine 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? As natural beings, do humans 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 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 were offered by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Our historian, Robert Heilbroner 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 strivings, even the vagaries of capitalism. They were all the carriers of a brighter future. The difference was that he envisioned this future as lying beyond the confines of the existing societal structure (Heilbroner, 1960, P. 41):

> 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 full recognition that history wins out over personal initiatives. In Marx's narrative, no cowboy 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 into 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 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 provided life insurance policies for their members along with survivor benefits. 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 sprang up throughout the American farm community provided welfare and multiple social gatherings along with advocacy for equity and social justice.

Heather Cox Richardson (2022d) offers a particularly impressive account. She writes about 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 introduces 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 unions 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 the manifesto offered by Marx and his followers. And they resided many miles away from the pastoral vision of Samuel Butler.

Images and Locus of Control

We return to insights offered by our guide, Fred Polak. Specifically, we 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, how do we engage with and influence this Future? Polak distinguishes between images of the future that are primary and irreversible 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 In*fluence-pessimism* are directly aligned with an internal locus of control. It is assumed 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."

We introduced the concept of external and internal locus of control previously in this book when describing and analyzing how the potential for freedom is viewed by different members of society. Both perspectives on

control are required when building a society in which true freedom reigns supreme.

Chaos, Grace and Discernment

In considering an integrated and balanced perspective regarding locus of control and the specific status of hope in our American culture, we are 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). An external locus of control reigns supreme in this image. 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 we have cited.

Beyond the Babylonian myths, we can look to Judaic and Christian theology for other examples of external control, as well as examples of integration. We have previously introduced the concept of "Grace." We propose that Grace 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 (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 fully beholden to God's benevolence. These are forms of Grace based on 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 we described previously in Chapter Seven. This is the anvil of shared commitment to higher purposes (a harmony of interest). As we noted in Chapter Six, Grace is also a scale that balances 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) whom 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 and scale 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 considered a form of "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 a viable image of the future to 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. 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 we 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 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. The norms may imbalance the scale of rights and responsibilities, as well as replace the anvil of shared commitment with an anvil of authoritarian compliance. It may be the case that we sacrifice true freedom for protection from the numinous.

We find 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. Collaborative and nonauthoritarian scales and anvils can produce a society filled with Grace. These scales and anvils, in turn, can only be established when we build relationships that are trusting, appreciative, and geared to a greater Good and higher purpose. Scales that balance right and responsibilities and anvils of shared interests and commitments only exist when we are open to forgiveness of the mistakes made by other people (and ourselves)—and when we are open to new learning from these mistakes. Grace, justice, collaboration, appreciation, forgiveness, and learning produce a powerful elixir of true freedom when properly mixed.

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 (as portrayed in Polak's image of 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 propose when he suggests how humans 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 contain a variety of attractors that disrupt rather than reinforce societal equilibrium. It should be noted, however, that Polak's (1973, p. 4) specific account of how human beings 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 modem 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 that hold or do not hold such an image. He describes how 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 we have previously identified. Polak writes about the inevitable decline of civilizations that lack 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 that indicates 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, we propose that the future of any society resides primarily in the 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 with the products of excessive consumption. Escape can also take place through widespread substance abuse—be it alcohol, opiate, gambling, or pornography (take your pick). Alternatively, 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."

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 troth 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 to no hope. They do not envision or plan 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.

Today, we face a particularly difficult challenge in creating a viable image of the Future. First, we find this task difficult because many alternatives are available to us. At each corner and every turn, we find a contemporary guru selling a 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 we previously took about balancing rights and responsibilities and establishing a 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.

Coda: Is There a Compelling Vision of our Future?

Once upon a time, there were good reasons to feel optimistic about the future. There was a wilderness to be conquered (and an indigenous people to be subjugated). There were also highway systems to be built and corporations to be established on behalf of the greater good. Christina Henriquez (2024) has recently portrayed some of this optimism as it relates to the building of a canal in Panama that would connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Omar and Optimism

Henriquez focuses this optimism on Omar, who was the son of a fisherman living near the Pacific Ocean. While Omar was to follow in the family tradition of making his living on the sea off the west coast of his country, there was something that compelled him to forsake this tradition and alienate his father. There was the compelling vision of a vibrant new future for Panama, founded on the construction of a canal. This human-built passageway would enable ships to pass between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans without having to take the long and treacherous journey around the Cape of Good Hope.

As portrayed in Henriquez's novel, *The Great Divide*, Omar personifies the strong pull of a collectively shared vision of a prosperous future. Here are some of Henriquez's (2024, p. 87) own words:

> Omar was slender and not terribly strong, but he was willing, and if the man had asked why Omar wanted the job, he was prepared to say that it was because he believed the canal would be the future of Panama, that by having such an important waterway here his country would forever be connected to the rest of the world. But the real reason Omar wanted the job-the reason he never would have said out loud to the man--was that his life so far had been small and lonely. Every day he woke up without anywhere to go or anyone to see. He wanted to give purpose to his purposeless days, wanted to be around people and stop feeling lonely so much of the time. What better way to do that than to join the biggest undertaking known to man, to which thousands of people had come, and which happened to be occurring in the very place where he lived?

While Omar is propelled by a compelling image of Panama's future, he and most of the other characters in Henriquez's novel soon find nothing but hard work, violence, and betrayal in the actual construction of the canal. Working in the deep hole being carved out of stubborn rock, Omar and his co-workers found little to be compelling or hopeful. It was just one very difficult day after another.

The three of us find ourselves staring up from another "god-awful" pit that has been constructed (and continues to be constructed) by our current president in the USA. The dreams conveyed by Donald Trump and his MAGA colleagues don't match the grim reality of today's America, as do the dreams of Omar and other citizens of Panama. We are not ourselves working in the hole, but our feelings start to match those of Omar and other Panama ditch-diggers.

For a brief period, we will step out of our Trumpian hole of despair to reflect on the nature of dystopian images of the future. We specifically offer several powerful images that are offered by social observers and contemporary songwriters.

Dystopian Images of the Future

As we will see in the next section of this book, positive images of the future are often delivered through social observation and the arts. This is also the case with negative images. These dystopian images often seem more realistic than the positive. Though, as we saw earlier in this book, it is a safer bet to predict the negative than the positive.

Alienation and Dissociation: Some of the most powerful images take on a neo-Marxist theme of alienation and the closely related sense of dissociation (especially regarding one's apparent powerlessness). At the start of his book on *The Pursuit of Loneliness,* Phillip Slater (1970/1976) offers a parable that speaks not just to the nature of contemporary loneliness, but also to the sense of alienation that pervades our society and our tendency to take no credit for the alienating position in which we find ourselves. We offer this parable:

> Once upon a time there was a man who sought escape from the prattle of his neighbors and went to live alone in a hut he had found in the forest. At first he was content, but a bitter winter led him to cut down the trees around his hut for firewood. The next summer

he was hot and uncomfortable because his hut had no shade, and he complained bitterly of the harshness of the elements.

He made a little garden and kept some chickens; but rabbits were attracted by the food in the garden and ate much of it. The man went into the forest and trapped a fox, which he tamed and taught to catch rabbits. But the fox ate up the man's chickens as well. The man shot the fox and cursed the perfidy of the creatures of the wild.

The man always threw his refuse on the floor of his hut and soon it swarmed with vermin. He then built an ingenious system of hooks and pulleys so that everything in the hut could be suspended from the ceiling. But the strain was too much for the flimsy hut and it soon collapsed. The man grumbled about the inferior construction of the hut and built himself a new one.

One day he boasted to a relative in his old village about the peaceful beauty and plentiful game surrounding his forest home. The relative was impressed and reported back to his neighbors, who began to use the area for picnics and hunting excursions. The man was upset by this and cursed the intrusiveness of mankind. He began posting signs, setting traps, and shooting at those who came near his dwelling. In revenge groups of boys would come at night from time to time to frighten him and steal things. The man took to sleeping every night in a chair by the window with a loaded shotgun across his knees. One night he turned in his sleep and shot off his foot. The villagers were chastened and saddened by this misfortune and thereafter stayed away from his part of the forest. The man became lonely and cursed the unfriendliness and indifference of his former neighbors. And in all of this, the man saw no agency except what lay outside himself, for which reason, and because of his ingenuity, the villagers called him the American.

We see in this brief parable not only the origins of loneliness but also the impact of an external locus of control on the life of someone who takes no responsibility for his actions. Much as Donald Trump looks outside himself and his politics when confronting the negative outcomes of many actions he takes, the “American” blames the weather, foxes, vermin, hut, boys, and neighbors for what has gone wrong. We believe the first step toward reducing alienation and dissociation resides in the difficult decision to take

responsibility for the actions (or inactions) we have taken. This includes taking responsibility (collectively) for the monster we have created to run our country. A positive, compelling vision of the future must begin with shifting the locus of control from external to internal.

Despair, Hope, and Grace: Contemporary art forms vividly display the nature and depth of despair to be found in a lost sense of the American dream and ideal. Visions of a new America built on the foundation of equity and opportunity have left us. And we stand alone, without much hope for an improved life for ourselves or our children. Contemporary art forms speak to the despairing search for meaning, redemption, and a bit of Grace. We offer excerpts from several songs written by three of our most successful bards of mid-21st-century popular culture: Paul Simon, Bob Dylan, and Willy Nelson.

A brief insight regarding the fallen American Dream is provided by Bob Dylan and Willie Nelson in their song about the "Heartland":

Don't they know that I'm dyin', Why nobody cryin' for me?
My American dream
Fell apart at the seams.
You tell me what it means,
You tell me what it means.

We next tune to Paul Simon's "America," in which a musical portrait is drawn of the optimism to be found in the collective search for the American spirit. Building on what Dylan and Nelson have written, Simon portrays a young person who seems to be seeking assurance that an American dream is available, despite personal feelings of loss and alienation:

"Kathy, I'm lost", I said, though I knew she was sleeping
I'm empty and aching and I don't know why
Counting the cars on the New Jersey Turnpike
They've all come to look for America
All come to look for America
All come to look for America

In "American Tune," Paul Simon expands on this perspective on the intermixing of despair and hope regarding a collective American future. Simon first writes (and sings) about being "alright," despite living in a society where everyone is "battered" and where he is "weary to his bones":

Many's the time I've been mistaken
And many times confused
Yes, and I've often felt forsaken
And certainly misused

Oh, but I'm alright, I'm alright
I'm just weary to my bones
. . .

And I don't know a soul who's not been battered
I don't have a friend who feels at ease
I don't know a dream that's not been shattered
Or driven to its knees

Paul Simon wonders what's gone wrong:

. . . when I think of the
Road we're traveling on
I wonder what's gone wrong
I can't help it, I wonder what has gone wrong

Yet, Paul somehow finds a glimmer of hope that is anchored (at least partly) in American accomplishments (much as was the case with Omar and the prospective building of the Panama Canal) :

. . .And I dreamed I was flying
And high up above my eyes could clearly see
The Statue of Liberty
Sailing away to sea
And I dreamed I was flying

We come on the ship they call The Mayflower
We come on the ship that sailed the moon

Can these past achievements provide guidance for constructing a collective American future in our current "uncertain times"?

We come in the age's most uncertain hours
And sing an American tune

Oh, and it's alright, it's alright, it's alright
You can't be forever blessed
Still, tomorrow's going to be another working day
And I'm trying to get some rest
That's all I'm trying to get some rest

So, we end up just getting some rest. Like Omar, we return to work and continue constructing our American dream. Perhaps an "American Tune" is only this acceptance of the challenges we face collectively under President Trump and the willingness to persist in forging a better America.

Perhaps, in addition to getting some rest and returning to work on the following day, we can find some of the grace we have often identified in this book as critical to the establishment of true freedom. We can turn one last time to Paul Simon, who writes a song about the search for "grace" at Elvis Presley's home called Graceland:

I'm going to Graceland, Memphis, Tennessee
I'm going to Graceland
Poor boys and pilgrims with families
And we are going to Graceland
And my traveling companions are ghosts and empty sockets
I'm looking at ghosts and empties
But I've reason to believe we all will be received in Graceland

These song fragments reveal several important features and concerns about the loss of the American Dream and the lingering hope that this dream can be reclaimed or rebuilt, despite the destructive impact of our current president on this dream and the societal structures that are needed to produce and maintain true freedom.

Conclusions

As we have already noted, there is no need to care for our children if there is no viable future for them to inhabit during their lifetime. Yet, we listen to the words sung by contemporary "troubadours" who seem to express some of the hopes and fears of youth living in our contemporary world. Do we listen to what is being sung? Do we find guidance in taking the first steps toward true freedom in addressing the feelings of despair, alienation, and

isolation portrayed in Phillip Slater's parable and the songs of Paul Simon, Bob Dylan, and Willie Nelson?

The three of us believe that it is not only possible to address these feelings (which we share with the social observers and songwriters) but also find (or construct) a compelling vision of the future toward which we can live and learn. Somehow, in counting the cars on the New Jersey Turnpike and finding our way to Graceland, we find a pathway to True Freedom. In Section Three, we begin to address the challenges just posed. We firmly believe that True Freedom can be found in mid-21st-century America despite the major roadblocks thrown on this pathway by our current president and his ardent followers.

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Section Three

Confronting the Barriers to True Freedom

Chapter Nine

Confronting Tyranny I: The Epistemology of Individualism and Collectivism

Amid our current global struggle pitted between autocratic and democratic rule, it is quite natural 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 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 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 authors of this book, we come to Snyder's 20 Lessons with our own life experiences and previous lessons learned. Some of what we bring to Snyder's work has already been conveyed in this book. Other experiences we have had, and concepts we have acquired, are activated by the lessons Snyder is presenting. Much of what we "learn" from other people (especially "experts') as we mature is the

activation and potential reintegration 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 shuffle the new epistemological deck. And other parts of our body often must 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 we will be taking each of Snyder's 20 lessons and doing some "riffing" on this lesson. We will be bringing in some of our own ideas and relating his lessons to what we have already offered in this book. We are all thankful for the "teaching" moments that Snyder has provided and hope that our extension (and even modification) of his lessons would meet with his approval. Given this framework, we 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 also a source of insights for the authoritarian leader. If Snyder is correct, then authoritarians not only teach their followers about collective compliance. They are also taught by their followers. Important lessons are learned regarding the needs, hopes, 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 operates under this assumption is no longer 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, *The 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 trip 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 a 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") operate as "flocks" with everyone learning from their neighbor. 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 demonstrated in dramatic fashion that we learn from one another, shift attitudes, and modify behaviors primarily when

interacting with those located right beside us. In each of these instances, any one agent is influenced specifically by one of the agents next to them.

Neighboring agents learn from one another (Bala and Goyal, 1998; Goldberg, 2011). This model of neighbor influencing neighbors is particularly effective when the agents in a system need to move quickly and when short-term tactical planning makes sense. There is no time for broader collaboration when a hawk or shark is racing in to gobble one of us up!

A more fully interconnected arrangement, as found in social networks (Schön, 1973), usually proves more effective when there is time for collaboration and when longer-term, sustainable solutions to a threatening problem are required. However, the most resilient solutions to threatening problems are found when every agent is directly involved in producing a solution. A web is formed (Zollman, 2011, p. 341). Every agent is connected directly to all other agents in the system. The table is large. No one is excluded from the constructive dialogue (Gergen and Gergen, 2004).

Enmeshment often takes place at the table, with everyone being involved in everyone else's business. While this enmeshment can leave one feeling somewhat "smothered" and gasping for a bit of "alone time," it operates in a quite powerful manner in social systems. On the one hand, social webs can be a source of rich personal and collective learning. The web's enmeshment ensures that we are learning locally and intimately. On the other hand, webs can be ripe for abuse and manipulation. Enmeshment can easily lead to collusion and the creation of alternative realities (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). It is for the authoritarian leader – and tyrant—to learn about local learning and to learn from this enmeshment. 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, p. 22)

In this second lesson, Snyder is offering us an important suggestion regarding the receptacle(s) for our compelling image of the future. He suggests that these receptacles are often found (and nurtured) in the formal

institutions of a society. A strategy for reform identified by Jay Forrester, the inventor of *System Dynamics*, seems appropriate. 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 preserve decency."

We would extend this point of apparent agreement between Snyder and Forrester. Their insights can be applied to one of the broader initiatives identified in this book. These two social observers have something to say about the creation and maintenance of a compelling image of the future that is held and shared by all members of 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 are certainly 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 first cautions us against finding this harmony by simply reducing or eliminating differences in the interests, needs, and priorities 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, the input of outside resources (such as food and technology) is required. Many societies fail to replenish their population. Not enough babies are born. Ultimately, immigrants from outside must be invited (or at least allowed) to enter this society. 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 will further "seal 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 the harmony of interest can't be sustained by blocking off the outer world. Somehow, harmony of interest must be created and sustained amidst 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 stagnant harmony of homogeneity. We

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, three fundamental principles 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 the validity of information we receive? As noted at several points in this book (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 complemented 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? 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 harmony-related intentions 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? A valuable image is introduced here. This is the image of a Target. In many 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 there are different flaws in the archer's performance. Both Noise and Bias are to be found frequently in the judgments made by most of us.

We 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 pose quite a challenge for groups. We must remain patient in addressing these differences; furthermore, the process of polarity management introduced earlier in this book can be of great benefit.

There is another important point 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 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" (Goleman, 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 use of valid information in finding pathways to the diverse intentions that have been identified. This is where a judgment 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 identified intentions. One of the main reasons the information should come from multiple sources, using 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 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 kinds of information are particularly evident in the diffusion groups identified by Everett Rogers (2008). Some people (early adopters) are convinced by data, while others are influenced 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.

What does it mean, in conclusion, to find harmony, given diverse information and intentions? There are two primary pathways. The first is a pathway of divergence that incorporates creative strategies. "Open space" technologies, 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 that 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 enable the achievement of intentions regarding one or more of the other clusters.

While we 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 (aligned with valid information and shared intentions) must be retained in a move toward harmony of interests. The portrait that is derived (through studying and appreciating these paste-ups on the wall or through the use of another 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 seek to create 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 amidst 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 noted in our 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, poetry (as in the case of Vaclav Havel), narrative (as in the case of the interview-based stories conveyed by David Rubenstein), or symbolic action (as in the case of Gandhi's hunger strikes).

We can also witness the demonic symbols that lead to repression, authoritarianism, and violence. One need only watch Leni Riefenstahl's photo essays to see how symbols can have a perverse impact on society. Symbols help to create an image of the future that Polak would identify as dystopian. Even though framed in a negative and ugly manner, these images are often 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 perceived 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 linking a leader to a specific location (Jerusalem), event (the *Eschaton*), or alliance (the Holy Roman Empire). The symbolic enactment of any basic assumption offered by Bion leads inevitably to regressive thinking, feeling, and acting on the part of the crowd (Le Bon, 1895/2022). Evil prevails. 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 guides 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 the basis for what we wish to call a *Communality of Concerns* shared by the professional and their client/patient. This is one domain in contemporary American life where communality of concerns often reigns supreme. However, we find in some sectors (especially medicine) that a profit-oriented managerial culture is now ascendant. 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 all 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 domestic 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, concerns among the founding fathers focused on the potential corruption of the judicial system. By establishing this branch of government independent of the other two politicized branches (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 observed throughout American society. Perhaps we as human beings are inclined toward differentiation and polarization, especially when we are anxious and fearful about 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? This may be one of the most profound and gnawing contradictions that exists 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).

This balance can be achieved through the polarity management process we have introduced at several points 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 signal 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 could involve a straightforward acquisition of new knowledge and/or skills—often associated with taking on a new job or higher position within their current organization. This can be identified 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 may require first-order learning, while a second or third child often requires second-order learning.

In a book that he was never able to finish before his untimely death, our colleague Bob Shukraft suggested that we engage both first-order and

second-order learning during the first half of life. During the second half, we are likely to focus on rearranging, integrating, and implementing what we learned during the first half of life. This might be a third (or even fourth) order of change (Kegan, 1982; Kegan, 1994). One that has an impact on 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 Schön, 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. Approaching the issue of organizational learning from an appreciative perspective (Bergquist, 2003; Bergquist and Mura, 2011), one acknowledges that members of an organization can also learn from their successes. Rather than merely celebrating success or moving ahead (feeling only relief and a release of burden when a project has succeeded), it is important for members of an organization to pause and spend 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, adapt, 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 thoughtless or (worse yet) highly intentional use of these weapons. Learning must occur that is particularly directed toward the management of polarization that typically occurs when issues associated with "gun control" are addressed in a community or entire 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 organizational priorities as related to broader societal priorities? What would the third and fourth orders of

learning look like in an organizational setting? How might an organization take a position regarding gun ownership and use?

These higher orders of learning seem to be 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 to the future with people outside our organization. We collectively envision a society in which guns are owned and used appropriately. We share a harmony of interests about gun regulation. 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.

Fundamentally, collective learning at all levels regarding the regulation of guns is embedded in the fundamental balance between collectivism and 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 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. The critical decision to say "no" is not always easy. It requires a higher order level of learning than adjusting to a new job or a second child.

Robert Kegan writes about this higher order, as do Argyris and Schön (building on the wise observations made by Gregory Bateson (Bateson, 1972; Bateson,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, reintroducing 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 shootings. The list is quite long. As Ken Gergen (1991/2000) 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 successfully confront this overwhelm.

We take this matter of higher-order learning a bit further. Specific types of learning may be particularly important when it comes not just to gun control; they might also be appropriate when confronting authoritarian rule (Pawlak and Bergquist, 2014). We specifically nominate "transformational" learning, which was first introduced by Jack Mezirow (1991). This form of learning leads to a fundamental shift in the way we view our world and engage the challenges posed. Our colleague, Kristina Liu (2022) writes about the internal and external journeys that accompany transformative learning. She suggests (at least for herself) that the transformative journey moves from the inside to the outside. Conversely, the typical transactional model applied to behavior change involves movement from the outside to the inside. A new policy or priority is established. And then our heart and head are expected to shift, complying with this policy or priority.

When addressing the issue of gun control, the transformative journey might involve coming to a fuller, more compassionate, and more extended understanding of the impact that the killing of a loved one has on the people who survive this tragedy and the victim. It might also involve gaining a 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 Timothy Snyder suggests, this type of learning might be an important antidote to authoritarianism—even if our learning results in nothing more than saying "No".

There is one final point to be made. A fourth type of learning has been identified (Pawlak and Bergquist, 2014). This is "appreciative learning." As one might anticipate, this type of learning is often associated with the strategy already identified in this book: learning from our past successes. Concerning gun control, this would mean collective learning about past successes in shifting public attitudes. We would appreciate moments of relative quiet and moments 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 an attitude that this matter is "over our heads." Living in a VUCA-Plus world requires us often

to face "in over our heads" challenges at several levels. We must successfully address complex, systemic issues in our individual lives and in our organizations. 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 a complex issue head-on such as free access to guns or restricted voting. We can say "No"—and can then help to craft a balanced policy regarding gun ownership or voting rights.

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. Using 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.

One of us [WB] is reminded of an experience in his own background:

> I was teaching students from Asian countries. In one of my 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 actual challenges 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.

> This student came up to me during a break. 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 unfortunately blocked 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 my lesson about cultural differences in perspectives regarding individualism and personal identity.

A similar dynamic is found in another part of the world. The formation of personal identity in many sub-Saharan African countries was the focus of a recent study of African models of leadership (Bergquist, 2021b). 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 the Taiwanese 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. Snyder's lesson of "Standing out" would seem to apply only to certain members of either the Taiwanese or the African 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 identifies an 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 a single 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, physical safety, or even one's life.

Much is at stake. We can point to the blackballed screenwriters 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 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 (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 States.

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).

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 accompanied by a general regression in the functioning of both cognitive and affective processes among those engaged in the courageous act. These participants in a courageous act are

heavily influenced by a fundamental motivation and assumption held by all members of the group (often this being Bion's fight/flight dynamic).

They are also being influenced by the behavior of those situated next to them. As already noted regarding 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 observes among their "neighbors." It is always good to have a friend and neighbor on whom one can lean and who will confirm one's beliefs. This is one of many benefits associated with living in a collectivist society. These benefits have been identified throughout this book. However, as frequently noted, the vulnerability to tyranny might be greater in a collectivist society than in an individualistic society, at least regarding the unlikely stance of the lone dissenter against a tyrannical foe.

There is an attendant fear for those who are lone dissenters and choose to act alone. 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 risk not only being shunned by 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. A similar "existential" risk is being taken by any member of a collectivist culture who is "standing out" with courage.

With all the courage being manifest by the brave isolate, it is worth noting that these people often do not consider themselves to be "courageous." Our 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 just future that overshadows any concern about their own personal welfare.

For others, like Rosa Parks, it might simply be a matter of "standing up" for their personal right to sit anywhere on 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. Parks. For others, it was a matter of maintaining a harmony of interests in their community. Peter Seeger looked to harmony in the civil rights (and later the environmental protection) community. He embraced the harmony

of song to find the 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 are featured 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 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, p. 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." This brings back Plato's metaphor of those who dwell in epistemological caves. As noted previously in this book, we are vulnerable to or might inevitably be 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 noted, 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, 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 that 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 thoughts about reality. We are vulnerable not only to visual images but also to words (such as those offered by commentators regarding the cave's shadows). Both the semantics (meaning) and syntax (structure) of our language help define the way we see and interpret reality (Whorf, 2012; Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). Our Chinese colleague, Xiaoyun (Sharon) Ma (2022), 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) lenses that are built upon the visual representations that surround us (Bergquist, 2025d).

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, p. 65)

The tenth lesson conveyed by Snyder reiterates a key controversial message delivered in this book. This message concerns the social construction of reality. The constructivist argument is that no pathway exists that allows us to confirm any truth. Hence, there is no absolute truth. What if one aligns oneself with the strict criteria offered a century ago by the aforementioned 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 "bathwater." In this instance, the "baby" amounts to most sources of meaning and understanding for members of the general public. The "bath water" that 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? 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, we return to our analysis in an earlier chapter—an analysis of epistemological stances provided by William Perry (1970). He identified an initial dualistic stance whereby there is a right and a wrong, and a true and a 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 are trying to detach 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 (1962/2012) 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.

This stance was also 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 their wallets to further and sustain one of their own pet truths. Many befuddled citizens of the mid-21st Century are tempted 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 may be appropriate 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-filled and polarized world on VUCA-Plus in which we are now living.

We don't think this is an accurate interpretation of the tenth lesson that Snyder is sharing with us. Snyder is probably coming to us from "commitment in relativism." Perry identified this as the fourth and highest epistemological stance. As 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. After all, 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 responsible citizens. As Snyder is suggesting, without making a choice, there is room only for

tyranny. If we introduce Snyder to William Perry, then we 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.

Wallace Stevens, a noted American poet, 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. We 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 we introduce you to both William Perry and Wallace Stevens? We 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, p. 72)

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 skilled in conveying messages. This still seems to be the case, according to C.S. Lewis (in *The Screwtape Letters*) (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. However, we have neither the training nor the 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 we should 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 convey everything in short bullets and PowerPoint presentations. 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 some of our guides: Gregory Bateson, Riane Eisler, Robert Kegan, Chris Argyris, Don Schön, Carol Gilligan, 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 can use 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 over time as well as how they contradict one another.

We would add three other tools to this short list of discernment tools. First, we turn to insights offered by two of the scholars just mentioned (Chris Argyris and Donald Schön). During more than twenty years of remarkable collaborative work, Argyris and Schön provided a detailed analysis of the way we operate with two distinctive theories about human behavior (and particularly about our own behavior). 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 so that he might improve his performance."
>
> "As a leader, it is important for me to treat all of my employees fairly and equitably. 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 PowerPoint slides). 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 Schön. 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 too entrenched to ever change!

The caring leader may hold a more general theory-in-use that suggests:

> The way 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 kinder 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 realize 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 their boss seems quite anxious when confronted by this boss. The employee doesn't seem to be paying much attention to their boss's 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. As an observer from Mars, we note that the leader's organization always seems to be in crisis. In part, crises are rampant because this 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 own 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 prospect of leaving this cave to be daunting. Argyris and Schön have offered us valuable insights about our own behavior. However, 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 does nothing 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 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.

Two forms of collusion 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. Soft collusion can also involve the passive acceptance of a destructive action taken by another person, based once again on the false assumption that someone else will step forward and block this action.

There is also *Hard Collusion*, where people who are working together share 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 occurs when unconscious dynamics dominate a system. There is little awareness of what is actually occurring. Invalid assumptions are repeatedly being self-fulfilled.

One form of Soft Collusion is often 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 disagree. 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 means never testing reality or checking what other people actually believe or what they want to do. No one wants to "rock the boat". The official psychological term is the management of agreement, and 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 provided a folksy (and disturbing) story of a family deciding whether or not to travel from their small town in Texas to the nearby city of Abilene. Called the *Abilene Paradox* by Harvey, the family decides 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 she actually 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 they decided to go to Abilene when everyone seemed content to sit on the porch and enjoy some cool refreshments. The Abilene Paradox was in full display.

One of us [WB] experienced the soft collusive power of the Abilene Paradox when consulting with 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 about academic cultures and assumed that the problem of being stuck in place had to do with the culture of the library staff. I found the library director 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. However, they 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. Very considerate and 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, mere acquiescence to the collusion will exacerbate the collusive process. No one observing the parade 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 enveloping 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 regarding 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, we wish to dig a bit deeper regarding this critical issue of thoughtful investigation. We will be using some psychodynamic terminology. Basically, collusion often begins to take place through a dynamic already introduced in this book:

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, someone "in power" (the father-in-law) needed to suggest 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 of our own power to other people. These are aspects of ourselves ("internal objects") that we refuse to recognize. These internal objects might be our own fears, our competencies, our anger, our arrogance—and especially our personal power. We don't accept aspects of ourselves because doing so would make us anxious. We would begin to feel personally responsible for some decision to be made or action to be taken. This would make us feel bad about ourselves:

> "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.")

Typically, we are not alone in engaging this projection. 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 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 themself, and thus readily accepts the assumption made by other

members of the organization that the leader is very much afraid. The leader at some level believes that they are very competent and courageous (or would at least like to think of themselves as competent and courageous). Thus, the leader welcomes the admiration and assumptions of competence and courage made by other members of their organization.

The father-in-law is pleased that he meets 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!" He feels good about himself, even though he is not being either wise or caring in discerning what other members of his family really want to do. 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 indiscriminate 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 processes—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. They collude with the principal actor to sustain the play. As Kets de Vries (2003) declares dramatically, 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 a vicious circle involving 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 major downside accompanying these secondary gains is that one person is often stuck in a specific role and required to assume responsibility for a specific problem or cluster of problems. Role suction reigns supreme. Furthermore, the overall 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).

We conclude this extended analysis of collusion by returning to insights offered by Gregory Bateson (1972) regarding *Schismogenesis*. According to Bateson, two systems (organizations, tribes, or nations) tend to relate to one another in a manner that drives the two systems further or leads to the escalation of similar activities in both systems. As we have noted, complementary schismogenesis is engaged when one system moves 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 in many organizations.

The leader becomes more assertive, and his employees become 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. 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 often creates a "vicious circle." This system is characterized by exponential growth (the "power law" of contemporary chaos and complexity theorists). It will quickly lead to an explosion and collapse. We typically don't find symmetrical collusion to be long-lasting in organizations. Rather, we are likely to witness escalation and collapse. Then there is 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 require Snyder's eleventh lesson, leading to an emphasis on sustained investigation.

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" (nor 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 acknowledge the contributions to the escalating collusion being made by those with whom we are working.

There is yet another way in which collusion operates. We return to Argyris and Schön'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 were a neutral observer, they probably wouldn'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 successfully. There can't even be a mention of the collusion that is taking place:

"We are doing fine, thank you."

"There is remarkable goodwill 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 Schön 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 what 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 Schön 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 uses 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 Schön identify a "ladder of inference" that should guide the discernment of one's own assumptions and biases. These assumptions and biases are often based on the often-devilish stereotypes and falsehoods conveyed and reinforced by their community and society. We hear it from someone close to us, and we believe it. If we don't hear it from them, then we become skeptical. To cite the title of Sanford Goldberg's (2011) essay, "If that were true, I would have heard about it by now." This is where something called the neighborhood effect produces its most destructive outcomes. As 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 avoid the neighborhood-based assumptions and biases, while achieving Snyder's investigative goals.

A second tool is found in the work of scholars who, like Argyris and Schon, lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts. These are the behavioral economists we have often referenced in this book. Their tool is the process of slow thinking (as opposed to fast thinking) articulated by Daniel Kahneman (2011/2013). Slow thinking is required, particularly when one is seeking to discern the validity of specific information. By contrast, fast thinking is engaged when we wish to quickly move to decisions and actions—and when we rely on heuristic processes such 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 are looking for an alternative way to frame 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, we 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. The voices found in the domain of politics and public policy are particularly focused on loss.

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 we have somehow gained during our lifetime. 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, we return to the matter of Noise and Bias introduced by Kahneman and his colleagues several years ago (Kahneman, Sibony and Sustein, 2021). This important distinction between Noise and Bias appears in many areas. In the field of psychology, noise is considered to be statistical variance in the results obtained from a psychological experiment. The focus of most studies is typically on the Mean (average) of the scores obtained. Variance is an unwanted visitor to the experiment. It 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. We may be 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 than by messy internal determinants such as personality or moment-to-moment chaotic judgements.

These variances in human behavior (and the human psyche) are more often a focus in the humanities, being portrayed in novels, portraits, and ballets. 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, some modicum of truth can be found within a disagreement. It is during moments of disagreement that the pull of collusion can be most often thwarted.

We propose that any comprehensive view of a human experience or any attempt to engage in systemic thinking will produce noise. As 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. Scott Page (2011) might suggest that we reduce bias by offering a diversity of perspectives. 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 us to investigate. 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 Serenity. 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 common among those who offer "expert" advice regarding viruses, wars on poverty, drug wars, and the preservation of democracy (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). Put simply, "noisy" experts are in trouble, even though they might have the best hold on contemporary reality. This is a very difficult condition. It is embedded in the distinction drawn between BIAS and NOISE.

Coda: Suzi's Perspective

As we introduce Snyder's initial considerations of factors potentially leading to tyranny in the United States, we have the opportunity to reflect on the epigenetic echoes that haunt someone whose relatives were survivors of Hitler's violent tyranny during the middle of the 20th Century. Suzi Pomerantz's reflections comment on the factors found in current political conditions in the United States from the perspective of someone who lives with the trauma of tyranny and death in the lives of her recent Jewish ancestors in Europe. While being "haunted" by these ancestral memories, Suzi also comes to these reflections with a sense of hope about the near future.

No Surprise, But Profound Fear

I don't think anything happening in the current chaos of this regime surprises me, because I was so clear before Trump got elected the first time. I was clear about who he was, what he was up to, and what he stood for. I was most surprised that the rest of the country couldn't, or wouldn't, see what I was seeing. I suspect a lot of my filter for interpreting what I was seeing has to do with my cellular epigenetic memory of the Holocaust, even though it was my grandparents who went through it. I saw the signs of fascism, narcissism, manipulation, and misogyny. All of the things that were evident before he was elected the first time. And I was in deep fear and trauma the first time around. I was profoundly upset regarding the election outcomes in 2016, which I now understand was re-triggered trauma from growing up hearing my beloved grandparents' first-hand accounts and stories of the horrors they lived through and witnessed.

However, this time around, I'd say I'm overall in a better place. This time, I know what he's doing. I don't like it, but I know what he's doing. And I

know we'll survive it. I wasn't sure we would survive his first term. I think we really only survived the first term because he's not as strategic or intelligent as someone in his position could be to take advantage of all the holes, gaps, and kinks in the armor. Our so-called "checks and balances", if you will, and our systems, and our democracy escaped Trump's first term attempts at destruction. I think he's been really good for us as a canary in the coal mine. He has unearthed the fragility of our world position, of our economy, of our democracy, of our politics, of our election process, and of our countrymen. He's revealed all the fragility.

The thing that scares me now more than Trump being the mad king is the fact that he's pointed out all the weak spots. God help us if a nefarious actor who is strategic, intentional, and intelligent steps in to exploit these revealed weak spots. Trump is now chaotically using every lever he found during his first term for his own financial gain and personal retribution against perceived enemies and those who simply won't do his bidding. Fine, that's predictable. However, someone really intelligent and nefarious may have been watching both terms. They now see all the gaps and weak spots. They are motivated to take over our government and society. We are ripe for the picking.

Is there anyone sitting here on the sidelines who would qualify for the nefarious leader? Are there any candidates? Internally or externally? Externally, I think Putin and Xi Ping certainly qualify. Internally, we have a whole host of power-hungry characters to choose from: Elon Musk, Robert Vought, Stephen Miller, and many contemporary Nazi-sympathizers. Trump warned us in his first term that he was stacking the Supreme Court in his favor, and he warned us he would be back when he finally left after losing the election in 2020. While campaigning for 2024, he warned us that he planned to grab more unchecked power. And not even our elections were likely to exist as we knew them.

At this point, Suzi is aligning with Snyder's first lesson. We are primed in the United States for authority. Trump is just the warm-up. Much like, on the positive side, John the Baptist was the warm-up to Jesus Christ, and, for good or evil, Sun Yat-sen was the warm-up to Chiang Kai-shek and, ultimately, Mao Zedong in China, we might find someone even more powerful, successful, and enduring, for good or evil, after Donald Trump

leaves office. We are also primed for the one-party state of which Snyder also warns us (Lesson 2). There is no viable Supreme Court as a protector.

The "inconvenience of dissent" may be abandoning us. Any external dictator with designs on world domination could easily take over. We must identify areas where we have not learned our lesson, where someone could come in and control the levers of government. Suzi concludes that no guardrails are in place right now. There are no checks and balances. Suzi adds that this administration is really good at creating continual chaos. Suzi indicates that during Trump's first term, she paid considerable attention to the chaos. Every new thing that happened was so shocking, and it was shockwave upon shockwave upon shockwave. We were all intentionally kept dysregulated. I'm smarter this time. I know how not to pay attention and not go along with the emotional whiplash caused by the chaos. I know how to regulate my central nervous system and stay grounded. I know how to cease fearing the worst and remind myself that *at this moment*, at least, I am safe and we are still a free democratic republic.

There is a kernel of hope in knowing that smart people everywhere are working from many different angles to figure something out. I know that there are still people in our country who care about the rule of law, so I have hope on that front. I just hope they can find solutions in time. I often marvel at the blatant and voluminous evidence of crimes committed. Many are already convicted. And yet not only is Trump *not* in prison for life, this ruthless man is also immune from prosecution and allowed to remain in the Oval Office.

Riding a Rollercoaster

We continued with Suzi's reflections. I was speaking to a client who runs an organization in the government. She told me how flustered and anxious she felt all the time. It interferes with her sleep and disrupts many other elements in her life. Her current life experience might be portrayed through the use of a metaphor about riding a roller coaster. It is fitting because, as Snyder warns, there are no longer institutions in the United States that serve as stabilizers (lesson two). When you first get on a roller coaster, whether you love them or hate them, if you're on a roller coaster, the arm bar comes down, you're locked into the seat, and the car starts going up that first steep, steep hill, right? And it's going slowly, and it's clicking and clacking, and you're feeling the anticipation:

Maybe for you, it's the thrill of the ride. Maybe for you, it's just fear and wondering, "What am I doing on this ride? Why did I think this was a good idea? This is crazy, I'm gonna die!" Or you're looking all around the park, and you're enjoying the view, yet however you take it, you're locked in. You might have a lot of thoughts going up that first hill, but then as soon as you go over that first peak, and you swoosh down that first big hill, and then you're off! Whatever design the roller coaster has, at some point, you relax into it a little bit. At some point, the part of your brain that was trying to keep you safe realizes you probably are safe, because thousands of people a day go on this ride, and they wouldn't allow it to stay in operation if it were going to go off the tracks. You remind yourself that these things are regulated and checked because the park stands to lose a lot if anyone dies on their ride.

So, you get to that point, when you decide: "Okay, I'm gonna relax and enjoy the ride as best I can, feel the fear, or feel the thrill, or whatever." But you know it's going to be over at some point. You know it won't last forever. That is a metaphor for what we're living through now. We are living through the chaos of this roller coaster ride, the chaos of this administration. Some of it's going to be terrifying and dark, and some of it is going to be maybe exciting, or thrilling, or hopeful. But at some point, it'll be over. So, we relax and simply take in the ride, reminding our nervous system that we are safe to override the visceral terror.

The question becomes: is this an accurate description of what is happening in the life of Suzi's client and many other people living in the American society of the 2020s? As Timothy Snyder suggests, we must be kind to our language (Lesson 9). This would seem to mean not only being conversant in what is actually happening today but also avoiding being "loose" with the language we use. It is tempting to be hyperbolic in our description of what is now occurring. This exaggeration and distortion do little to guide any action taken to address the current problems. And in many ways, this exaggeration contributes to the problematic situation in which we find ourselves. So, is it accurate to describe the current American experience as riding on a roller coaster?

We find that we are not alone in describing the current situation as one in which we seem to be thrown about and cascaded between feelings of despair and hope, anger and fear, trust and mistrust. One of the noted social critics

of our time, Naomi Klein, offers a metaphor that aligns with the rollercoaster ride, but in some ways is even more disturbing. She writes about her past advice in confronting a world that has been in shock for many decades (Klein, 2008). Klein writes about her past capacity to manage the shock (Klein, 2023, p. 8):

> "Gather together, find your footing and your story." That is the advice I have been giving for two decades about how to stay out of shock during moments of collective trauma. Metabolize the shock together, I would tell people, create meaning together. Resist the tin-pot tyrants who will tell you that the world is now a blank sheet for them to write their violent stories upon.

Currently, Klein is not so confident that solutions to our present-day problems are accessible (Klein, 2023). She turns her analysis at this point primarily the external world (her preferred venue for two decades) to her own internal world. Specifically, she introduces her own metaphor, this being the *Doppelganger*. A mythic figure in the literature of many cultures, the doppelganger is an apparition that lingers alongside one's self. In many ways, it represents a second side of us, not unlike the Shadow described by Carl Jung, or Mr. Hyde who resides inside Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll. As Klein notes, the Doppelganger represents the intertwined sense of a higher order aspiring self with a repressed, rejected, and often depraved self. We can't bear to see the evil twin, the shadow self, the anti-self. She suggests that her own Doppelganger is now more apparent to her, especially given the "frustration and uncanniness of it all. (Klein, 2023, p. 9)

Naomi Klein seems to be suggesting that we live in a world not just of roller-coaster-based anxiety, but also in a world that produces Gergen's (1991/2000) aforementioned *Multiphrenia*. Multiple senses of self are produced without any central organizing framework that enables us to identify one sustained and unified idea of who we "really' are (self-schema). We might ask ourselves: Are we riding on the roller coaster, or do we only imagine this is the case? Our world is deeply fragmented, yet we go from day to day living with some semblance of coherence and integrity. Is it actually our society that is riding the roller coaster, while as individuals most of us are leading a stressful, yet "livable" life. Yes, people are deeply suffering, but are we personally suffering? Are there two selves, one of which is deeply

impacted by the Trump presidency, and another that is "doing just fine" (perhaps attending some demonstrations and providing some charity)?

Klein doesn't let us off with this personal appraisal of two selves. She notes that (Klein, 2023, p. 9):

> Doppelgangers . . . are not only forms of torment. For centuries, doubles have been understood as warnings or harbingers. When reality starts doubling, refracting off itself, it often means that something important is being ignored or denied–a part of ourselves and our world we do not want to see–and that further danger awaits if the warning is not heeded. That applies to the individual but also to entire societies that are divided, doubled, polarized, or partitioned into various warring, seemingly unknowable camps. Societies like ours.

Alfred Hitchcock called the tumultuous state of living in the presence of doppelgangers "vertigo" in his 1958 classic of the same name. Naomi Klein would seem to suggest that Doppelgangers are not leading us away from the roller coaster but are instead pointing us toward our ride on it, even when we are trying to deny our ridership. We experience the Vertigo that comes with careening up and down on the roller coaster. This Vertigo would seem to interweave with the anxiety of riding on the coaster, as well as the exhilaration of somehow "championing" the ride. A second question arises from Suzi's provocative use of the rollercoaster metaphor. Should we just go along for the ride? Is this the best strategy for survival during this turbulent period in the life of the American democracy? Or is this a strategy of acceptance that leads to loss of vigilance? Is this what Snyder warns us about when focusing on the loss of any sense of responsibility (Lesson four) or an important commitment to ethics (Lesson Five)?

Klein (2023, pp. 11-12) digs even deeper into the presence of the Doppelganger in her own psyche. She wonders if her Doppelganger will ever allow her to "go along for the ride":

> As I shadowed my double further into her world–a place where soft-focus wellness influencers make common cause with fire-breathing far-right propagandists all in the name of saving and protecting "the children"—I found myself confronting yet more forms of doubling and doppelganging, these ones distinctly more consequential. Like

> the way that all of politics increasingly feels like a mirror world, with society split in two, and each side defining itself against the other—whatever one says and believes, the other seems obliged to say and believe the exact opposite. The deeper I went, the more I noticed this phenomenon all around me: individuals not guided by legible principles or beliefs, but acting as members of groups playing yin to the other's yang–well versus weak; awake versus sheep; righteous versus depraved. Binaries where thinking once lived.

Klein (2023, p. 12) finds herself confronting an array of intractable conditions:

> At first, I thought what I was seeing in my doppelganger's world was mostly grifting unbound. Over time, though, I started to get the distinct impression that I was also witnessing a new and dangerous political formation find itself in real time: its alliances, worldview, slogans, enemies, code words, and no-go zones-and, most of all, its ground game for taking power.
>
> And all of this, it quickly became clear, was enmeshed in another, more ominous kind of doubling: the age-old way that race, ethnicity, and gender create dangerous doubles that hover over whole categories of people—the ones cast as Savage. Terrorist. Thief. Whore. Property. This raises the most chilling part of my doppelganger journey: it is not only an individual who can have a sinister double; nations and cultures have them, too. Many of us feel and fear a decisive flip. Democratic to authoritarian. Secular to theocratic. Pluralist to fascistic. In some places, the flip has already taken place. In others it feels as close and as intimate as a warped reflection in the mirror.
>
> As my investigation has worn on, this is the form of doppelganger that increasingly preoccupies me: the fascist clown state that is the ever-present twin of liberal Western democracies, perpetually threatening to engulf us in its fires of selective belonging and ferocious despising. The figure of the doppelganger has been used for centuries to warn us of these shadow versions of our collective selves, of these monstrous possible futures.

It is at this point that Naomi Klein (2023, p.13) is hovering on the edge of her own roller coasting metaphor:

> It's going to take some wild turns-but rest assured that the point of this mapping is not to stay trapped inside the house of mirrors, but to do what I sense many of us long to do: escape its mind-bending confines and find our way toward some kind of collective power and purpose. The point is to make our way out of this collective vertigo, and get somewhere distinctly better, together.

Klein is hopeful that we can leave the polarizing house of mirrors, while Suzi is buttressed by massive protests like 7 million Americans flooding the streets of every major city on "No Kings' Day." Hopefully, the rollercoaster ride will soon come to an end. Most importantly, the three of us hope that our American culture will hold strong and sustain our American society through this turbulent ride.

Unfortunately, along with the hopes come the apprehensions. Suzi fears that the current policy makers are smart enough with Project 2025 to be putting in place things to make sure that it perpetuates indefinitely and doesn't ever reach "over", but she is hopeful that enough people are working towards ending the chaotic ride so we can all collectively move on from the divisive polarization and cruel tactics against our citizens. She thinks, however, that we need a different construct in our country.

Suzi doesn't think democracy is viable as we've known it with the two-party system, the electoral college, and the broken term limits. "I think we need something completely different, because this one's clearly broken and exploitable." Obviously, as Trump himself said, what he does every day is great for the media: "I'm boosting your ratings all over the place. Yeah, I'm all about what makes good TV".

The New Society

Suzi continues. I'm surprised at my hope and faith, honestly. I don't really have faith in the American voters who got us into this mess. I certainly don't have faith in Trump to be a good person and do the right thing. And I don't have faith in the people around him to support him in going down the right path. However, I've been surprised that I still have hope and faith. I believe that we'll get off this roller coaster ride at some point, and somebody who's grown up will take the helm (or not, and we will be in worse shape with a

truly evil dictator). Somehow, something new will arise from our current mess.

It's a very interesting time. I feel like there's something new coming. Perhaps it's a rise of our collective consciousness. It was very interesting to see, for example, just little glimmers of the law working the way it's supposed to. Little glimmers of the Supreme Court pushing back and not allowing some of Trump's illegal declarations to happen. Little glimmers of all the people who turned up in the streets for No King's rallies. Little glimmers of hardcore MAGA representatives, like Marjorie Taylor Greene, stepping down or turning away.

Suzi indicates that it is important to acknowledge that you can't grow new things in chaos. You can only destroy in chaos. In fact, that brings up a quote that my colleague, Dr. Pamela Richarde, said at a board meeting. I wrote it down here because it struck me when she said this. For it is true and it's fitting here. She said, "Chaos is the raw material for a new order". I just think that's so brilliant. I feel like a new order is needed and maybe coming. The chaos is like the fire in the forest that clears the land. The new growth can emerge after the burn."

Suzi is touching on an important factor that operates in complex systems, such as we find in American society. Ralph Stacey (1996), a British organizational consultant, proposes that it's in the chaos of a system. It's in the chinks of the armor encasing the organization—where the creativity and the new version of the organization will emerge. As Suzi has noted, we can't just iterate our way out of the current chaotic conditions of American democracy. Something new must evolve, be born, or be imagined.

It is different from what happened in Germany, Italy, and Spain during the 1930s. Today, we have extensive media coverage of all events, including military actions. The Internet provides us with even more extensive information. The lessons to be learned about the paramilitary (Snyder's Lesson Six) and all acts of armament (Lesson Seven) are now to be framed as potential threats in a world that is richly vigilant regarding the occurrence and impact of aggression in any form. It is no longer second-hand reporting of violence; rather, we now view violence first-hand through the police bodycams and the TV cameras being carried into warfare. We may no longer be living in Plato's Cave; instead, we are living outside the Cave. Or at least

our cave is filled with large screens conveying what is happening outside our Cave or in other caves.

It seems to Suzi that we are now seeing a small turning of the tide. On the one hand, the polarity is still very apparent; You've got the Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth, randomly killing people on ships that are supposedly trafficking fentanyl to the United States from Venezuela. These ships were actually trafficking cocaine to Europe and were never coming to the United States. Hegseth was taking unilateral action without going through the proper channels. You've still got the president doing things not through the proper channels. Like destroying the East Wing of the White House, for which he never sought formal approval. So, chaos and destruction still rain down on us.

On the other hand, we're starting to see some shifting of the sands. Marjorie Taylor Greene was once one of Trump's biggest supporters. She is now basically coming out against him and saying, "I'm not playing this game anymore. This is stupid." And then you've got four [later fourteen] Republican congresspeople voting with the Democrats to extend subsidies for the Affordable Care Act.

So, we're starting to see that not everybody is marching in lockstep with the Führer as they once were. So that gives me some hope that maybe things are starting to shift. I also think that many Americans are waking up to the reality of ICE. They are becoming aware of the dire situation, as the ICE raids continue to break apart families and lock up supposedly illegal aliens who later turn out to be actual U.S. citizens. ICE, following the Gestapo playbook, is sending them to countries that aren't even the country they came from. Not to mention the ICE murder of Renee Good in Minnesota. If those in power in the US are now openly, in broad daylight, murdering citizens, we can be sure there will be earthquakes from the epigenetic echoes our Black citizens experience from the horrendous days of Ku Klux Klan lynchings, not to mention slavery.

Bright Lights, Yet Illuminated Truth

Suzi comments that there's so much chaos going on, but there's still the push toward truth. Timothy Snyder is not alone in declaring that "to abandon facts is to abandon freedom." (lesson 10). As Snyder also suggests, it is hard to operate when big-money lights are blinding us. We are

vulnerable to “truths” that are nothing more than convenient fictions or are declared so often and in such a media-compelling manner that we eventually assume they represent truth. Yet, Suzi believes that there may be an awakening of basic American people who are saying, despite the blinding lights: “Wait a minute, that's not what I signed up for, and that's not right”. Furthermore, the economy is having a negative impact on many people. In that, she feels there may be some hope.

The Internet is a primary differentiator. Information is more readily available. Real information, as well as misinformation and disinformation, is abundant. The distinction is between wrong information that's accidental versus wrong information that's intentional. We have a lot of global disinformation being used as a weapon in international events that are happening right now. Most people are thinking of the Internet as a villain that's causing (or amplifying) the polarization and division we all see in the US. However, while the Internet cannot save democracy, it does open the possibility of real change.

The Internet really is what's different. In 1939, the world was not as connected and informed as it is now. Germany, Italy, and Spain could operate and repress without the rest of the world being informed of the authoritarian acts being committed. Whether that information is correct or not, we have access to more information than our ancestors did, no matter where they lived. We have more bodies moving around the globe between countries, continents, and regimes. It used to be a “really big deal” to travel between countries or cross to another continent. You'd have to travel by boat for months. Now we can, in a matter of hours, be on the other side of the world.

I think technology as a whole, but the internet specifically and social media even more specifically, has dramatically altered access to information. In real-time, people can report what's happening to them or can share what's happening around them. What they're seeing. I think that difference is problematic in that it played a major role in getting us into our current mess, since the interpretive lens through which Americans watch the same video has conscious bias; they find evidence to support their polarized world view and then gaslight those of the opposite view.

This difference also enables us to be hopeful in getting out of this mess. The role played by the Internet is problematic in that higher-order learning and

critical thinking are required to make sense of the massive amount of information we must assimilate. We must make sense of and find meaning in that which occurs in our VUCA-Plus world. A large amount of courage is required to remain sane while riding the roller coaster. However, we can be hopeful because we do have the capacity for second-order collaborative learning. Together, we can think about our thinking, feel about our feelings, and find ways to share our interests with other people. We can connect and learn. About this, we can be hopeful.

Gentle Optimism

Soon after the interview from which the perspectives offered by Suzi Pomerantz are derived, Suzi went with her daughter to see a production of *Hello Dolly*, a Jerry Herman musical based on a play written by Thornton Wilder. Like other Thornton Wilder works (such as *Our Town*), *Hello Dolly* yields a positive message regarding the rediscovery and recovery of a life associated with the warm support offered by other people. The musical parallels Suzi's own gentle optimism. She is hopeful that American society is coming through the dark side of our current political situation.

Like Dolly Levy, Suzi Pomerantz—and all of us in the United States—have suffered and survived through trauma and are now ready to "come back out again". In many ways, Suzi Pomerantz's return to an abiding sense of optimism is just as impressive as the return of Dolly Levy following the death of her husband. As Suzi has noted, the current political situation in the United States triggered her multi-generational trauma, lingering from the Holocaust and her own ancestors' trauma associated with their experience escaping the Holocaust. We have already introduced the concept of social unconscious in this book (Hopper and Weinberg, 2019). And this concept certainly applies to the perspectives offered by Suzi Pomerantz. The Trumpian world has "hitched a ride" on Suzi's lingering concerns about antisemitism, authoritarianism, and political disruption.

Timothy Snyder has offered a cautionary note in his eleventh lesson about Investigation. He encourages us to figure things out for ourselves. This might be particularly important if we are haunted by psychic ghosts (such as the Holocaust) that can readily distort our view of the world. We must also take responsibility for how and what we communicate with other people. This might be particularly important if we are haunted by the holocaust and are likely to pass this haunting on to our children. History may not always

repeat itself; however, there are always rhymes and echoes across time that can help us navigate through, if not prevent, such atrocities. As Oscar Hammerstein observed in his song from *South Pacific*, it is tempting for us to teach our children all of the fears, false assumptions, and stereotypes we were taught by our parents: "We must be carefully taught." A protege of Oscar Hammerstein, Steven Sondheim, similarly proclaims in his musical, *Into the Woods*, that "children will listen" to our fears and the actions we take based on these fears. So, as Snyder suggests, we should read long articles, turn to investigative journalism, and be skeptical about Internet "truths." In our investigative behavior, we teach our children (and other people we influence) something of value about how to navigate (or at least survive) in a world of roller coasters, Doppelgangers. and epigenetic echoes.

Will It Be Different? Will It Be Better?

Suzi asks herself: If things turn around, in what ways would they be different from what our country was like before Trump entered his first term? How would it be different from the world left by Biden after his term in office? How should we envision our world being altered? Can we return to what we were before? Or is there something in the Trumpian era that will push us for a long period of time in a new direction?

First, things weren't working great before. Some systems were not serving those citizens who were most in need of services. The education system, for one, was broken. And it has been broken for quite a while. When we examine the origins of our current public school system, we find that it was established to produce compliant factory workers. And now, in this information age, we don't need more factory workers. In the budding AI age, we surely need a new system of education. Our system doesn't teach people how to think critically. Little attention is given to assessing the real threat that is posed to people, businesses, and communities by the nefarious uses of AI and social media.

Timothy Snyder is knocking on our educational door when urging us to investigate (Lesson 9) and seek out the truth (Lesson 10). Education systems need to adapt so they can really teach people how to think critically and discern what is valid rather than sham. Students must become their own personal researchers and reflective practitioners (Schön, 1983), and lifelong learners (Weise, 2020). They must carefully search, find ways to validate

products of the search, and explore ways to act on what they have found and validated.

As noted, our electoral college system is broken. We need term limits for Congress. Many things were broken before Trump took office the second time. So, I don't actually wish for us to go back to exactly the way it was. I'm no expert, but I feel like so much has been irreparably broken, damaged, destroyed, or erased that we can't go back. It's like a forest fire. The forest fire burns everything down. Our forest is barren, bleak, and awful. Then, all of a sudden, new growth can happen. The fire clears the space for new growth. New awe-filled beauty will soon emerge.

There may be some good that eventually comes out of our current mess. However, I think it's going to take generations to put our system into any kind of ordered, functioning, efficient structure. I don't know if it can be a pure democracy. Actually, it was never a pure democracy. Rather, it was a republic with control being in the hands of elected representatives rather than directly in the hands of citizens themselves. It also came with complexity and corrective forces of a separate administrative branch (unlike in parliamentary governments) and with an independent judicial system. These are the so-called "checks and balances" referenced earlier.

Conclusions

What we do know relates to what Timothy Snyder declared in his eighth lesson: We must stand out. We must set an example for other people by taking on the task of helping to construct the new society. This standing out doesn't have to be "big time." It can be as simple and courageous as refusing to sit at the back of the bus. Snyder points to this standing out by Rosa Parks. It can also be standing out on behalf of blocking the unwarranted arrest of a protestor or hard-working immigrant. We would suggest that this act of standing out might be the most important step toward true freedom for us individually and for us collectively during the mid-21st century.

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Chapter Ten

Confronting Tyranny II: Engagement and Learning

We turn to the next six lessons that Timothy Snyder has shared with us in our efforts to confront tyranny in this chapter. He suggests ways in which we can most effectively engage with others and 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, p. 81)

We suspect that Snyder is offering this twelfth lesson in large part because those of us living in a highly individualistic society require 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 "intelligent." 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)

In recent years, attention has even been devoted to a set of "micro-skills that involve such matters as communication (including Snyder's eye contact and small talk, as well as active listening, and clear and concise feedback), time management (prioritization, realistic deadlines, and time-blocking), and

technological proficiencies (file organization, search efficiency and, recently the use of AI tools). Some of the micro-skills can even be a bit surprising, such as the use of vocabulary levels that align with the recipient's background and education level.

This final vocabulary-based example of micro-skills suggests that we must stay in touch with our social surroundings if we are to enact this twelfth lesson. Effective social intelligence is a matter of motivation, as well as social intelligence and people skills. We often seem to avoid 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 that societies such as Japan, which were once quite collectivist, have evolved into societies where young people are sheltering themselves in their bedrooms. They are even disguising themselves (using 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)

Some of us (perhaps many of us) prefer intimate interactions with machines and technology over 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. A similar reluctance exists among many young people 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 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 serving as a barrier between various populations in many societies. It is now also a matter of

barriers being formed, based on many other distinctions, such as lifestyle, sexual orientation, cultural differences, and political preferences. We're sure these barriers have always been there. However, they seem to be more prominent in contemporary times.

Furthermore, 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 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.

We push back when it comes to Snyder's attention to the matter of trust. Our pushback concerns a distinction regarding the multiple dimensions of what we often simply identify as "trust (Bergquist, Betwee, and Meuel, 1995). On the one hand, 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 clearly understands us and our motivations. We can offer an example of a trust-related process 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 are 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 standing in front of the platform 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 to incur injury. They might very graciously pick me up from the ground and ask me if I would like to fall off the platform once again.

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 their intention. 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? We 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 may be able to engage competently in societal improvement. 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 intercultural understanding. We might simply fail to understand or appreciate the way in which people in other societies approach authoritarian rule and establish their priorities. Democratic rule and "true freedom" as we define these concepts in this book may not align with the perspectives and practices of people in other societies. They might not find this book (or others of similar 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.

We 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 identify as engagement in "constructive dialogue." They proclaim that "truth is only found within community" (Gergen and Gergen, 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." As noted by Ken and Mary Gergen (Gergen and Gergen, 2004, p. 21): "one is invited into a posture of curiosity and respect for others." When all three forms of trust are established, there is an opportunity for moments of democratic engagement to occur. Furthermore, according to Ken and Mary Gergen (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 we identified earlier in this book, because the relationship is not just a reflection of reality. Rather, the relationship and the discourse are themselves a reality. Consequently, it is critical that we engage our social intelligence to form the kind of relationships that Snyder proposes. 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, p. 83)

While this thirteenth lesson, taught by Snyder, on the surface concerns the marvels of outdoor life and making new friends—an enlightened version of

positive thinking—it also addresses the confronting of tyranny by embracing diversity. Snyder goes a step further. His thirteenth lesson speaks to one of the major themes introduced in this book. This theme concerns identifying the harmony of interests within a society and establishing an expanded and enduring communality (harmony) of concerns among those living in this specific society. We wish to expand on Snyder's lesson by considering the interdependence of diversity and harmony. And the critical role they play in a successful confrontation of social and cultural differences.

First, we reintroduce our perspective on diversity. Previously in this book, we 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 the most abundant life is to be found. Much of 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 our guides, Scott Page, writes extensively about the benefits that are 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 VUCA-Plus (especially ambiguity). Under these conditions, we are likely to experience bewilderment, anxiety, and sheer exhaustion (Newport, 2016; Stoycheva, 2022). As we 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 must change. That's what makes complex systems so "tippy" (unstable) and unpredictable. One

thing gets messed up. The ramifications are widespread. Thus, a diversity-rich society and a state of mind filled with diversity tend to offer great opportunities as well as diverse 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 Effec*t. This effect concerns the "Intersections" between different disciplines and cultures—what Thomas Kuhn (1962/2012) 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 chance 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. They range 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 discovering, this ecosystem comes with mixed blessings. This system allows autocrats to centralize, control, and distort information. However, this ecosystem can also create an opportunity for the generation of radical ideas, as Beckerman suggests.

In a prescient book written more than 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 in disciplines and cultures. It is also diverse in sources of 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 us 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 produce this diversification, Anonymous focuses on societal structures that are quite diverse. This is a critical insight that we shared earlier in this book. These structures range from transportation systems and public policies that influence migration patterns to the quality of land for raising crops and the quality of machinery for producing goods.

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 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 a homogenous harmony of interest with all the eggs in one basket is quite fragile. Enduring harmony of interests requires diversification of enterprise. And this diversification ultimately requires diversity among those who are sitting at the table where decisions are made.

If Anonymous is accurate in their assessment, then Snyder would also seem to be correct in suggesting that we get out of our comfortable chair. Our departure from a 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 discover a set of shared values and principles that can govern their behavior and the nature of their interaction.

We would also suggest that this expanded community is found in the type of "constructive dialogue" recommended by Gergen and Gergen (2004). 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. We 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 Internet content—as well as personal emails and text messages we receive—impact our lives. They even impact how we receive, process, and act on information we receive from the outside world.

While we usually focus on how humans have impacted technologies, we have reversed this focus and have examined how technologies—and particularly Internet-based digital technologies—have become intimately embedded in the human psyche (Bergquist, 2022; Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). No doubt (as Snyder suggests) these embedded technologies powerfully and often unconsciously influence the way in which we view (and tolerate) various forms of authority.

Let us back off and provide some background regarding human-embedded technologies. Recently, 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." We suggest that this phrase can be misleading. We 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*." This word is used to describe 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 found in headsets. For instance, heart rate can be measured by a device taped to the body for one month. Sleep patterns can now be monitored with a device that is taken home and strapped to one's head at night. These technologies serve even more importantly to enhance hearing (hearing aids adjusted via links to a mobile device) and save lives (digitally monitored heart values). Beyond the matter of health, we can turn to devices that continuously supply visual information while we perceive and navigate 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 used maps? Now, envision (but soon accessible) devices that will meet many of our emotional as well as cognitive needs. They will track all our decisions and preferences, as captured in the movie *Her*. Current technologies can translate our spoken word into written form and 'improve" our communication (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 the technologies derived from DNA 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 vast library of information about how the brain operates, how we react to traumatic events, and how our diet informs our thoughts,

feelings, and behaviors. 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, we 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) the fundamental nature of consciousness. We will use the term "technological propinquity" as shorthand for the slightly longer phrase "technologies embedded in humans."

The first and most obvious question is: how do we process all the information we receive 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, political preferences, and other daily propensities. The new world of propinquity requires a tolerance for ambiguity along with a comfortable relationship with 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 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 Donald Schön have referred to as higher-order learning. Our country witnessed this higher order of reasoning and reflection when President Roosevelt declared that we have nothing to fear but fear itself. This level of reasoning and related "out-of-the-box" problem-solving was also evident in the decision President Kennedy made to acknowledge only one of the two messages delivered by Nikita Khruschev during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Comparable levels of reasoning, problem-solving, and learning are required as we accompany our leaders in addressing the challenges of VUCA-Plus. We might, for instance, ask the following higher-order questions regarding the six VUCA-Plus conditions:

1. What strategies are best used when sustaining a commitment to basic principles under conditions of volatility?
2. When is the time to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty?
3. How do we best sort out the most important elements on which to concentrate, and establish criteria for establishing validity in a highly complex setting?
4. What is an effective way to remain focused when addressing problems under conditions of ambiguity?
5. How do we navigate a "white water" environment filled with turbulent, often interacting subsystems?
6. What strategies make most sense when confronting a polarized condition filled with contradictions and competing priorities?

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 feelings. 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 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 our requests to provide information. However, we also know that Alexa might be providing our requests and related information to other people and institutions. We have computer-aided television sets that provide us with easy access to many channels of information, yet we 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 that is collected by

outside agencies from our hand-held devices and computers. The monitoring does not stop at the door of some entertainment enterprise. It is found in the digital rooms of politicians, policy makers—and tyrants.

What should we do about this matter? It is a trade-off between access to information from outside ourselves 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 (1991/2000), 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 create an avatar of ourselves for other people to see in our digital world? Is there such a thing today 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 noted throughout this book, these challenges directly concern our search for and attempts to manage true freedom.

There is a third matter. It is the related challenge of discerning between reality and image-production ("virtual reality"). How do we integrate the two when we are simultaneously receiving both kinds of information? 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 can digitally transform themselves). They never actually have to 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 one might ponder after viewing 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 assumes new relevance when we form 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 we have addressed at several other points in this book. We hope to control at least certain aspects of our lives (a predisposition toward an internal locus of control). However,

we know that much of the world around us remains outside our control (we recognize an 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, we find ourselves drawn toward a world of fantasy that we can control. Are the digital games we play (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 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 we have introduced at several points in this book—easily translated into fantasy about authority in our new digital world?

A fourth challenge relates 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 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 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 reason, decide, and reflect with the aid of high-powered machines and AI tools. We will soon not only leave the driving to the machine (self-driving cars), we will leave some (or much) of our thinking and reasoning to AI. The private life that Snyder considers 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 more complex and refined than any existing computer (or probably any existing in the near future). However, there are still some areas 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 online). A small amount of consciousness might be lost when our food choices are mediated by a machine. Perhaps a larger part of consciousness can then be chipped off by someone with 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 discerning 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 concerning confrontation with tyranny? This loss might be critical to the preservation of democracy. The true freedom that we envisage might be in peril. We must identify and take action regarding these technological 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 pillar that we believe 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 suggests 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 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 instructional (cognitive) processes of socialization, but also physiological (affective) processes. With oxytocin surging through our bodies, we seek 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 who are doing the nurturing and with whom we wish to bond. This is part of *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 aforementioned 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. Obviously, this 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 occurs 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 calls 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 are 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 to change a fundamental habit of many Americans. This habit concerns consuming a substantial amount of meat. Members of the US government wanted citizens to eat 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 identify convincing arguments regarding why people should eat less meat. These women might not 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 the 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, behavioral economists have focused on altering our views and values based on a visceral desire to achieve *Cognitive Consonance*. In essence, we wish to reinforce a 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 good managers of an inherently destructive process.

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. This is a critical point in understanding the way 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 enables us to recognize differences in other people's viewpoints on 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. One of us [WB] 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). Extensive data was collected on Freshmen and Junior students in all of these institutions. We did indeed find 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 these students had in common. 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 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." We 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 how to view and act in the world created by their society.

The conservative college students had encountered Expansion when engaged in their missionary work. This is an example of Jack Mezirow's "transformational learning" (Mezirow, 1991). This process of expansion is an important source of learning for all adults (Pawlak and Bergquist, 2014). It is the kind of learning that Timothy Snyder encourages 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 we encounter.

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, when offering other lessons, Snyder moves 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 amidst diversity. We must find concurrence in a world filled with multiple 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 introduced the freedom of choice – a major focus in our book. The distinction we 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 about 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; we are also 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 kid 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 Serenity 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 realization: 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.

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 remain vigilant but must 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 makes an excellent point in encouraging us to find like-minded people, he also opens the door to potential collective distortion and ignorance. Here is where his admonition about freedom of choice must receive full attention. 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 lives of people about whom I can 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 us 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, offered 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. This means leaving our comfortable but confining Platonic cave. We wish to pause our analysis to introduce some systems theory and a theoretical field once called cybernetics. In essence, we use cybernetics theory to identify ways in which information (feedback) flows in a system. Cybernetics also concerns the resulting movement of energy and resources that operate in this system.

Both negative and positive feedback 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 exclusively with 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 resulting from the growth in human populations, exponential expansion of energy and resource consumption, and an environmental toxicity explosion. 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 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 the 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 messy and laden with mistakes and inefficiencies that disrupt 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.

Another factor is often ignored when a cybernetic (feedback-based) approach is taken to describe a system. This factor is the *Delay Effect* mentioned earlier in this book. Traditional cybernetic models were highly mechanistic in nature. Systems were portrayed as a bundle of tightly interlocking feedback loops. They operate 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. 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 instance, changes in policy regarding the recruitment of new employees in a corporation might not take effect 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 to be made. The food that is needed does not immediately arrive in a country of starving citizens. Money

is not immediately available to enhance human services in underserved communities.

A couple of important insights emerged with the inclusion of delays in our analysis of autocratic and democratic governance systems. First, let's consider the autocrat. This person, or a 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. Lessons learned on the production line are often delayed on their way to the autocratic C-Suite. With rigid vertical hierarchies comes the slow movement of lessons upward in the organization. "No bad news" barriers are 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 often is 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 play a very different role 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 made or that the same mistake isn't 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 democratic system. We can't do anything . . . thank God.

One of our guides, Heather Cox Richardson (2024c), has 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-century world? Stay tuned.

We would be fools if we thought there were clear answers regarding the viability of contemporary governments. There is no way 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 humane personal and societal conduct. We learn more about how to best care 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 that Wilfred Bion identifies as one of the three often-regressive assumptions that people hold. In addition, we 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 of 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 dated in our increasingly flat (Friedman, 2007) and terrifyingly interdependent (Smick, 2008) world.

Richard Rodriguez offers several analyses that challenge traditional linguistic categorizations. 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 Americans, such as himself, are not disadvantaged. 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 to race. Poor people need a helping hand, not people with darker 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 increases in the labeling of sexual orientations and gender identifications. There is a blending of Jewish and Zen traditions. An intermingling of Asian and European cuisines, health-related practices, and even 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 an increasingly 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 determining 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 increasingly 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 on credit cards, promises, and fleet feet.

Just as the financial productivity 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 well-being among most of us living in the mid-21st Century. In a study regarding the psychology of money, one of us [WB] obtained a quite insightful answer to a question that was 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 out!"

There is also the matter of a disappearing social class. Contemporary headlines often contain 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 the term "middle class" has become dated. 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-nots."

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 our lives. 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 aforementioned 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 the 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 and Little, 2025).

Some people in the trades make a whole lot more money than many of their "white collar" colleagues who hold Bachelor's, Master's (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 even tied up in the distinction drawn 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 find 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 the three of us 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 assembly 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.

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.

Coda: Bill's Perspectives

While we had the intergenerational perspectives of Suzi Pomerantz to help guide us through the consideration of Timothy Snyder's first ten lessons, we have the perspectives of Bill Bergquist, who has worked in many societies and cultures, to guide us through six of Snyder's other lessons. One of

Snyder's points concerns learning from other people in a cross-cultural setting (lesson sixteen) and putting yourself in "unfamiliar places with unfamiliar people" (lesson thirteen). Having worked in more than 20 countries that offer a varied spectrum regarding authoritarianism and tyranny, Bill can offer his experiences inside the United States. Attention then shifts to his experiences and lessons learned in other countries.

American Religious Institution: from authoritarian to democracy/self-management

Working with the leaders of one religious denomination that wished to move from its current hierarchical (and rather authoritarian) structure to a structure that is closer to that of the founding Christian church in the first century A.D. I encouraged a look at structures and procedures associated with the Social Technical Systems (STS) movement, founded at London's Tavistock Institute. The STS perspective concerns the ways in which members of an organization (especially those working in production units) can manage their own affairs, without the guidance or monitoring of managers. Associated with the workplace democracy movement, STS could help this church shift from a management-dominated hierarchical system to one that resembles the community-oriented operations of the early Christian church. We offer a more extensive description of STS in Chapter Fifteen.

I worked with a second religious denomination that similarly wished to become less hierarchical. One of the innovative church leaders with whom I consulted initiated a process engaged at the start of all committees over which she presides. Each meeting began with a reading of this denomination's mission statement and a statement regarding the purpose of this meeting as related to the mission statement. I was particularly pleased to be working with this religious leader. She was doing good in the world and, as Timothy Snyder suggests (Lesson Fifteen), it is important in confronting tyranny that we help others to do good. While I didn't make any financial contributions to this church, I found that my consulting work was offered with a bit more dedication than was usually the case. I needed to watch my boundaries so that I didn't suddenly take on the many concerns shared by this leader with me.

American Educational Institution: an authoritarian environment

By contrast, I worked with an American liberal arts college that was led (fully controlled) by a very strong autocratic leader. While this college was not very large, it had multiple layers of leadership, with the "top of the heap" being the autocratic leader who was given the title of "Chancellor" (a title that is usually reserved for the head of major multi-institutional educational systems).

I was working with the faculty of this college. It soon became evident that many of the problems these faculty members were facing had to do with their subordinate relationship with the Chancellor. They found him to be intimidating and impossible to meet with at a collegial level. Given these deeply held, emotionally laden concerns, I invited Charles Seashore, a truly gifted organization development consultant, to assist me with the faculty. "Charlie" was noted for bringing a nontraditional approach to his work in organizations. He often made use of humor, a gentle challenging of strongly held assumptions, and even the "off-the-wall" testing of new behaviors.

We set up a workshop during which Charlie and I introduced several strategies that would increase the empowerment of faculty (and lower-level administrators) at this college. Then came the critical time for the faculty to role-play a meeting (individually and collectively) with the chancellor, using the new strategies they had learned and rehearsed. One of the senior faculty members played the role of chancellor. He knew the actual chancellor very well and had a long history of usually unsuccessful interaction with this dominant leader. This faculty member was brilliant in his role as chancellor. Repeated attempts by faculty members at this workshop yielded abysmal results. The room was filled with frustration and despair. At this point, Charlie suggested that he take on the role of grieving faculty member.

What followed was remarkable. First, when Charlie entered the Chancellor's office, he refused to sit in the chair located at the front of the Chancellor's large desk (replicated by placing several tables together). Instead, Charlie walked around the desk and sat in the Chancellor's lap!! Charlie then told the Chancellor that things needed to change at the college if the Chancellor wanted to leave a positive legacy after retirement. The role-playing Chancellor was "flummoxed" (to use his term) and was forced to listen to what Charlie had to say.

Workshop participants first sat in silence, having observed this "ridiculous" performance. They then broke out in laughter. They began to talk about what would probably really happen if someone tried to sit on the Chancellor's lap. And what would happen if someone told the Chancellor that his legacy was in jeopardy? New ideas were suddenly flying all over the place as the Chancellor was suddenly converted into a "real" person. Humor and outrageous confrontation had produced a reframing of the faculty members' sense of their own potential power and how they might approach the Chancellor in a new way. The senior faculty member who had effectively played the role of Chancellor was one of the most active and creative participants in the workshop, having gained some insight into how the Chancellor might actually be feeling about his legacy and vulnerability in leading this college through difficult times.

A shift had occurred in the relationship between the Chancellor and his faculty (along with his lower-level administrators). Bill met with the Chancellor several months later. He thanked Bill profusely for helping to "unfreeze" his relationship with members of his own educational community. He talked about the value he found in the bold initiatives being taken by his faculty. He was tired of being the "bully." He was relieved that he didn't have to take the lead in abandoning this nonconstructive style: "It is hard to demand of other people that they no longer accept one's demands!" It takes a strong stand by someone other than the bully to declare that bullying is no longer acceptable. A second-order change is required. Charlie Seashore demonstrated this second order. And other members of this college community could emulate this second order (perhaps in a slightly less dramatic manner).

We can move beyond the dynamics of a single institution when considering experiences of tyranny and authoritarianism that operate in broad-based American societies—such as California.

California: a collapsing democracy

Bill spent many years consulting with various institutions in the State of California. I found my work in this state to often be quite frustrating. Virtually all of the institutions operating in California were (and still are) very big and potentially unmanageable. For instance, much of the responsibility for the implementation of new government policies in California is assigned to county governments (rather than state agencies).

Unfortunately, county governments rarely receive sufficient funding to implement and monitor new state laws and policies. Difficult problems are also found in the dominant role played by the initiation of propositions in California. Beginning with Proposition 13, passed by the California electorate many years ago, the major policies are now passed into law through these initiatives rather than through the traditional legislative system.

Bill may be observing the collapse of vital demographic processes in California as a result of the misassignment of responsibility to underfunded county governments and the shift to a proposition-based process of formulating laws, determining priorities, and identifying future directions for the state. Similar trends are observed in other states, making democratic governance processes throughout the USA seem "weak." Authoritarian leadership that is "strong" and indifferent to ineffective democratic processes may seem desirable.

Maine: a town hall-based democracy

For Bill, there was a remarkable shift in perspective regarding American governance when I moved from California to Maine. My new state has a long tradition of community-based democracy. Citizens in Maine participate actively in their local governance through the legendary use of town hall meetings. Many people think that New England town hall meetings are a remnant of the past that were active in the distant past or were never really in operation (like the mythic magazine covers created by Norman Rockwell). However, this is not the case. Town hall meetings are alive and well in my community (Harpswell) and in many other Maine communities.

At least once a year, a meeting is held in Harpswell, where all funding proposals are voted on by citizens, and any new community project is debated before being approved or not approved. We all meet in the school gymnasium and are given red and green cards, which we use to signal our approval (green) or disapproval (red) of each item brought forth during the meeting. With more than 35 items on most agendas and an open mike for anyone to express their opinion, the town hall meetings usually last for half a day. They are convened by the three members of our elected selectman board and are moderated by a community member who is selected at the start of the meeting by all assembled.

While there are many contentious issues brought forth at most meetings, and many impassioned statements regarding specific matters (such as the demolition of a town water tower or the construction of a new fire station), the tenor of the meeting always remains "civil" and replete with New England "goodwill." I am reminded of the observations made by Alexis de Tocqueville (1835/2000) regarding the American spirit of Democracy. We featured his observations earlier in this book. These observations primarily concerned democracy as it operated in New England when de Tocqueville visited the still-infant United States.

Now, more than one hundred and fifty years later, much of what de Tocqueville recorded as democracy in action is to be found in Bill's Maine town. It is even more noteworthy that Bill's wife, Kathleen, who often speaks up at these town hall meetings, agreed to serve as a delegate for our party's state convention. None of this would have occurred when Bill and Kathleen were living in California. Actual influence in the State of California was exerted by politicians living and working many miles away. Bill and Kathleen knew little about what was happening in their community or at the state government level. They were detached and felt powerless to make any difference in the way that their local or state community operated. Now, in Maine, Bill and Kathleen are holding up green and red cards about local matters. And they are raising their hands to volunteer for participation in the state party convention. Quite a contrast!

Canada/Yukon: a cross-cultural democracy

I have had the good fortune of working in many countries around the world, including the country located just north of the US border. I have worked in most of the Canadian provinces (states) both as a teacher of graduate students and as a consultant to organizations, collegiate institutions, and government agencies in this fully democratic country. However, I have found that the greatest amount of learning for me has come from my work in one of the regions of Canada that isn't even given formal provincial status. This region is the Yukon Territory (located just east of Alaska).

My work in the Yukon consists of training with the government as well as with the only collegiate institution in this territory (Yukon College). In providing training to employees of the Yukon Government (the largest employer in this territory), I had the privilege of working with

administrators and leaders of several tribes located in the Yukon (and adjoining territories, Canadian provinces, and Northwest American states). Tribal governance existed alongside the Yukon Territorial governance system.

Tribal councils served in a governance and management role under the leadership of a tribal chief. I worked with the chief of one tribe (the Tlingit), who succeeded his father and grandfather as chief. While my chief/client was supported by deeply entrenched leadership traditions in his tribe, there was also the equally strong tradition of collective tribal governance. First Nations people in the Yukon and elsewhere in Canada have traditionally governed themselves through engagement of sophisticated and relational processes that are grounded in the responsibilities of stewardship regarding the land and community.

Bill found that traditional tribal governance is not merely a set of rules; it is a holistic process that integrates cultural, spiritual, and social dimensions. Contemporary governance in the United States and most other countries is no longer embedded in a sacred (church-based) tradition. This is not the case with the tribes in the Yukon. The official government of the Yukon may be secular; however, the tribes operate as hybrid (sacred/secular) systems.

The Tribes have become just as powerful and influential as the Territorial government, in part because the Tribes hold all rights to the minerals that are to be found in this territory. Given the wealth held by the land-owning people of the First Nation (as they are identified in Canada), I found that democracy in the Yukon was cross-cultural in the way people from quite different cultures (and languages) were coming together to govern this large region of Northwestern Canada. The cross-cultural dynamics become even more complex when you add the independent tribal councils that function in a hybrid (sacred/secular) manner.

Bermuda: a multi-racial democracy

Emerging from my work in Canada, I was invited to provide some consultation in Bermuda, another member of the British Commonwealth. What impressed me most regarding the people of this small island nation was the very comfortable and equality-based interactions among those who were “White” and those who were “Black.” While I am sure there are some

racial tensions in this country, I found in my short time there that the spirit of multi-racial democracy was alive and well.

Much of this multi-racial equity might have arisen early in the history of this isolated "rock." There is no record of any human beings inhabiting the island prior to 1609. And these early "White" settlers were soon followed in 1617 by a "Black" settler. The White and Black people lived together peacefully, with this relationship further enforced when slavery was banned in Bermuda and other British holdings in 1833. It would seem that Black/White distinctions need not automatically be assigned in a society, especially if this society was settled at the same time by both racial groups. Racism in the United States might be dependent on the initial arrival of African Americans as slaves. Could it have been different if some adventuresome Africans had built ships and decided to settle on the American continent?

Unfortunately, we have ample evidence to suggest that the arrival date is not critical in the instigation of discriminatory practices. After all, the American Indian (called "First Nation" in Canada) was present on the American continent long before the Europeans arrived. Yet, these "Aboriginal" (emphasis on "original") people were not only subjected to discrimination but also almost driven to extinction (as they were in Cuba) by the European "late comers." For Bill, as a psychologist, the matter of origins is particularly important. How does a dominant attitude arise in any society? Is it a matter of founding events and physical presence or absence at this founding event? Or is it more basically a matter of who has power and control of the narrative and the norms?

Asia: a diverse set of democratic institutions

My cross-cultural experiences in the Yukon Territory and Bermuda were a source of rich insight for me as I reflect on my "maturing" attitudes regarding race, culture, democracy, and freedom. My work in Asian countries was an even greater source of insight. Most importantly, I learned about the differing and diverse Asian perspectives not by visiting their countries as a tourist. Rather, I gained insights by actively engaging with my Asian colleagues as a teacher or as a consultant to their organizations. To paraphrase Anna of Siam (and Oscar Hammerstein, the lyricist of the musical *The King and I*), it is by our students (and clients) that we are taught. As Timothy Snyder recommends, we can learn from our peers in other

countries (Lesson Sixteen), especially if we make friends with them (Lesson Thirteen).

While, as I am about to note, I learned about the various notions of democracy in Asian countries, I also gained an appreciation of differing patterns of communication. Timothy Snyder observes the importance of eye contact and small talk when confronting tyranny (Lesson Twelve). I found that this lesson proved to be even more important in seeking to understand alternative ways in which people interact with one another, as well as differing ways in which to establish and maintain trust. Nonverbal factors, such as body posture when meeting someone for the first time, are critical.

While many of my Asian colleagues have become "westernized" and no longer bow when meeting someone, there is still the subtle nod that accompanies the Western handshake. Furthermore, there is the essential "small talk" that precedes any formal conversation or negotiation. One does not "get down to business" with an Asian colleague. Rather, one joins them for a meal, shares something about one's own family (especially parents), and/or provides a small gift as a token of expectations regarding the formation of a trusting relationship.

I found in my own work with Asian colleagues, whom I got to know as "friends," that the magnitude of Trust was exceptional, after the careful, non-business-related building of trust was first engaged. I was able to establish major financial arrangements with a Taiwanese colleague based on nothing more (or less) than a handshake. No formal documents needed to be drawn up for the two of us to offer a shared commitment to one another's welfare. The lessons I learned about authentic communication and "earned" trust have been some of the most important in my life. I suspect that these forms of communication and ways of building trust operate in the "underground" of Asian politics and modes of democratic rule.

Taiwan: a transition from authoritarianism to democracy

I began teaching students from Taiwan when this country was still firmly in the hands of one political party – the Kuomintang (KMT). This was the party of Chiang Kai-shek, who brought his authoritarian rule from China to the island nation of Taiwan in 1948. In full opposition to the rule of Mao Zedong in China, Chiang had governed for many years and was

followed (as in many authoritarian-ruled countries) by his son. Under the ongoing threat of Chinese invasion, the Kuomintang had found ample justification for ruling their new homeland with an iron fist. For those who escaped from Communist rule, there was the immediate threat of Chinese invasion. Chiang's authoritarian rule was based on the domination of his government by those immigrating from China. Chung left the native Taiwanese without much power. They were unable to influence the formulation of national Taiwanese policies.

I found that I had to be careful during these early years of work with my Taiwanese students. As Snyder suggests, there are "dangerous words" (lesson seventeen) to be spoken when a strict authoritarian rule is in operation. Most of the students I was teaching were supportive of Chung, having come from the upper middle class of Taiwan. I needed to back off from criticizing the Chung government. I also needed to reserve any questions about the abuse of power in Taiwan. When visiting Taiwan, I was of course taken to Chiang Kai-shek's large memorial, as well as the more understated memorial to Sun Yat-Sen. I much preferred Sun's memorial (reminding me of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C.). I did not share this preference with any of my Taiwan students.

Over the subsequent years, I found that some of my students supported the alternative, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). These were often students who came from native Taiwanese roots rather than from families that immigrated from China. These were also the younger students who were somewhat defiant of their parents and impatient with the lack of democratic reform in their country. During the early years of teaching Taiwanese students, I needed to respect the privacy of those students who supported the DNP. Their open support of DPP or critical commentary regarding the Kuomintang would have been deeply frowned upon, especially being articulated while in another country. Negative comments made by the younger students could be "dangerous words" in terms of their career and even their relationship with family members back in Taiwan (their comments in the United States would certainly have been reported back to their disapproving parents).

Then things began to change while I was both teaching students and doing some consulting work in Taiwan. The second political party (the DPP) began to win a few elections. Primarily representing the Native Taiwanese

population, this party focused on local Taiwanese issues rather than being "obsessed" with Mao and the Chinese Communist Party. While I initially found that the MBA students from Taiwan were reticent to discuss the emergence of this second political voice in their country, they eventually began to offer some candid appraisals regarding what was occurring. While most of my students were still affiliated with the Kuomintang, there was an emerging sense that attention should be directed toward internal Taiwanese affairs. Even those supporting Chiang Kai-shek and his son were frustrated with the lack of needed reform in the stagnant Taiwanese National Government.

There was a lingering sense of appreciation for the prospects of a truly democratic government emerging in Taiwan. The DPP won a national election. The KMT was out of office for the first time since the mid-20th century. More of my students were now aligned with this "progressive" political party—even one of my young female students was elected to the national government representing the DPP. While women had always played an important role in the Taiwanese government (traced back to Madame Chiang Kai-shek), it was primarily a role played in the background, rather than the foreground of Taiwan's politics and government. Now it was all changing. Democracy and female representation in government went hand in hand in this prosperous country.

Despite the emergence of aspirational democracy and feminization of government in Taiwan, collective angst regarding a Chinese invasion still lingered. One of Bill's students joined him one evening on a beach located on the West Coast of Taiwan. He indicated that this is where the Chinese troops will arrive when the invasion begins. Furthermore, the DPP's commitment to an independent Taiwan has repeatedly been met with strong, belligerent reactions and threats by the Chinese government. Thus, increasing the collective angst in this country. Yet, democracy still prevails in Taiwan. Actually, the Chinese threats strengthen the resolve among the Taiwanese to retain a free, democratic rule in their country.

Indonesia: a transition from authoritarianism to fragile democracy

I spent many days working in the spread-out country of Indonesia, enjoying the Indonesian Shangri-La called Bali, as well as enduring the challenges of navigating the massive congestion of Jakarta. It was amid these highly diverse settings that I witnessed hunger for increased tolerance of citizens

from different religious backgrounds, as well as differing political perspectives.

As a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia holds the future of Islam in its hands, as it seeks out new political policies that honor and protect not only the devotees of differing Muslim sects but also those who follow other faiths or no religious faith. While working in Indonesia, I observed the excitement when new leaders were elected who represented diverse religious perspectives. And after a long history of tyrannical rule, the people of Indonesia find themselves living under the turbulent conditions of democracy and multi-party rule.

The fundamental question becomes: can democracy hold in Indonesia? Faced with massive challenges regarding climate change and economic upheaval, can the citizens of Indonesia tolerate the messy process of democratic problem-solving, decision-making, and policy initiation? Is it easier to find a forceful, authoritarian leader who is decisive? Why not establish a single religious belief system to guide the choices and actions taken by this decisive leader? This may not be the time for Indonesians to be open-minded about Allah or to explore alternative ways of being in a world that is complex and threatening (VUCA-Plus).

During the same time that I was working in Indonesia, I was teaching and consulting in Europe and Israel. The contrast between Indonesia and these "Western" countries could not have been greater. Yet, similar VUCA-Plus-related threats were facing the citizens of these countries located halfway around the world from one another. I was particularly aware of the condition of uncertainty in all the countries where I taught and consulted.

Estonia: a transition from authoritarianism to democracy

We have already devoted many chapters in this book to the transition made by Estonians from authoritarian Soviet rule to independent democratic rule. It is still worth a brief review of what occurred in Estonia, as it contrasts with the transitions occurring in Taiwan and Indonesia. All three countries had been ruled for long periods of time by autocrats. All three countries have been invaded many times by other nations with significant military power. Yet, there were important differences to be found that could provide us with some further insights concerning the pathway to true freedom.

First, democracy in Estonia differs in important ways from what has occurred in Taiwan. Both countries have been and continue to be threatened by invasion from a vastly more powerful neighboring nation, be it China or Russia. However, the shadow of Chinese invasion is addressed differently by the two main political parties in Taiwan, whereas there seems to be a unified perspective in Estonia that the challenge of Russian invasion is to be met by aligning with other countries (membership in NATO), building its own defensive structure (traditional artillery, air defense, well-drilled citizenry), and continuing to foster celebratory events that enhance a sense of cultural pride.

We find in one instance, the role played by threat in splitting the loyalties of citizens, and in the other instance, the role played by threat in bringing citizens of a country together. As Timothy Snyder has noted, it is often reinforcing to align with the "good" (lesson fifteen). In the case of Estonia, this means aligning citizens with the deep (often smothered) heritage of the country. Much was "good" in the singing revolution we described earlier in this book. There has been no comparable unifying event in Taiwan (though they do have many cultural festivals that feature politicians speaking and even singing). While the defense of Taiwan is considered a "good" thing by most Taiwanese, a unifying declaration of a strong, distinctive Taiwanese culture that is worth defending is absent. Defense in Taiwan is a secular matter, while it often takes on a sacred stance in Estonia.

What about the contrast between Estonian and Indonesian democracy? I would suggest from my experience in both countries that democracy is much more fragile in Indonesia and is saturated in this Asian country with Islamic perspectives and traditions. While religions play a secondary role in Estonia, this sacred perspective resides at the heart of Indonesian culture. Snyder's dangerous words (Lesson Seventeen) are linked primarily with religion in Indonesia, but with perspectives on Russia in Estonia. I found that one does not offer any critical comments when in Indonesia regarding the Islamic faith or the Prophet Mohammed, as the major religious figure in Islamic history. As we have seen in the travails of Solomon Rusdy, any words that are critical of the prophet can be quite dangerous.

For Estonians, religion is a private matter. There is the lingering impact of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Estonia. It is central to the life of Russian immigrants who remain in Estonia. However, for many Estonians I knew

and worked with, the Orthodox Church mostly represented the repressive heritage of Soviet occupation and rule. It is in the narratives about Russia and the Soviet rule itself that we find "dangerous words." It begins with the term used to describe the years when Estonia was part of the Soviet Union. Most Estonians referred to these years as the "Russian occupation" rather than membership in the Soviet Union.

It was dangerous to say much positive about the era of Soviet rule. I never heard anything about the Soviet "modernization" of Estonian industry or culture. Little was ever said about the rich Russian culture that came into the world of Estonian life. Ongoing revelations about various kinds of Soviet repression were saturating the media while I was working in Estonia. While writing the first version of this book about freedom in Estonia, I was hesitant to offer any statements regarding the benefits of Soviet occupation.

Thus, while Timothy Snyder offers us a valuable lesson regarding the use of dangerous words such as "terrorism" and "extremism," it is also important to acknowledge the differences found in various countries regarding what is dangerous. Perhaps, even in the United States, specific words are dangerous in some sectors but not in others. These differences in danger might be contributing in an important way to the polarization that exists in the US. The one word that doesn't seem to be dangerous is "polarization." Everyone, from all political and cultural perspectives, seems to feel comfortable in reporting that American society is in a polarized mess!

Norway, Sweden, and Finland: a set of high-functioning democracies

I didn't spend as much time in these three Scandinavian countries as I did in Estonia. However, I gained a clear sense that those living in these countries knew what they were doing in operating a government that worked for its citizens. Yes, the cost of living in these countries was high, and the level of taxation is daunting in all three countries. However, the services being provided seemed to exceed what we receive in the United States.

The high quality of government services provided might be attributed to the lower level of military spending in these countries. Unlike the United States, the Scandinavian countries do not commit to protecting citizens worldwide, though this could be changing at least in the short term with

the withdrawal of international support by the Trump government. Another reason for the high quality of service could relate to Snyder's seventeenth lesson regarding dangerous words.

While Snyder is concerned about the use of words such as "extremism" and "terrorism," I would suggest that phrases such as "liberal democracy" and "human rights" can be quite dangerous when inserted to dismiss out of hand a new proposal for increasing services to the underserved or increasing taxes on the super wealthy. It is dangerous when a conversation about "governmental integrity" is met with a sneer or sarcasm. It is devastating to assign a term such as "socialism" to a newly proposed health care reform.

There is a whole host of dangerous terms that can be tossed into a bin called "communism." These include not just words such as "liberal democracy," "human rights," and "socialism," but also humane terms such as "equity," "social justice," and "tolerance." The danger ultimately resides in the polarization of political debate. This polarization, in turn, is founded on the failure to recognize that political perspectives and priorities reside on gradients related to the amount and type of government services. They are not either/or. The amount and sources of taxation reside on corollary gradients that are aligned with those of government services. Citizens of the Scandinavian countries seem to appreciate the validity of these gradients and are less likely to fall into the pit of polarized perspectives and priorities. Many of us living in the United States seem incapable of or unwilling to abandon the either/or view of most political perspectives and priorities.

It was also interesting to find that parliamentary government is found in all three countries, as it is in many other countries. The American system of independent administrative and legislative branches of government is less common than in the parliamentary system. In most countries, the administrative and legislative functions are provided by a single legislative body (parliament). I mention this difference in systems because the American three-part system is now under attack by the Trump administration. The legislative branch of our federal government is no longer operating independently on most important occasions.

This apparent integration of administrative and legislative functions in America, however, is different from that operating elsewhere in the world, where the legislative function takes precedence over the administrative. Major administrative issues of government are debated in the legislative

sessions of parliamentary governments before being enacted. Little attention is given to these deliberations in the current American government. The only deliberation is to be found in the White House or often just in the head and heart of President Trump.

I also observed a second level of democracy operating in Norway, the Scandinavian country where I spent the most time and did the most work. Much of my time in this country was sponsored by Jarlsberg, the producer of fine cheese. I discovered that this enterprise is not a single company but rather a cooperative including many Norwegian farmers.

Israel: a transition from democracy to authoritarianism

When I first worked in Israel (teaching my graduate students), the government was filled with contentious debate. And my experience was of a vibrant democracy in which dissent and change in government were not uncommon. However, I was also aware of the setting of Israel in a part of the world where there was a profound and sustained threat from neighboring countries. I was made aware of this source of collective anxiety every day when I went to a restaurant in Tel Aviv. An armored soldier stood at the entrance to the restaurant. They were checking bags for any weapons or explosives. I also witnessed the lingering threat when traveling from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. An armed soldier was aboard the bus I was taking to and from this fabled "city of peace."

I also experienced, indirectly, the real threat of enemy weapons when teaching Israeli students via Zoom. On several occasions, the students had to excuse themselves from a teaching session to escape into a bomb shelter located in their Israeli home. I would remain on the Zoom call, waiting for their return. I would hear missiles whistling through the air and exploding somewhere near the students' homes. Collective anxiety was certainly justified for these students and their fellow citizens.

In my later years of working in Israel, I experienced the disturbing transition of the national government to one in which one person (Benjamin Netanyahu) essentially dictated the policies of his country and directed Israel to war against the Palestinians in Gaza. While my graduate students were usually strongly opposed to the presidency of Netanyahu, I found that they (like most of us today in the United States) are mostly focused on "getting by" in a setting that is saturated with anxiety. Unlike in the United

States, there is even the existential threat of annihilation (something we have not experienced in the USA since the conclusion of the Cold War).

Turkey: a transition from democracy to authoritarianism

I consulted in Turkey during a time when it was full of hope regarding its place as a modern democracy aligned with the Western world. This potential alignment has been lingering in the hearts and minds of Turkish leaders. Located at the point of intersection between the East and West, the country of Turkey has often been the staging area for military forces (and philosophical forces) representing the distinct differences between East and West. Sitting in an Istanbul hotel room overlooking the Bosporus Straits, I was deeply aware of this intersection, knowing that across the Bosporus lay countries of the Middle East. And the dangerous forces to be found in this troubled area of the world.

Yet, during this troubling time, I found many Turkish colleagues who were fully enculturated in Western values, aspirations, and practices. I could have been consulting with the leaders of a New York City corporation or doing human relations training in a Midwest American utility company. All of the goods and bads of Western culture were present. Yet, there was something different operating in the offices and training centers of Turkey. I was working with a woman who headed a large company in Turkey that produced a formula for babies that would replace breast milk. She was preparing an ad campaign to convince women in small rural Turkish villages that her Baby Formula was the "modern" way to nourish their newborn child.

This corporate leader declared that breastfeeding kept the women at home. With the formula, these women could feed their child at locations other than their home. The "liberated" women could enter the workforce or, at the very least, be less tied down at home. The Western use of formula was to replace the Eastern reliance on natural breast milk. Nowhere in her message were the health benefits of breastmilk mentioned, nor were ways in which to bring breast milk with them to work. I felt very uncomfortable working with this corporate executive and soon terminated my work with her.

I saw that the intersection between East and West was often uneasy. I would read accounts in an English edition of an Istanbul newspaper regarding new

programs and policies that assist women wishing to advance in Turkish business. And then I would travel to the site of my consultation by passing by the large Harem of the past potentate of Turkey. It was not many years ago that Turkish women had virtually no rights. My corporate president was right in suggesting that her country needed to take a more "modern" approach concerning the rights and opportunities of women. It was just her strategy (selling formula so women could go to work) that I found troubling.

The world of democracy stood on the precipice while I was working in Turkey, when it came not just to the role of women, but also the fundamental role of citizens in determining their fate. Soon after I terminated my work in Istanbul, democracy fell off the Turkish cliff. Recep Erdogan came to power and suppressed all democratic processes. I heard from the Western-leaning business leaders who brought me in as a consultant and trainer. They despaired of the loss of democracy in their country. In many cases, these business leaders planned to leave Turkey for life and work in another country. I hear something similar today from many of my American colleagues and clients in the business world.

There is one other point I wish to make, based on my experiences in Turkey. The hotel where I was staying in Istanbul was located near the expansive Topkapi Palace of the Ottoman Empire's Sultan. Part of the Sultan's palace (the seraglio) was set aside for his large harem. As I was driving by the palace, I wondered what life was like for the many women in the harem who were "owned" by the Sultan. Several years later, I was able to learn more about life in the harem. A neighbor of mine in California wrote a book about harems. Her book was filled with the complex power dynamics in the harems of Ottoman Sultans.

Then, something appeared recently that brought me back to my interest in harems. In preparing this book, I returned to Gerth and Mills (1953) foundational book about social structures as related to the formation of character. In the midst of my reading, I read their account of the unique source of power that is to be found in countries governed by sultans. The sultans "owned" (were married to) a prized possession, this being physically attractive and often quite accomplished women. While there were many other "desirable" women in the Ottoman Empire, the Sultan displayed and maintained his power through his control of this prized "resource" (beautiful and intelligent women).

Having read this account of Sultanism power, I began to reflect on the power held by our current president. Not only has he personalized the presidency (placing images of himself and his name on many Washington D.C. buildings), and proposed a golden ballroom, he has his harem. I would suggest that it exists at four levels. First, there is the obvious: he has "collected" several wives that have all been beautiful and "prized." At a second level, there is Donald Trump's affiliation with Jeffrey Epstein, who had "collected" young women and kept them in his island-based harem. At a third level, there is Trump's collection of beautiful women in his administration. Serving as the heads of several federal departments and in staff positions, these women have often been unqualified for their high-level jobs and have frequently been cast aside by Trump when they become controversial or attract too much attention away from the president.

A fourth level can be identified, which is Trump's sycophantic "harem" of legislators in the U.S. Congress. Having abdicated most of their authority, Republican members of the House and Senate (under the guidance of this harem's Valide Sultans, Mike Johnson and John Thune) have vied for favorable position with Trump, much as the women in the Ottoman harem vied for position and power with the Sultan. While a few of the house members, such as Marjarie Taylor Green, have "escaped" from Trump's harem, most have remained "married" to our Sultanist president.

Finally, there is the fifth level, which is by far the biggest of Trump's harems. These are members of MAGA. Much like the women in the Sultan's harem, MAGAs are "owned" by and even in many ways "married" to Trump ("for better or worse"). While the MAGA population is not very large relative to the total American population, Trump holds great power because of their absolute devotion to him, much as the Sultans held power because of their complete control over the women living in their harem. Furthermore, it is in Donald Trump's "ownership" of those in MAGA that his personification of power is most evident and of greatest strength. It is important to note that women in the Ottoman harem often wielded considerable political power (as the "Sultanate of Women"). By contrast, those in Trump's multi-level harem seem to be incapable of confronting or unwilling to influence the president. They might fight with one another, but not with Trump, their supreme leader.

While it is appropriate, in many instances, to draw a parallel between the actions taken by Donald Trump and those taken by fascist leaders such as Mussolini in Italy and Huey Long in Louisiana, we might also consider our president to be a Sultan. He seems to be engaged in converting our American White House into his Topkapi Palace of the Ottoman Empire.

China: a troubling form of authoritarian rule

I have spent little time in China, only occasionally traveling through Hong Kong (which is uniquely a part of China) on my way to other Asian destinations. However, I personally experienced something of the strict authoritarian rule of the Chinese government as it impacted work with one of my graduate students who lived in China. She and I had collaborated on several writing projects and were in the midst of mounting an ambitious collaborative co-authorship of a book about freedom (related to the present book).

Sadly, my Chinese colleague contacted me via email one day to inform me that it would not be wise for her to continue this collaboration, given the Chinese government's disapproval of this form of collaboration, especially given its highly charged topic: Freedom. My student had already shared the history of her family and its long-term troubled relationship with the Chinese government.

Singapore: a thoughtful, yet somewhat autocratic democracy

Bill experienced quite a contrast between the Asian countries of China and Singapore. Both countries are deeply embedded in Chinese culture. Yet, these two countries operate in a far different manner. I find Singapore to be a thoughtfully ordered country that is somewhat autocratic. Everything in Singapore is carefully orchestrated. For instance, all citizens of Singapore are given a day off from work to read about the positions taken by candidates, as well as any new laws or procedures being offered for a vote. The election campaigning is also restricted to a specific, short period of time. This is in sharp contrast to the extended campaigning found in the United States.

The automobiles in Singapore are few in number and all new. An automobile cannot be more than 10 years old. Furthermore, cars are very expensive (especially with a heavy government surcharge). This leaves the Singapore streets free of heavy congestion. Public transportation is the

primary option. The streets are clean. Heavy fines are levied on anyone who does any littering. No congestion and no messes—exactly what we would like to find in America. Yet, cleanliness and order seem to exist at only a superficial level. This is a perfect country, with a perfect democracy. Yet, as someone who has spent some time interacting with the citizens of Singapore, I find something a bit unsettling about the autocratic way in which democratic and civil practices are supported (and enforced) in this city-state.

I have discovered that there is also the Shadow side in Singapore. As Carl Jung might suggest, the brighter the light, the deeper the shadow. As already noted in this book, my colleague, Richard Lim (Lim Say Teck, 2018), has captured some of this shadowy side in his dissertation on the social psychology and social unconscious of Singapore, the society in which he consults and provides psychotherapy.

Some of the shadowy functions are manifest in the widespread disorder of gambling in Singapore (though it should be noted that this "disease" is also common in many other Asian countries). There is also a pervasive sense that one must be "obedient" when working with someone in authority. While this authoritarian perspective is common in many Asian cultures, I found that it appears as excessive politeness in Singapore, suggesting that a failure to be obedient can lead to being cast out or isolated from other members of one's group, organization, or society. This is part of what Dr. Lim has suggested when considering the social unconsciousness operating in Singapore.

South Africa: a transition from authoritarianism to democracy

While I will leave most of the observations regarding South African rule to my colleague, Kevin Weitz, who grew up in this country, I will offer several observations I made about this country while offering a course on management sponsored by the University of California Extension Services. I was working specifically with managers of the Allianz Insurance Company in South Africa. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was convened when I was working with Allianz. The television was saturated with reports on the atrocities committed by all parties to the ongoing Apartheid conflict. I found these reports to be depressing, given the extent of and rationale for the use of arrest and torture. Why, for instance, were children being

tortured? What valid "evidence" might they provide to those inflicting the pain on them?

However, I was deeply moved by the decency and vision displayed by the Commission. It is remarkable that the citizens of South Africa were willing to endure the pain and suffering associated with the reports in the South African media. There was the widely supported belief that truth could bring about reconciliation. While the outcomes were only partially successful, I soon wondered (as did many other Americans) is a comparable commission should be convened in the United States so that we might confront our own racist past. While there are dangerous words, as Timothy Snyder has suggested, even greater danger might result from a failure to speak certain words. When it comes to confronting tyranny, narratives of truth may be just as important as avoiding certain polarizing words.

Another important experience in South Africa has lingered with me. Especially as related to the internal and external locus of control. I was honored to spend some time with the president of Alliance in South Africa. He and I became acquainted and spent some time together based on my awareness and appreciation of the classical music composed by one of his relatives. The lingering impact resulted from a report that appeared in the South African press while I was working there. The report concerned evidence that had just been reported in Germany, that the Allianz Insurance Company in Germany had insured the "spoilage of goods" being transported by German trains during World War II. The "goods" were the Jews, Gypsies, and Dissenters being sent to the Concentration Camps. "Spoilage" was the death of many prisoners on the trains.

This news was devastating to the president of Allianz in South Africa. He had been very proud of the liberating actions taken by his company in providing home insurance for the first time to Black residents in the South African townships. Yet, this social reforming act was now being overshadowed by the atrocities associated with the insuring Holocaust-related activities. I met with the president soon after this report was issued. He reflected on what he would have done if he had been president of Allianz in Germany during the war. If he had resisted the invitation to insure the trains, then Allianz employees and, certainly, his family would be at risk. And would refusal make any difference? Another company could have provided insurance. What would he have done?

Several days later, this exceptional leader met with me before I returned to the USA. He gave me one of the last books written by Thomas Mann (who had escaped from Europe to the United States during the war). This book is *Dr. Faustus* (Mann, 1948). It concerns, in part, the struggle of a German citizen with the atrocities being committed by Adolph Hitler, the leader of his country. The protagonist in Mann's novel, representing Mann's own disdain for Hitler, wished for the downfall of his government. He was aware, however, that this would probably only occur if the Allied Forces were successful in the invasion of his country. Would he want to witness the arrival of troops to destroy his village and inevitably kill some of his friends and even relatives? Is this what the protagonist wants: the destruction of everything he holds dear and precious? My thoughtful South African insurance president was caught in something of a similar existential dilemma.

My reflections on the deeply emotional struggles faced by Thomas Mann as he contemplates the horrors of World War II, and of the President of Allianz in South Africa as he considered what he would have done during World War II, have recently extended to the realm of music. I was listening to a late composition of Richard Strauss, the noted German composer. At the end of World War II, Struss composed a heart-rending composition called *Metamorphosen*. Like most of Strauss's work, this orchestral work conveyed themes at multiple levels. In this specific composition, the levels represented the losses in Strauss's life—the death of people he loved or admired, the devastating impact on his community and society, and the destruction of a classic German culture that he so deeply admired. I wonder if I, my children, or my grandchildren will someday be in similar despair regarding losses in their own lives during the post-Trump years.

Conclusions

Having considered the ramifications of *Dr. Faustus*, we have wondered what we wish for in our own country. Are we willing to support disruptive actions and even violence on behalf of a change in the current US leadership? Thomas Mann offered dangerous words. These are words that must be embedded in contemporary conversations about America's future. They must also be embedded in the conversations that will inevitably take place in countries in which we have had the honor of working. Each of these

countries, in its own unique way, is struggling to find, recover, or retain a form of democracy that provides a pathway to true freedom.

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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. 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.' 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 hook. Do not fall for it. (Snyder, 2017, p. 103)

A fair amount of attention will be devoted to this eighteenth lesson, conveyed by Snyder, because we 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 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 individual and collective levels. 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 (1936/1990) 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 briefly explore the neurobiological basis of collective (and contagious) anxiety signaling. In recent years, neurobiologists have recognized the crucial role played by a specific neurotransmitter in human life. 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*. They 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 must manage with just as much skill as the alarms based on 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 reintroduction of anxiety into an organization. As parents, we need to help our children differentiate 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 when others are addressing the imagined VUCA-Plus monsters lingering under our organizational beds.

In essence, we must fully appreciate the nature of a VUCA-Plus environment in which we must operate. In such an environment, effective containers and metabolic processes 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 reintroduce it in a manageable form to other members of their organization. We first consider the nature and variety of containers. We then consider the remarkable process of metabolism as originally described by the psychoanalytically oriented object-relations theorist at 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 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 a 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 like 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, and 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. However, what does it really mean, and how does a leader (therapist, facilitator, or parent) go about engaging the multifaceted role of container, metabolizer, and reintroducer of the anxiety? Clarity is provided in this chapter regarding this important role. We suggest ways in which this role can be engaged to address the challenges of VUCA-Plus. We reflect on the nature of (and dynamics associated with) each of the principal concepts: container and metabolism. Some tools are then offered that can assist us as combatants of tyranny in bringing about containment and metabolism. Several strategies and tools are also provided that can be used in the reintroduction of anxiety into society.

The Nature of Containment

What does it mean to contain anxiety? More generally, what is the nature of psychological containers in our lives and the life of our organization? Let us begin by addressing the second question and then considering how the containment of anxiety works. The case will be made 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. Containment is about finding or establishing a "permission structure" that enables us to explore a new identity and new ways of being with other people. However, under conditions of VUCA-Plus, a permission structure (such as that provided by Donald Trump and the MAGA movement) allows for the open expression of closed-minded bigotry. As Ralph Stacey (1996) has observed, a space opens for new perspectives and

new behaviors under conditions of turbulent change and chaos. Unfortunately, these perspectives and behaviors can be quite ugly.

A quite different perspective can be taken. The new space can be quite lovely. It can provide ground-breaking ideas, practices, and projects. Nassim Taleb writes about the condition of anti-fragility. He writes about things and conditions being fragile, robust, and anti-fragile. If mistakes are viewed as something that will break an object or system, then this object or system becomes "fragile." If the object or system can overcome the mistake, then it can be considered "robust." However, if one can learn from the mistake and build better objects or construct even better systems, then anti-fragility will reign supreme. Taleb (Taleb, 2012, p. 27) encourages us to make mistakes that:

> . . . are small and benign, even reversible and quickly overcome. They are also rich in information. So a certain system of tinkering and trial and error would have the attributes of anti-fragility.

We pilot test a new idea. We create a sanctuary in which new ideas, products, and relationships are bent, twisted, and reviewed from multiple perspectives. Anti-fragility reigns supreme. While viewing everything in our world as fragile will lead us to seek serenity, an antifragile perspective encourages us to take reasonable risks, set up means to learn from these mistakes, and try again. Taleb does a lovely job of portraying Mother Nature as anti-fragile. Trees bend in the wind, but do not break. They are not fragile. Rare events happen—be they tornadoes, earthquakes, or forest fires—yet Mother Nature always recovers. Humans may find it hard to rebuild a city after strong winds or moving earth wreaks destruction; yet, the natural world soon recovers. And Mother Nature doesn't blame anyone for these unpredictable, "black swan" events.

While Mother Nature has long had to face natural chaos and destructive events, we humans now have to face our own chaos and potential destructive conditions. In some ways, vulnerability, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence, and contradiction (VUCA-Plus) are new to us living in the 21st Century. However, in other ways, they have always accompanied human history, given our propensity for innovation alongside destruction. We are not the first people to yearn for sanctuary. Back in the 1930s, with World War II looming 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 that enables us to 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 sanctuaries. We turn now to a brief and systematic exploration of five types 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 contain 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. We first consider the most personal type of container.

Personal Imagery as a Container of Anxiety

In the beautifully poignant song, "And So It Goes," written by the popular singer, Billy Joel, a sanctuary is described that is found 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. Hopefully, sanctuaries are also 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) writes 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 after a snow blizzard, the school assigned him (and the other children living in the country) an alternative home 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 badly 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 the 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 who presides over an educational institution found that he could gently touch his forehead when under stress and, with this touch, evoke 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 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 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.

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 power residing in one's engagements existing at the threshold between boredom and anxiety. When Flow and Awe join forces, 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 may be found in a long-term accepting and supportive relationship with a family member or friend. They might also be found in our moments of playing 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 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: 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 have just met. These temporary relationships can be critical to interpersonal life in a VUCA-Plus world. They can also be the source of short-term, important containers of the individual anxiety and collective anxiety (angst) generated in and by VUCA-Plus conditions.

Finally, we can look at the special relationships that are formed within organizational settings. These are the "play spaces" that are created when an organization sets up 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 established that enable management and union leaders to share perspectives and seek mutually satisfactory solutions to shared problems (Blake, Shepard and Mouton, 1964). Safety is secured. This 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 used to label these unique relationship-based containers. The collateral organization is established on a short-term basis. It is set up in 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. This temporary container has often been eliminated with the introduction of computers, the Internet, and our home office.

Many years ago, Matthew Miles (1964) identified the important role played by temporary systems in 20th-century society. These temporary systems may be particularly important to engage in our VUCA-Plus world. Miles suggested that temporary systems are found throughout our society (and virtually all other societies) 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 Mardi Gras or New Year's Eve at Times Square). This often is an event that allows us to act in a new way. These are 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 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 a unique threshold between boredom (lack of challenge) and anxiety (too much challenge). 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 a "self-transcendent" state in which we feel truly free. In what could be labeled 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, the outcome might be recognition 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 we have already referenced regarding organizational sanctuaries. Winnicott wrote about *Play Space,* in which we safely search for a new and clearer sense of self (much as we suggested when considering organizational place spaces). This is the place where (as children) we built forts or constructed fanciful narratives. 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 a 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. It is a "safe place" and perhaps even a "play space" within or outside the organization. Some Japanese firms, for

instance, provide private rooms where employees can go to vent 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 occurs within an organization can be traced directly to the leadership of the organization. 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 spending 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 organization's culture. It is to this final, critical mode of containment that we now turn.

Organizational Culture as a Container of Anxiety

There is one other type of container that we 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 organization's anxiety. In other words, metabolism occurs when members of an organization collectively (culturally) create a narrative about the source of anxiety, the current impact of anxiety on the organization, and the way(s) in which this 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, shifts in an organization's narrative may be the most powerful way to bring about change and improvement in an organization (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005). Schein suggests that an organizational culture should be built on the narratives of past successes. The AI practitioners would agree with this conclusion. 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 helps 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. All other functions of the organization, from day to day, 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 organization's informal system—a system that has been established to help those working in the organization to confront and make sense of the anxiety inherent in the organization's operations. Menzies Lyth's observations have been reaffirmed in many other organizational settings. Anxiety is 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 build a buffer that both isolates (contains) the anxiety and addresses the realistic, daily needs of its employees.

Containing 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? Our identification of sanctuaries as containers of anxiety suggests that a protective function is critical. A sanctuary isolates or protects us for at least a short period of time from anxiety (or perhaps even the source of anxiety). In this protected state, we can do something about the anxiety while it is not engulfing us. For a specific period, we find that we are not anxious about our anxiety – and can metabolize it (as we will describe in the next section).

Our reflection on 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 can defeat the lion with our own bare hands. Culture serves a vital function: it reduces 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 have really 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 be addressed day in and day out in the organization. This is where culture plays a key role.

Menzies Lyth (1988) suggested that anxiety is addressed daily through the "social defense system"—that is, the patterns of interpersonal and group relationships that exist in the organization. Other organizational theorists and researchers, such as Deal and Kennedy (2000) and Schein (1992), similarly suggest that the rituals, routines, stories, and norms (implicit values) of the organization help members 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.

Edgar Schein (1999) has concluded that an organization's culture is the residue of this 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, the existing culture of this organization will be reinforced, deepened, 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 creates and maintains the container and provides crucial metabolism of the anxiety. It is to this remarkable and perhaps mysterious metabolism that we now 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 theorists from the field of biology. Beginning with Sigmund Freud's "scientific project" (eventually evolving into psychoanalysis), there was a strong affinity among practitioners and theorists 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 bodies 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

We begin our description of the psychological metabolism process by turning to Bion (1995). According to Bion, two fundamental elements exist in human consciousness and thinking. One of these elements is labeled *Alpha*. The other is labeled *Beta*. Bion's Beta elements are the unmetabolized thoughts, emotions, and bodily states that we 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 must be transformed.

Alpha and Beta

Bion's Alpha elements are those that have been metabolized. Alpha elements 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 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 Schön, 1978; Senge, 1990). This setting is one in which there is an ongoing testing of reality and a desire to learn from organizational mistakes. We

would add that this is also a setting to learn appreciatively from organizational successes.

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 we have already suggested when describing the nature and variety of containers.

This still doesn't do the trick as far as we're concerned. 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 gain access to this material but also determine its accuracy. Even more importantly, the therapist helps their client assess the impact of this material on the client's current perceptions of relationships and reality. And the impact of this psychic material on current decisions being made and actions taken.

What about at a collective (group or organizational) level? The metabolism operates much like the process of dream interpretation. Dream content is interpreted, and implications are drawn regarding how the dream's content informs the dreamer about their wishes and fears. Similarly, beta elements in the life of an organization (or individual members of the organization) can be interpreted and 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 ongoing organizational experiences.

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 with an accurate appraisal of ongoing experiences. Ego functions are in charge, whether this concerns the personal psyche 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, 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

We have often mentioned the first of these theorists, Daniel Kahneman (2011/2013), the 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 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. We offer Kahneman's (2011/2013, 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 coml0065 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? We 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, we increase 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 our anxiety. This 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 lunchtime 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.

We 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 we quoted, System 2 is dependent on System 1 for many 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 comes out of Beta content, so they are not immune to bias or the intrusion of unconscious content. In broader, psychoanalytic terms, the Ego derives its energy from the Id and the 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 the Ego is to gain its energy.

Leading by containing

What does this mean? We 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, we have often noted that a leader plays a key role in managing (or mismanaging) the container and metabolism. The leader must often contain anxiety, which is a very difficult emotion to contain. 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 even 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 coach, or a skilled psychotherapist. Later in this book, several tools are offered that might assist an organizational leader in their attempt to meet the challenges of VUCA-Plus by metabolizing and reintroducing the attendant anxiety into the organization.

Coda: Kevin's Perspectives

This chapter is all about anxiety—and especially collective anxiety (angst). We have explored such psychological concepts as signal anxiety, metabolism, and containment. These concepts have all evolved from the psychotherapeutic couch and have been applied to our understanding of how anxiety is managed during therapy sessions, team meetings, and the ongoing operation of organizations. This is all well and good; however, this book concerns entire societies and their pathways to freedom. Given this much broader focus, we must ask: are there signals of collective anxiety to which we should attend? Are there societal containers of collective angst? Can (and do) leaders of nations metabolize the anxiety of their followers?

As we address the issue of widespread anxiety (Angst) in America, and its impact on the way authority is engaged in this country, it can be quite useful to reflect on the experiences of those living in another country that is saturated with angst. And that found a very destructive and tyrannical way of addressing this strong, collective emotion. This country is South Africa, and its dominant way of dealing with pervasive anxiety was to enact a repressive rule of apartheid against the Native-Born Africans, who constitute a major proportion of the South African population during the 20th Century.

As we noted previously in this book, one of us [KW] understands and appreciates the full power of angst in South Africa, having been born and

grown up in this country. This is a society where signals of threat and personal anxiety were being sounded everywhere, and where a national leader emerged to help metabolize personal anxiety, collective angst, and imminent threat.

Kevin continues and expands on his personal narrative regarding his experiences from birth to adulthood in this nation of both strife and redemption. As a South African with European roots, Kevin provides a further narrative about his experience of Apartheid. He ties this narrative directly to the threats now present in the United States that could lead the USA and its anxious citizens down the path to a similar form of apartheid.

We turn to Kevin's own words. He offers a very detailed account of the challenges now facing American democracy and offers a candid account of his own fears and sources of anxiety as a now-vulnerable immigrant to America.

Choosing Freedom and Hope

Decades ago, having returned to South Africa on a one-year project, I found myself marooned in Johannesburg in the late years of Apartheid – I had missed the deadline to update my green card and was not allowed to return to the US. During the prior 13 years, my entire family had emigrated to the US. They all lived on the West Coast. I was now isolated in a country still stuck in the quagmire of Apartheid. I panicked. Distraught, with no plan. I felt hopeless. In the early 90's, my brother, an avid hiker and camper living in Switzerland, invited me on a camping trip to Namibia in the Sossusvlei area. It's a magical environment, with the tallest sand dunes on earth, colored a magnificent red. We discussed my lack of hope and purpose. And he mentioned Tony Robbins' book "Awaken the Giant Within".

On returning to Johannesburg, I read the book with intensity. It gave me a wake-up call. I had always been a focused, positive, and get-it-done kind of person, but had gotten demoralized and lost the capacity to find myself again in the Apartheid quagmire. With renewed focus and motivation, I developed and launched a plan to return to the US and my family. While it took about nine years, I eventually achieved my goal. Remarkably, those nine years, energized by a new thought process, were some of the best in my life.

The life events and experiences I had changed my life in wonderful and unexpected ways. Not the least was voting for a new democratic government for the first time in South Africa's history. I also hired the first-ever black management-level person in the history of Standard Bank. I am thankful to have experienced these and many more incredible events that emerged out of despair and loss of hope. What is clear to me in this personal story is that my community fostered this transition from despair to hope. My brothers helped me find my direction. And my colleagues at Standard Bank nurtured and coached me along this new path. I found opportunity and a sense of freedom in the despair I had felt.

As with Nelson Mandela during his imprisonment, Viktor Frankl's concept of freedom was forged within the context of his experiences as a Holocaust survivor (Frankl, 2006). The death camp taught him that while external circumstances may limit physical freedom, humans still possess the internal freedom to choose their attitudes and responses to situations. The narratives and work of Mandela and Frankl underscore the role of freedom in finding meaning in life, even in extreme adversity.

Navigating through my stages of grief and fear

As I transition to some form of semi-retirement, dependent on stock market investments, Social Security, and Medicare, I wonder about the impact of the "blow-up first, analyze later" approach to DOGE activities, the "Big Ugly Bill", and tariffs and threats against other countries and territories might have on life in the US in the coming decade. If I'm concerned, I can barely imagine the concern of federal workers who are being fired by uncontrolled 20-something-year-old DOGE employees. These DEI hires must be concerned that their careers are perhaps permanently damaged. They may possibly be damaged forever, at least in the Federal government sector. LGBTQ and transgender individuals are potentially at risk. Freedom and opportunities are being dismantled.

Instead of the typical five stages of grief, I think I have 100! Or rather, I am cycling back and forth endlessly at this point. My first stage consisted of total and complete shock. I simply could not believe that a predator who admitted to sexually abusing women – because he is famous and powerful – could be elected – actually RE-elected. How is it possible that the majority of American voters are supportive or at least accepting of this? Never mind his many other crimes.

I think I am now progressing into the "Bargaining" phase – struggling to find ways to deal with the reality of where America is and where it is going. Here are some of the techniques I am using to handle my anxiety (this does not include the occasional screaming and ranting):

- Limit my reading of the news – I am a news binger. I would normally get up early in the morning specifically to consume the news. I greatly limit this since Trump took office. There is so much chaos swirling on social media at the moment, it is terrifying. I am much more selective about what I consume.
- I have created mental boundaries – instead of being outraged or anxious about every outrageous action Trump, via DOGE, is doing, I protect my mental state by thinking primarily about what will impact my family and me directly. Selfish and self-centered – absolutely, and that's the point right now.
- Finding freedom in California – California is not perfect, but living here does provide a feeling of insulation from the Trump chaos. Being the 4th largest economy in the world does provide some comfort.
- Humor – One very important value of Trump back in office is … there is continued great material for SNL, Steven Colbert, and other Late-Night hosts. I find gratitude in being able to laugh out loud at his word salads, buffoonery, and his pathetic attempts to make himself look good, from his fruitless attempts to cover up his hair loss to his orange-painted face. Yes, it may be juvenile to poke fun at these things; however, it helps me cope given the current circumstances. My wife and I have joked about moving to Canada. We even investigated this process half-seriously. We won't, of course, but somehow the process of exploring this opportunity has been cathartic.
- Exercise (mindfulness and appreciation) – I lose myself in exercise. It is my mental therapy: practicing mindfulness and expressing gratitude. Cycling in forests and mountains allows me to directly appreciate the essence of feeling free.
- Getting involved and making an impact – Freedom is not free!

This list does not include my occasional screaming and ranting . . .

So, while I have not fully arrived there yet, the most important strategy for me will be to get involved and make an impact on maintaining our Constitution and our freedoms. Currently, this involves writing Substack articles on these topics and occasionally participating in group discussions, such as those of the Braver Angels organization. There are other opportunities in the future, but for now, this is where I am and feel comfortable.

Resilience amid adversity

In my teen years in South Africa, my primary lens on the world was through my athletic pursuits in Track and Field. By the time I left South Africa for the US in 1973, I had never run a track race against a black athlete. This is hard to even imagine in this day and age. In prior years, I had been inspired by Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the Mexico Olympic Games. They were winning and demonstrating against black discrimination while standing on the podium. The restrictions on basic freedoms – running in a track and field race for goodness sake – seem unbelievable 50 years later.

I recall my excitement in 1972, taking a bus trip to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to compete in a track meet against the great Joseph Leserwane, who is a black Zimbabwian. This was a privilege and a great opportunity. It is incredible to think it took so many years and traveling outside the country to have that opportunity. The South African Apartheid government was a white Christian authoritarian government, and these kinds of egregious restrictions on basic freedoms feel like they are now being implemented in the United States.

Consider the following actions taken in just the past few months. Every day produces another step in the direction of a fascist, authoritarian oligarchy in the US:

- Zero experience appointments for critical secretary positions – other than total subservience to Donald Trump and disdain for US government.
- Taking control of the DOJ and turning it into a legal organization in support of Trump and against his liberal enemies,

- Pardoning the criminals who attacked the Capitol on January 6th, beat police officers, and ransacked the building with threats to hang the Vice President and House Speaker.
- The most visible sign of an authoritarian state is targeted prosecutions – Trump has an enemies list, which not only includes people like Liz Cheney and others who have challenged him, but media companies that have been critical of him.
- Firing the most experienced generals in the US Military and appointing sycophants, with the potential to use the military against domestic enemies.
- Trump repeatedly discusses the idea of running for a 3rd term and refers to himself as the "King".
- Comments from conservative leaders that Trump does not have to accept federal judge decisions – whatever the "king" indicates is right is right!
- The SCOTUS decision that the President is essentially above the law and cannot be prosecuted for actions while in office. Trump has been massively emboldened by this decision.
- The Citizens United decision in 2010 by SCOTUS allowed corporations to invest unlimited amounts of money in political campaigns. And in 2024, allowed Elon Musk – the wealthiest man in the world - to essentially buy the election for Trump and thus gain massive influence over his decision-making.
- Threatening to block funding to liberal states unless those states do his bidding.
- Trump's decimation of the Department of Education and installation of a sycophant secretary who has the potential to block funding to liberal universities unless they comply with his extreme conservative and authoritarian policies, such as eliminating DEI programs and Title VI and Title IX, laws that prohibit educational institutions from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, or sex.
- Threatening and then manipulating large corporations to support his policies:

In what the *New York Times* columnist Michelle Goldberg (2026) termed "the Great Capitulation," powerful CEOs who had once criticized Trump's authoritarian behavior are now rushing to meet with him, praise him, and give him money. Amazon, Google, Meta, Microsoft, and Toyota each gave $1 million to fund Trump's inauguration, more than double their previous inaugural donations. In early January, Meta announced it was abandoning its fact-checking operations—a move that Trump bragged "probably" resulted from his threats to take legal action against Meta's owner, Mark Zuckerberg. Trump himself has recognized that in his first term, "everyone was fighting me," but now "everybody wants to be my friend."

Apartheid in the Land of the "Free"

Kevin concludes that the United States is becoming increasingly divided. While South Africa's Apartheid forced people of color into specific geographic "locations", the US is being forced apart by politics – Blue states are becoming much more divided by ideology from Red States – people are self-relocating to areas of political preference. For example, a small town in Tennessee is proposing to create a geographic area to be developed only for people who espouse Christian Nationalist beliefs. They are self-described "Christian nationalists" who question modern values, such as whether female suffrage and the civil rights movement were good ideas, and call for mass deportations of *legal* (my emphasis) immigrants far in excess of President Donald Trump's current plan. Another thing they sometimes say: "Repeal the 20th Century."

Indeed, political differences have fragmented American families. My wife is a licensed Life Coach and provides coaching services to people (mostly parents of adult children) who have become estranged from their adult children. They are often estranged because of political differences directly related to Donald Trump and MAGA ideology. It is becoming an epidemic. I am looking over my shoulder!

The example of the small town in Tennessee described above is just one example of White Christian Nationalist beliefs. Their view of mass deportations of LEGAL immigrants (I am one of those) was combined with the view that the civil rights movement was not a good idea. And it has broad implications. Their view implies that it is a good idea to deport black and brown people; however, it may also imply deporting any legal immigrant who disagrees with Donald Trump. And that includes me!

Should I be afraid of being tracked and followed? Given recent reports of Palantir, the company whose software is being used by the US Government (ICE specifically) to track both illegal and legal immigrants, I am afraid. There are well-documented examples of Palantir software being used by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in ways that involve data about U.S. citizens. The key nuance is that ICE's systems are designed for immigration enforcement, but the data sources they pull from include large federal and state databases that contain information on both citizens and non-citizens.

Black people living during South Africa's Apartheid system and working in so-called "white" areas would need to be very careful at their workplaces or simply going to a store to buy food – the police could arrest them for no reason other than they were black! As a twelve-year-old, walking home from school in Parkview, Johannesburg, I recall hearing screams emanating from the local police station. I was certain at the time that these were the screams of a black person being beaten.

I doubt there was any due process for these individuals who were simply arrested off the streets because they were in "white" areas, and they were black. It is astonishing to think that this is now happening in the United States – people in Los Angeles, Portland, Chicago, and elsewhere are being attacked on the streets by masked ICE agents targeting people simply because they "look" like illegals. The President of the US said that a US Senator from California, Alex Padilla, "looked like an illegal" after he was tackled and forced to the ground by federal agents.

Am I at risk?

This is an unthinkable question to consider .... Until Trump! As a naturalized US citizen, I am now concerned that my publishing (on Substack, for example) of articles that tend to be critical of the Trump administration and MAGA may result in some level of scrutiny. There are numerous reports of the administration's denaturalization efforts. There's growing concern among legal experts and immigrant advocates that naturalized citizens who criticize the Trump administration could face increased scrutiny—especially under the administration's expanded denaturalization efforts.

So, while the government can only revoke citizenship if it proves that it was illegally obtained, typically through fraud or misrepresentation during the naturalization process, it's a vague, chaotic, and seemingly racially driven strategy being implemented. The Justice Department apparently issued a memo in June 2025 directing attorneys to "maximally pursue" denaturalization cases, including a broad catch-all category for any case deemed "sufficiently important." This could include me!

This arguably opens the door to politically motivated investigations, especially when paired with public threats against figures like Zohran Mamdani, a naturalized citizen and NYC mayoral candidate [now elected], who was targeted simply over his political views and rap lyrics. So, while political dissent alone isn't a legal ground for denaturalization, the administration's rhetoric and discretionary enforcement powers, engaged without due process, raise the possibility of selective targeting. Immigration lawyers have warned that even minor discrepancies in decades-old paperwork could be used as a pretext for investigations. And while the Supreme Court has ruled that citizenship is a fundamental right, and stripping it without due process violates the Constitution, the SCOTUS has made some remarkably partisan decisions that support Trump doing anything he wants to do.

Conclusions

Kevin's story is saturated with anxiety, uncertainty, and disappointment. After leaving Apartheid South Africa in 1973 to gain U.S. citizenship and the American Dream, and a couple of decades later, standing in line to vote for the first-ever true democracy in South Africa in 1994, Kevin never imagined that the United States would regress to much of the mindset and methods evident during the Apartheid period. But here he is. The United States is on a dangerous trajectory towards authoritarianism and the kind of basic freedom restrictions that have previously been the cornerstone of American culture and the Constitution. The notion of returning to anything similar to the Apartheid regime is frightening for Kevin. He hopes to find purpose and a sense of freedom in the same way he found it over 30 years ago in the red sand dunes of Namibia.

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Chapter Twelve

Confronting Tyranny IV: Courage, Patriotism and Learning

Up to this point, we have focused on ways Snyder has suggested the challenge of tyranny should be addressed. Attention is particularly directed (in Chapter Eleven) to the way we must manage anxiety while addressing these challenges. We wish to dig a bit deeper when approaching Snyder's final two lessons regarding patriotism and courage. Patriotism is ultimately about something more than waving a flag. And courage is about something more than taking a bold step forward. Residing beneath both patriotism and courage is a fundamental reorientation of our head and heart in the pursuit of harmony of interest, the balancing of rights and responsibilities, and acting in the service 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 engaging 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 unwelcome when we are trying to reduce our anxiety)?

Bateson's Higher Order Thinking

We return to the guidance offered by Gregory Bateson (Bateson, 1972; Bateson, 1979), the remarkable polymath who explored a wide variety of issues, including what he identified as first-order and second-order thinking and learning. First-order learning and thinking concern the ability to change and improve what we are already thinking and doing. This form of learning and thinking is dominant in our daily lives. It relates directly to Kahneman's heuristics and Bion's Beta elements. Conversely, second-order learning and thinking focus on 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 operate in an institution of a specific type? Let one of us [WB] reflect on his work with an educational organization where he has 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 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 be readily applied: improve what you are already doing and/or do more (or less) of what you are already doing. 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 at this college, 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 interdisciplinary 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 learn from this differing 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 the unique lessons they have learned about laboratory education over the years with other faculty members. A similar impact was evident among the arts faculty as they began to reflect on and share their insights about studio learning.

We 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. This 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

This brief excursion into the dynamics operating in a faculty workshop has been offered in part as a way to introduce another way of envisioning a process that confronts tyranny, as well as the rigidity of thought and feelings.

This process involves an even deeper probing of the world we perceive, interpret, and in which we act. 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 one of us did in working with the art and science faculty members at a liberal arts college.

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 not only to assert their own assumptive world on our society. They would also like to nurture polarized views regarding other competing worlds. These assumptive worlds are dependent on 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 social setting or a subset of this setting (Kuhn, 1962/2012).

The assumptive worlds in which we live determine what we choose to see and what we choose to know. At a very basic level, these worlds are 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, which is the fourth type of issue we have identified. It is the mystery that is most closely aligned with Bion's unprocessed Beta elements. We suggest that mysterious elements are not just those assigned to the unconscious because they are psychologically dangerous, as Bion and his psychoanalytic colleagues might suggest. In many cases, these mysterious Beta elements are those that are simply too large, complex, unpredictable, vulnerable, ambiguous, turbulent, 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 challenges to one's assumptive world? One example of a metabolic process

has already been offered 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 one's present (or past) life. The empty chair process used in Gestalt-oriented psychotherapy comes to mind, as do many psychodrama techniques. We will be identifying many other strategies in this book; however, at this point, we 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 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 leader's role in reflecting on their own assumptions regarding the operations of their organizational unit. This can be done, as Marybeth O'Neill notes, by inviting an executive coach to facilitate this reflection in a group setting (such as a retreat) (O'Neill and Bergquist, 2007).

Another approach might be taken. 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 concerning 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 team members can then comment on their own thoughts and feelings regarding each assumption, for they are

likely to be struggling with similar contradictions. One of us has described this powerful process elsewhere in much greater detail (Bergquist, 2014a). It is based on a technique invented by Michael Balint, another object relations practitioner. At this point, we are ready to turn to Snyder's last two lessons regarding patriotism and courage – but from the expanded set of perspectives we 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)

Usually, patriotism is conceived (perhaps even by Snyder) as the confrontation in words and weapons of an enemy seeking to overwhelm our society through the engagement of force. While we agree that patriotism is often found in this type of confrontation, other forms of patriotism are equally important when confronting tyranny. We have already identified three of these forms – one being the challenge of physical force (alignment with the fight/flight assumption identified by Wilfred Bion). Bion 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. We 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 an essay written in *The Atlantic*, Adrian Vermeule (2020), 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 would 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.

This is an example of profound paternalism. It's a form of patriotism. Vermuele 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 Vermuele's arrogant worldview.

It is particularly disturbing because Veremuele 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 offers a contemporary viewpoint, Vermuele arouses our own fears regarding a possible or even an inevitable slide to paternalism—and from there to tyranny and despotism.

Snyder is right to call for a patriotic stance. However, in this case, the enemy is not a sword. It is an untested assumption held by someone with some status and the potential of 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), our own fears of this pull toward dependency are justified.

The source of this quotation from Vermeule, Margart 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 collectively to accept Vemeuele's dictum over time. Amid our diversity, we will push back against this gentleman's dualism, as both Snyder and we have proposed.

Fight/Flight

We 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 noted elsewhere in this book, human beings have the capacity to imagine, in vivid and compelling terms, the threat of a menacing enemy. This is what Robert Sapolsky (2004) has described as the human capacity and tendency to produce and be stressed by imaginary lions.

A second version of this fight/flight assumption is offered. 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 lives 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 willingness to fight. If we refuse to fight, then we are relegated in Bion's assumptive world to nothing more than flight. We are cowardly 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.

Mill's quote is offered as a startling alarm ringing out against the pervasive love of war and the regressive pull back to a fight/flight assumption. We 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 is provided by 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 reward those who are peacekeepers? The yearly awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize is wonderful. However, we need a lot more of this honoring if peace can hold its own against war.

It is 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 filled with risk. 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 Mill.

Pairing/Vision of Future

We turn to the third form of patriotism. It 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 form of patriotism that focuses on a powerful pairing of forces that 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 it. 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 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, we 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. We are reminded of the perspective offered (probably) by the Esenin community that was located in the Qumran Caves near the Dead Sea. Through our discovery and review of the "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, culminating 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. This need for an action-oriented leaning into the future is evident in 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 matches 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.

We must acknowledge that all three notions of patriotism are societal constructions. These constructions 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.

One final point is offered 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 whenever we 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.

There is the matter of "confiscating" our personal and collective future. When we are successful in our lives, 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 contributing 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. We should forget about tomorrow. We are not ready to fully embrace this perspective offered by a wise sage. We turn instead, one last time, to the Western perspective offered by Timothy Snyder in his twenty lessons regarding tyranny. This lesson concerns the courage to confront that which challenges 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." In combining these two perspectives, we would rephrase Snyder's question: "How courageous can you be on behalf of freedom?" To further refine this question, we turn to the analysis offered regarding Lesson Nineteen. We would ask: "What form of courage can you display and will you display on behalf of freedom?"

There is the kind of courage associated with escape from 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.

We would go further in refining the basic, existential question. We are courageous in our own way on behalf of freedom. However, "What should we do with the freedom?" This requires a higher order of thinking. It also requires a penetrating re-examination of our basic assumptions about how the world operates and what our role should be in helping to foster a compelling future. Effective courage requires that we are not only thoughtful but also introspective regarding what freedom really means to us—and for what we are willing to sacrifice.

When there is no longer a tyrant, are you now free to pick your own cereal or choose your own style of clothing? This trivialization is often 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? We will emphasize the role played by a compelling vision of the future in the final section of this book.

There is a final challenge to be addressed. It concerns the fundamental reason why we should be courageous. We are courageous in defense of democratic rule in our time and place. This challenge requires that we first invite several new guides to join us in containing tyranny and defending democracy. Without this containment and successful defense, there is little hope of realizing a desired future, let alone ever creating a society with a harmony of interests and a 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*. Interactions with

these guides are documented in the next chapter of this book. Much as we have done in the four chapters on Timothy Snyder's confrontation with tyranny, we will be offered Levitsky and Ziblatt's insights and then share our own reflections arising from absorbing and expanding on their work.

Coda: Patriotism, Courage, and Higher Order Learning

In many ways, the matter of patriotism and courage is a personal matter. We each must come to terms with these two challenges in our own unique way. The ghosts of past moments of patriotism and courage displayed by our ancestors might come to mind, as might the experiences of our own present-day family members and friends. Given this personal nature of patriotism and courage, each of us offered our own perspectives on and experiences with these two challenging states of mind and action.

Suzi

Let me ask myself, if I were to consider myself to be a patriot, a strong, red-blooded American, what would be my vision? What would the America of which I could be truly proud look like? We would recognize the interconnectedness of not only all people, but also our connection to the planet. We would take better care of each other and our home planet. And America would lead the way—leading the charge, for instance, around climate change.

All of this is hard to imagine, given the first Trump administration. I am painfully aware of how ignorant many of our countrymen are. They don't learn history. They don't learn critical thinking. They don't see the things that some of us can see in terms of history rhyming with itself or echoing or repeating itself. Or they don't understand civics. They don't really understand how the government works or used to work.

We were promised checks and balances, but they don't exist. They're supposed to be guardrails, but there aren't any. Case in point, Trump was impeached twice and yet still allowed to run again. He was convicted of 36 felonies and still allowed to run again. In many states, if you're a convicted felon, you can't even vote. So why on earth would you be allowed to run for president if you're a convicted felon?

I think there would just be more common sense. But again, common sense isn't very common. So, I don't really have a lot of faith in real democracy working because the people have voted against their own interests so many times. Whatever new form emerges will take time because it requires a more intelligent electorate, a better-informed electorate, who can then fashion a new variant on democracy that is based on something more than just their own self-interest.

I think if we still as a country value the concept of democracy, and if we still uphold that which was written in the Constitution to be valid and true and aspirational for us, then we need to set about creating a system of democracy that is not only sustainable but adaptable at the pace of change of technology and AI in our future. It must take into account the mistakes that we've made and hopefully evolved from during the past 200 years. We must consider the dangers that we're now aware of that can be exploited.

We got really lucky that Trump is the clown that he is, because if he were a much more malicious, intentionally devious, and intelligent. A real despot who could now see the cracks that have been exposed. This despot could exploit these cracks in much more dangerous ways. So that's my fear.

The big issue now is that the folks in charge believe that it should be a few wealthy white Christian males who decide everything for everybody else, because they're clearly better than everybody else. At the surface, I completely rail against that. However, when I consider what would be ideal, on some level, I'm one of those intellectual elites. I do think it needs to be people who are versed in what democracy is, and what our history has shown, and what global history has shown. So, maybe I'm no better than those in office, right? I don't think everybody should have a say, because they don't know what they're saying.

I wasn't an avid student of history or civics, so I don't know enough to even know if a true democracy can work. Do we have examples of effective pure democracy anywhere on the planet? There may be true democracies, but they tend to be in much smaller areas and often exist in some form of isolation. So, that's a real challenge. The Trumpian era may have taught us that we need a new democracy. As patriots, we need a new solution to a newly emerging problem. But what is this solution?

About what am I courageous? About what do I care enough about that I could be courageous? These are challenging questions. You know, throughout this whole discussion, I keep bumping up against values, right? Like, what would I like to see as a proud patriot? It's all things that are aligned with my values, right? People caring for each other, displaying empathy, coming together, building community, and sharing resources. Those are my values, and in a true democracy, like a real democracy, it must include space for people whose values are diametrically opposed to mine.

The question of courage might end up: On what would I fight for or against? I've thought about this because of my grandparents fighting the Nazis. And that comes up frequently, given current occurrences. Because I'm seeing a lot of Nazi-type behavior in my own country. I remember growing up hearing their stories about their courage. And they didn't see it as particularly courageous. They just saw it as survival.

So, the real question is: What would I do to survive? Protect my home. Protect my children. That brings me back to values. Because if we do devolve into a civil war, I'd have to get a gun. And my values are very anti-gun. Yet, I'm not going to bring bunny slippers to a gunfight. So, if we do devolve into a civil war, everybody's taking their guns and running roughshod through the streets. I'd have to have a gun to protect those I love and my home. That would require a different kind of courage for me. The courage to go against my own values to save people.

The stories about their harrowing experience of World War II were shared with me by people who hated violence. Some of that is deeply embedded in Judaism. Like in Israel today, there is a struggle among people living there. They hate what has happened in Israel. They may feel it was necessary for survival, but it's against everything basic and noble in Judaism. And I seem to be struggling with some of those same issues concerning my children and my way of life. In Israel, they have a tiny piece of land surrounded by seven countries that hate them. Seven big enemy countries surround their tiny piece of land. The Israelis must do what they can to protect themselves.

My grandfather was a major in the Russian army. Even though he was a medical doctor and a surgeon who saved lives, he was a trained soldier. I think violence was just part of his reality growing up in Russia. Many years after my grandmother died, I discovered that she had been trained as a sharpshooter. So that when she was fighting the Nazis, she was trained and

knew how to manage her guns. My uncle, who was born in Belgium, shared stories about his childhood that involved significant street fighting. Furthermore, as immigrants to America, my relatives were living in neighborhoods with other immigrants. And it was a world of poverty. They were just getting started. There was a lot of violence. So fighting was just kind of baked into my uncle's upbringing. Yet, he's the calmest, kindest, sweetest, gentlest person.

So, does it take some form of violence to be courageous? Even if it's not physical violence, it's violence that requires us to shed old beliefs and old ways of behaving. Does it take some sort of violence to create a new social form, a new democracy? Are we all going to suffer? Maybe. I would argue that all of the destruction and chaos that's happening now is a form of violence.

It's violence against the previous standing. So, in that sense, I guess I keep coming back to the metaphor of the butterfly. The caterpillar doesn't know it's becoming a butterfly. It just enters the cocoon and then dissolves into goo. That's a kind of violence against the caterpillar. It dissolves into goo. Then, eventually, it reforms into a butterfly that can leave the cocoon. So maybe this is just us as a country, spending years in the goo. Maybe we're evolving. Might we be dissolving into goo during this chaos and disorder? And maybe something new can emerge.

I just don't know the right way to proceed amidst the goo or how the transformation is going to happen. Luckily, there are people far smarter than I am who are in charge of these sorts of things. Or they're not in charge. Or they're not smart.

Kevin

With all the ongoing protests and hundreds of thousands of people mobilizing n the streets, and as our country becomes increasingly polarized, I begin to wonder: Should I support many of these causes? Should I not be out there, however small my voice is? Attending the rallies might require courage. I ask: Do we risk the possibility of personally and collectively getting involved in a serious conflict? Consider the individuals protesting the ICE raids. They are putting themselves in real danger of being brutalized in these ICE raids. I need to be particularly concerned, given that I am an immigrant. I do quite a lot of Substack writings, articles on apartheid in

the United States, and racism in the United States. I write quite a bit about the psychology of the mega conspiracy theories and Christian nationalism. I've written quite a bit about the mega culture. I wonder if the new Palantir software will pick me out as a threat. At one o'clock in the morning, I hear my front door being knocked down.

So, what do you do? Do you risk yourself and get out there like so many hundreds of thousands of people? Do you risk getting involved in some dangerous stuff? It's a challenge. Jennifer (my wife) and I raised questions amongst ourselves. What is the role we can play that has the biggest impact? What can we put forward? And I think: It's in our writing that we land rather than standing in a crowd, protesting, I think that we can play and make a much bigger impact with our writing.

Let me return to the more fundamental issue of patriotism. I've lived in two different countries. I've seen major tyranny enacted in two countries. What's my role as a citizen? I can start with South Africa and then talk a bit about patriotism in the United States. If I had to start the story, I would have to go back many decades. I reflect on my approach to patriotism during my teen years, when I became aware that something was seriously wrong with South African society. And my rather narrow viewpoint during these years led me to focus primarily on the Olympic Games. I was watching the black power salutes of Tommy Smith and John Carlos.

From my narrow view as a youngster, concerning track and field, I recognized that there was something wrong about the presence of apartheid in South Africa. I wanted to be part of the United States system, where all cultures can protest, as opposed to being here in South Africa, where opposition was forbidden. By the age of 16 and older, I had never ever run against a black person in my track and field events. I acknowledged that race-based barrier. It spurred me to say: I want to get out of this country. As opposed to protesting and making a difference, I wanted to get out.

And I think my role was to be patriotic not to South Africa, but to a broader definition of justice and equality, which I found more in the United States than in South Africa. I think that if I had to go back and reconsider my mindset, it would be to question my preferences: Wouldn't I have been more effective if I stayed in South Africa to become more involved in political protest rather than trying to come to the United States? I identify

my rather narrow-minded teenage viewpoint: I preferred to compete in the American type system. This was rather myopic back in those days. Apartheid was all around me. And what I wanted to do was escape, as opposed to confronting the tyranny of apartheid.

Of course, my mindset changed. I went back to South Africa years later. One wonderful memory was being there when the ANC was unbanned. Nelson Mandela was released. And then I was standing in line to vote for a new democratic government for six hours. People of all racial backgrounds and cultures were standing in miles-long lines. They were partying; it was not just a vote. It was partying in the streets. Getting together with different cultures and being joyful that apartheid was over. So, this was a moment of patriotism when I felt a real commitment now to the new South Africa.

It was a magnificent time to witness all of that unfolding: the whole Desmond Tutu notion of the Rainbow Nation. Mandela and Desmond Tutu talking about the new South Africa. The Rainbow Nation was energizing. It was magnificent. And, of course, that did fade to some degree with the violence and the crime wave that ensued afterwards. This damaged the lives of many South Africans.

With all that hope and energy came the specter of potential personal violence, day to day, moment to moment. That overwhelmed daily life for many South Africans. This was hugely unfortunate. So, much like we're talking about today, there was an ongoing threat of violence. However, while there was the potential of violence in South Africa, it wasn't from the government. It came from among people who were suddenly experiencing freedom. With freedom being granted, I can do what I want to do. I can steal and damage property.

You could put on the shoes of disenfranchised black people who lived in repression and poverty for most of their lives. You could enter their mindset and justification: I'm equal now. I have an equal vote. I can do what I want. And I'm going to take from those white people what was taken from me. And in many respects, although the violence was extreme, you can understand how, in the minds of many of these people, it was absolutely justified. The violence was coming from the ground up.

By contrast, today, in the United States, violence is being promoted in many ways by our government, by the ideology of the current regime. What we're

experiencing today is perpetrated, in many cases, by those in charge of our country. It's not necessarily citizen against citizen. It's more the MAGA and ICE version of the Nazi SS. Grabbing people off the streets. Throwing them in vans and taking them off. Shipping them off to Venezuela, or wherever the prisons are, to which other countries will take them.

So, I came to the United States. I gained citizenship. And the reason I came had something to do with my dreams of what America was really like, given Tommy Smith and all. Many immigrants like me have really struggled with loss of connections with family, loss of connection with their home culture. I've never felt that during my teenage years, when I first arrived in the United States. I felt like I was home. I never felt a connection with South Africa back in those days.

Certainly, there was the lost connection with my family that I left behind (they eventually did come over to the USA). I felt a loss when leaving my family. However, in terms of patriotism, I had always felt a connection with the United States. Probably, this was a result of my early years being connected with track and field, which was dominated by the Americans. I was so mentally and emotionally involved in the track and field world during my teenage years that I almost felt like an American. It was just normal for me when I landed in my new country.

Now, I can address the specific question of what has transpired during the last decade of Trump. I have come to a profound and troubling historical realization. Things were quite positive for me after Obama's eight years, when there was this beautiful revelation of the first black president, the first family, and that wonderful sense of integration. Coming out of the Great Recession, there was a wonderful feeling: as a country, we had moved on.

However, Trump came into power. There is a new, troubling realization. We are not so much moving on as perhaps moving backwards. And now, in Trump's second term, that notion of American harmony and patriotism directed towards a racially integrated collective has been damaged very badly. So, here we have a president who is blatantly racist and has now, in his second term, formed a government that is probably as racist, if not more, than the apartheid government of South Africa. Except that it's not necessarily as formalized in law as was the South African apartheid system.

Nevertheless, the racial foundations of the Trump government are certainly evident. Christian nationalism is exactly what the Afrikaner, Dutch Reform Church was all about. This Christian system was framed around the notion of being the Chosen Nation. That is a huge part of the MAGA thought process. I've seen the image of the Obama presidency thrown away. It is being replaced by a distorted, quasi-religious image of a new America being made great again. The old image and order are shattered.

However, the Rainbow Nation that emerged in South Africa, after the first democratic elections, has not necessarily been shattered at all. My son still lives in Johannesburg. I follow him on Facebook and other social media platforms. His own personal family and his large collection of friends are magnificent to watch, because they're fully integrated. His wife is a person of color, what you would call "South African Colored" from the Cape Colored community. His friends are black, and all various shades of black and brown, which would have never happened during my youthful years in South Africa. At many levels, the Rainbow Nation, *per se*, has thrived. Though crime and other aspects of corruption haven't necessarily gone away. However, the Rainbow Nation, in terms of cultural integration, appears to have thrived in many situations and many contexts.

There's a transition that needs to happen here in the United States. And I hope we will soon begin to see it in this country. Some of the devastating things that MAGA and Trump have attempted to do and have quite successfully enacted during his first year might be experiencing a strong pushback. The MAGA playbook, found in the Project 2026 guidebook, might be running out of fumes in terms of public support and potential funding. However, it's hard to imagine that the Trump initiatives are running out of money. Considering the investment in the big, ugly bill, the investment in ICE is almost as great as our US military. It is bigger than the investment in all other militaries around the world. However, Congress does ultimately hold the purse strings.

The investment, in many cases, concerns getting brown and black people out of this country. As I have noted, it is not that I think illegals should be simply allowed to come into the country. It took me many years to become a legal citizen, following the law. I don't agree with people just being able to come in illegally and stay here. However, the way that the Trump administration is getting them out is fundamentally lawless. Trump has

taken over ICE, in the same way that he has taken over the DOJ as his own personal legal entity, doing his bidding. Furthermore, the way that Congress has just folded is maddening. Congress is not serving as a coequal branch of government.

This is unbelievable. However, I think there's one aspect that I've been most concerned about over the last year. This is the biggest threat to our democracy and has led our authoritarian government to lay waste to our democratic system. I am pointing to the Supreme Court, which has supported much of what Trump's trying to do. The lower courts have pushed back for the most part. By and large, these courts have been the stopgap against many of the potential abuses of power. For instance, the lower courts have pushed back on the National Guard going into Los Angeles, Washington, DC, Portland, Oregon, and Chicago. Trump has now had to pull back.

However, by and large, the Supreme Court has been supportive of many actions that Trump has wanted to take. For instance, if you take a fundamental freedom of racial profiling, the Supreme Court has supported ICE in its racial profiling of people. Justice Kavanaugh has declared that it is acceptable to be selective in enforcement, if someone speaks a different language and/or they are of a different color. Kavanaugh seems to have backtracked a little bit on that statement or interpretation; however, the notion of freedom and due process at the Supreme Court level is certainly in decline. Support for the Constitution has been shattered. It's frightening. For me, the Supreme Court's decisions are the biggest surprise and the biggest threat to this country's democracy and its support of the Constitution.

We are judicially teetering at this moment. And that doesn't go away when Trump leaves. These people are still in office. There are ways, of course, that have been considered in the past. The Supreme Court can be expanded. Term limits could be set for members of the Court. An appointment for life certainly doesn't make sense. Some things can be done. Whether they will be done effectively is to be seen.

Certain signs of optimism have emerged in recent weeks and months. They might represent something more than hope. I would not have said that three months ago. We are seeing the mobilization of people against ICE, for example, around the country. There are massive demonstrations against

ICE. In many cases, people have come out by the tens of thousands, even in freezing weather, to protest ICE. As I have noted, the lower courts are fairly consistently deciding against Trump's policies. Even the Supreme Court is beginning to show signs of saying this is going a little bit too far.

These are early days, but there are some signs, for example, of growing support for the notion that the National Guard can't go into these cities. And I think that probably the biggest sign is where the polls are showing that citizens, even conservative Republicans, are beginning to say, " This is a problem".

Now, of course, there's a slight difference with the conservative Republicans saying this is a problem, because the two factors that seem to be tipping conservatives against Trump are priorities, policies and actions that are not necessarily fundamental to the MAGA Christian nationalism philosophy. These include the failure to open the Epstein files, as well as the initiation of external wars like that against Venezuela. Some of the conservative Republicans are saying that affordability as an economic issue is not being effectively handled. These are not necessarily MAGA priorities or reflective of MAGA principles. Many MAGA folks are reluctantly disagreeing with Trump about where he is focusing his attention, or where he is not adequately focusing attention.

Most importantly, the polls show that in November, the midterm elections are likely to yield a significant victory for liberal democracy. The political signs are looking very positive. The Democrats will likely assume a majority in the House of Representatives, unless something significant happens. If this occurs, we will begin to have coequal branches of government, providing some form of counterbalance to authoritarian policies.

I am becoming increasingly hopeful, given a blue wave of voting, even in very conservative states where governors have won by double digits. And Democratic women are winning elections by significant double-digit margins in conservative states. This is very positive. It's early days yet. However, at least we're seeing a movement in a positive direction.

Bill

I agree with virtually all the observations made by Suzi and Kevin regarding patriotism and courage. Yes, it's hard being patriotic about America when you witness what is happening. It is also hard to be courageous given the

widespread threat in our communities. I worry about my daughter, as an administrator in a large school district, having to stand at the front door of her building, refusing admission to ICE agents. I am concerned about my son-in-law going to work every day in a city where ICE agents have picked up a co-worker residing in a nearby office building.

I also agree with my two co-authors that courage comes in many forms and that, as a writer, I risk being "found out" and either discouraged from writing about certain topics or threatened with some retaliation. While I am not out there demonstrating in the streets, I could be identified, like my co-author, as a dissenting voice in American political life. New technologies can make all three of us more vulnerable than five or ten years ago.

I also think Suzi might be right about the need for a selective group of Americans to craft a new Democracy. If you look at the founders of our country, those really were intellectual elites. A recent edition of *The Atlantic Magazine* addressed the extraordinary opportunity there was for these men (and a few women) to create something new. These were not the extraordinary patriots fighting the war. They were mostly the landowners who were sitting there in Philadelphia, arguing the big issues. It is important to acknowledge that many of them were slave owners. Furthermore, many of them (including George Washington) were very biased against the Native American population.

If we look at today's version of the elite, they would mostly be billionaire business owners. That's today's version of who the landowners were then. George Washington was among the wealthiest of those journeying to Philadelphia. He owned huge chunks of land west of the Appalachian Mountains. George Washington had a major investment in his country's independence, given that he owned a lot of land that he wanted to protect from King George's interference.

All these valid points about protecting against tyranny and potentially building a new form of democracy require, as we suggested at the start of this chapter, that we slow down and find a time and place for reflection. We also suggested that there is the matter of engagement in higher-order thinking and reasoning if we are to address Snyder's nineteenth and twentieth lessons (actually, most of his lessons) successfully. Put simply, we may need to learn in new ways if we are to engage in higher-order thinking and reasoning. Regarding Snyder's nineteenth and twentieth lessons, I

would suggest that we must specifically learn in a patriotic way and be courageous learners. I offer some of my own perspectives on learning, based in part on my experiences in recent years, with both patriotic learning and courageous learning.

Patriotic Learning: Patriotism in the United States requires that we know something about our country's physical location in the world. And we should be aware of the United States' political and cultural relationship with other countries. This is Geographic knowledge. We should also learn how our country functions and how we can get involved in determining the nature and focus of these functions. This is Civics knowledge.

Geography: We must learn about the world in which our country is now situated. This world profoundly impacts the way in which our leaders formulate priorities and policies. Unfortunately, we no longer teach this discipline in our schools. As a graduate student at the University of Oregon, one of my colleagues was working on his doctorate in Geography. He was from England. All of his fellow doctoral candidates were also from other countries. No Americans had enrolled, which is understandable since no teaching posts would be awaiting them when they graduated.

One cautionary note. If geography is to be taught in our schools once again, it is critical that a balanced and diverse perspective be offered. For we are dealing with the complexity of culture and historical dynamics. As a child, I recall being taught geography at my school located in a small, highly biased town in Illinois. A wonderful country was featured in this class by my teacher. I wanted to move to this paradise. The country was Argentina. And this "paradise" was being ruled by a Fascist: Juan Peron (of "Evita" fame). Like President Trump, Juan Peron was going to make his country (Argentina) "great again." This required an iron rule, biased media, and a heavy dose of violence. None of this knowledge was introduced in the class I was taking.

Though I have not been exposed to much geography since leaving this elementary school class, I have been fortunate to gain many cross-cultural experiences. In "bumping up against" other social structures and cultures, I have been able to formulate some tentative answers to several fundamental "patriotic" questions: What is distinctive about America, leading to an awareness of what we need to hold on to in America, and why I value being an American.

I also found myself learning about geography while conducting a study for one of the major higher education associations in the United States. This study focused on learning styles among students enrolled in American liberal arts colleges. Specifically, we were interested in potential shifts in preferred learning styles of students over their years of college, using David Kolb's (1984) four-cell model. We chose a group of elite liberal arts colleges, along with a control group, consisting of colleges that definitely were not "elite." The Kolb Learning Style Inventory was distributed to students during their first and third years of college.

As we anticipated, most students drifted from a divergent style (considering a variety of ideas) to an assimilating style (bringing new experiences into an existing conceptual framework). Very few students from elite colleges moved very far from this traditional academic assimilating mindset. However, students from one of the "control" colleges did move dramatically past assimilation. They became more interested in doing something practical (convergence) and being influenced by new ideas (accommodation). These were students from a biblically conservative college located in the Deep South. The president of their college was the son of the former president, who was the son of the school's founder (after whom the college is named). How could this unexpected change in learning style have happened?

We found that all students at this college had to go on a mission to another country during their second year. They were to "convert" those whom they met in this other country. However, as we know from other studies, these students tended to be more influenced by their cross-cultural encounter than were those they sought to "convert." The students from this conservative, sheltered college received a strong dose of Geography. They returned to school ready to implement what they had learned, and ready to learn about and adjust to yet other new things. I also vicariously learned something. I discovered something more about cross-cultural impacts. The students taught me about the ways in which changes in attitude and behavior might actually occur in our society.

Civics: There is a second discipline that we no longer teach in our schools. This is Civics. We need Civics to be taught in our schools. Our young people need to know how our country operates. The Dreyfuss Civics Initiative, initiated by an American movie actor, Richard Dreyfuss, focuses on this important discipline. As announced on the home page of the

Initiative's website (The Dreyfuss Civics Initiative – Prioritizing Civics Education), we must: "Teach our kids how to run our country, before they are called upon to run our country… if we don't, someone else will run our country."

Specifically, the initiative concerns teaching American history, government, and civic values. I quote from the website:

> Civic values such as civility, clarity of thought, and the importance of dissent are not inherited at birth. The ideas must be taught, and the younger the better. In light of the changing demands on the education system due to an increasing focus on Science, Math and other academics, civics has seen its allocation of time greatly diminished resulting in younger generations having little connection to our founding documents and political system.

Offering a positive perspective on the operations of the American government, Dreyfuss and other members of his initiative have this to say:

> In order for our children to be effective citizens, they must understand the development of America so they know how our political structure is unique and exceptional. Additionally, future generations must be taught how to understand all sides of an issue, thoughtfully develop an opinion, and discuss that opinion with civility and reason. We must not shy away from, but embrace teaching the controversial issues and events throughout our history that have shaped the current standing of America.

The Dreyfuss Initiative also declares its broader mission to work beyond the classroom:

> The Dreyfuss Civics Initiative plans to educate citizens on the power they have as well as giving future generations the skills they need to be intelligent citizens. Responsible citizenship is dangerous in its absence and unknowable unless taught."

Recognizing that American potential is not realized at the present time, Richard Dreyfuss and others associated with the Civic Initiative believe that the voting electorate should be conversant about the responsibilities of citizenship in the United States. Our citizens must be knowledgeable about how our government operates and aware that leadership in this government

requires exceptional democratic skills. While Suzi Pomerantz rightfully suggests that these requirements might require some greater selectivity in the right to vote, Richard Dreyfuss believes that it is possible to elevate all adult members of American society to an appropriate level of citizenship competency.

In my own work with many government leaders throughout the United States (and many other countries), as well as with the judges in several American judicial systems, I find myself residing somewhere between the optimism of Richard Dreyfuss and the hesitation of Suzi Pomerantz. I have provided a wide range of educational programs to a wide range of public officials but have found that the perspectives and practices I have offered only "take" for a short period of time. It might simply be that I am not a very good teacher; however, it is also possible that a perfect storm of cognitive and affective retrenchment is in effect. This storm is composed not only of the typical resistance of bureaucracies to change, but also the political nature of public service (even when public servants are protected from indiscriminate personnel practices) and recognition that nothing is very secure when the political party in charge might soon change.

I realize that some of my reticence does not reside in the perspectives and practices of dedicated public servants. Rather, my reticence and pessimism reside in the often-ignorant perspectives and irrational practices of the voting public that they serve. As Richard Dreyfuss is proposing, it may not be the education of government workers that is required. It might be an education that is oriented to civics for the total citizenry. This is a much larger and more daunting task. Should Richard Dreyfuss stick to acting in movies and leave civics to those with more realistic expectations? Or, perhaps, government should be left to those who do have a solid knowledge of how America operates and how our form of democracy can best be preserved. Ironically, it is often the immigrants who are most knowledgeable about the American government. They have been preparing for the citizenship test. I wonder: how many of us who were born in the USA could pass this test?

Courageous Learning: Significant, higher-order learning is required if we are to confront tyranny in a successful manner and potentially design and create a new democracy. We know that all significant learning generates and occurs in a state of anxiety (Argyris and Schön, 1974; Argyris, 1982).

Inevitably, we experience resistance when forced to accommodate profound new ideas, rather than assimilating information captured by our existing mindset.

Having had the opportunity to learn much, as documented in the first sections of this book, from my travels down the turbulent river of the collapsing Soviet Union in the early 1990s, I had the opportunity to learn once again from a turbulent environment. It was the environment of tension, mistrust, and violence to be found in the countries of Israel and Palestine more than two decades later.

I recall having to navigate the white water of a small Palestinian village, accompanied by my Israeli colleague, Daniel, and my Bedouin colleague, Ahmad. We were in a car driving down a bumpy, rock-filled road deep in Palestine. Having served as a Bedouin Chief, Ahmad possessed the unique ability to provide leadership in moments of civic crises. We had just witnessed a traffic accident (which is frequent) and a bottleneck of cars, their drivers all honking to express their anger and frustration. Ahmad steps out of our car and quickly directs a return to order. While I know, as a US citizen, this car being driven down a side street in Palestine was not the safest place in the world; however, I felt strangely and completely safe with Ahmad and Daniel.

These two remarkable men had also provided me with the opportunity to learn much about Arab and Bedouin culture when I was invited to share a delicious Bedouin dinner at Ahmad's home and when welcomed to a meeting of Bedouin leaders in a large tent surrounded by Camels, located on the Palestinian side of the Israeli/Palestinian wall. Sitting on the bare floor and sipping on coffee heavily spiced with Cardamom, I felt "at home" even though I was a "stranger in a strange land." I learned about Bedouin customs and leadership. I also witnessed the way Ahmad's children were allowed to play freely on top of a wall at Ahmad's home, in contrast to the much more restrictive behavior of American parents (Rogoff, 2003).

I also had a chance to meet Ahmad's wife for a moment before being asked to return to her sheltered existence at the back of their home. This restrictive practice contrasted vividly with my visit to a large Arab university located immediately on the other side of the wall. This university was filled with young women who were working toward their college degrees. I

couldn't help but wonder what the future will be for these women in the traditional, repressive environment of Palestine.

Finally, as one of the first Americans to visit a newly established Arab museum that documented the other side of the Israeli/Arab conflict, I could not help but feel and wonder what was going to happen in the future of these two countries. I was told of children placing ladders on the wall and daring guards to shoot at them while climbing the wall. I learned a bit later that the Bedouin tent was destroyed and replaced by new Israeli residential structures. Furthermore, Ahmad's automobile shop near the wall that I had visited had been torn down by the Israeli government. Yet, with all this documentation and demonstration of Israeli brutality, Ahmad and Daniel were committed to the peaceful resolution of the Israeli/Arab conflict. And I concluded my white-water trip through the Israeli and Palestinian world, somehow empathizing with both parties to the conflict.

Appreciative Learning: I witnessed an exceptional example of appreciative learning consulting with the faculty at Columbia College in Chicago. Having received federal funding, members of the Columbia College community conducted a study of heritage and contributions made by two ethnic communities in Chicago. Although communities with strong ethnic ties have long played a role (often resistant) in Chicago politics, there has rarely been any acknowledgement, let alone appreciation, for the history and cultural contribution made by members of these communities.

Documents were collected from members of these communities, and oral histories were prepared based on interviews with the older men and women who had grown up in these Chicago neighborhoods. Now buried under the freeways that cross Chicago, these poor neighborhoods provide fertile soil for social clubs, family gatherings, and intramural sporting events. Photographs, commemorative plagues, and stories of successful ventures (and contentious disputes) provide multi-faceted portraits of these affairs. Oral histories were filled with humor, tragedy, and candid descriptions of the human condition.

The products of this appreciative initiative were given back to the communities. Video recordings of the interviews were played in store windows; documents were on display in public venues (such as libraries and meeting halls). These products also went "big time," with a large display being installed at the famous Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago.

The documents and video recordings of oral histories were at the Field Museum, displayed under large cardboard representations of the overhead freeways and the massive pillars that supported sections of these freeways. One gained a very clear impression of what it must have felt like to live under the freeway. To find one's neighborhood being cleaved by these massive structures. And to be ignored by those travelers who were speeding by, driving in and out of Chicago on these "high-rise" highways.

I was also fortunate to be briefly involved in another appreciative initiative that had been funded through another government grant. Led by one of my colleagues at a university in Montana, this project involved collecting oral histories from the now-aging "homesteaders" in Montana. These are the "pioneering" men and women who were provided with a plot of land at no cost as long as they lived on the land and made it productive (crops, livestock, etc.) over a specific period of time. While many of the people we interviewed were suffering from some memory loss, we found a way to elicit some quite vivid memories. Specifically, we visited nursing homes and showed a movie called *Heartland* that accurately portrayed homesteading on the American Great Plains. The movie included an actual birth of a horse, as well as dramatic narratives regarding human childbirth and the impact of violent prairie storms.

After showing the movie, we conducted the interviews. Many elderly Montanans who were interviewed recalled comparable events in their own younger life. They shared stories of storms, droughts, abundant harvests, and often troubling isolation. One of the women we interviewed talked about having to give birth to her child without any assistance, for the weather was too challenging for a doctor to travel to her home. One of the gentlemen shared a story about being invited to assist in the "farrowing" (birthing) of horses, cattle, and even children at homes that were located over a wide region in Montana.

As with the Chicago study, my colleague in Montana was engaged in appreciative learning that enhanced a patriotic learning about the courageous actions of the Montana pioneers. Just as members of old ethnic communities in Chicago have been forgotten, the "old folks" residing in Montana nursing homes have been discarded and assigned to a residential care facility where they can be forgotten.

Conclusions

For the democratic spirit of a nation to remain vital, and for citizens of this nation to remain free of alienating tyranny, there can be no ignoring of specific people. The full history of this nation must be honored, including the history of both courage and discouragement, of both acceptance and discrimination, of both endurance and abandonment, and, ultimately, of both hope and despair.

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Chapter Thirteen

Protecting Democracy

We turn to the thoughtful and provocative analysis offered by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (2018) in How Democracies Die to build an even stronger foundation for establishing the conditions needed to ensure a society where true freedom prevails. We will revisit themes already introduced when considering insights offered by Levitsky and Ziblatt.

We begin with Levitsky and Ziblatt's four Indicators of Authoritarian Behavior.

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 i:o accept credible electoral results?

We propose that the Constitution of the United States serves two of the functions of true freedom proposed in this book. First, it provides guidelines for creating and preserving a harmony of interest—at least to the extent that a governmental institution can assist in this process. To a lesser extent, the US Constitution also provides a vision of the future. In our opinion, the Declaration of Independence (and Gettysburg Address) are better able to serve this function, as could 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 ways, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Roosevelt seem to grasp

something about the aspirations of Americans and what the American Dream encompasses.

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 already noted, the differentiation to be found in any organization (or in any dynamic system) must always be balanced by a structure and force that provide integration and coordination of the differentiated units.

To build on what Levitsky and Ziblatt have proposed, we 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 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 the 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 reference 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 more than a short time to a cable TV station committed to a political view that opposes our own. All three of us 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:

He/she is stupid, unfeeling, not patriotic, etc., like all of the other people of his/her kind. Furthermore, these "Other" people are biased. Unlike me. They are close-minded. I am open-minded."

Our 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, one of us [WB] was told that the people running the local store where he 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. As a child, I was also "taught" that I must attend Sunday School or bad things will happen to me (such as being killed by a Jew). I was "carefully taught" not by my very caring parents but by many other adults in this Midwestern American community.

We also must 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. We must be taught that Sunday is the sacred day of the week, not Saturday (as some "believers" assert). "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.

In this account, we see hope and reformation. While we must be carefully taught as children to hate those our parents or members of our community

hate, we can be taught to abandon these childhood biases and fears when we are older. We can learn about and learn from the "Other." There are lessons to be learned in a California Synagogue by those of us who are Christian. Important insights about a sustained commitment to social justice can be gained from an adolescent friend now living in the slums of New Jersey.

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 provide the cheap manual labor that is needed in both an agrarian and an 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, cast 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 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 we 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 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 an individual threat reaction (amygdala-based) as well as a collective threat reaction in our community. Tier Four Polarization reigns supreme. It is usually attended by equally as bad, active, and 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 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 initially focuses on Archie Bunker. A counter-portrayal of a successful and loving Black family is then offered on a major television program. There was then an emerging commitment of Black families to retain their racial and ethnic identity. "White" families found this "Black identity thing" to be a mild threat. This threat increased when a Black family moved 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. A large number of individual acts and decisions lead to collective action. At some point in time, there is a "tipping point." 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 "lifestyle enclaves (Bellah, et al., 1985) and the creation of planned clustering of the elderly in gated communities and unplanned clustering of these elderly citizens. There are also the citizens of wealth who live in their own gated communities and the citizens of poverty who live in the slums and Tenderloin districts of American cities.

Finally, there is the exponentially growing community 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." New "neighborhoods" of the homeless emerge on the streets and parks of America.

We find the same dynamic, in much less dramatic and destructive form, operating at a much more benign level at 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. Anyone still standing is now "out of place." They will soon sit down.

An even more powerful and poignant "wave" took place in Estonia during the time when the Soviet Union was collapsing. As we have already noted, at a major song fest, one Estonian choral 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." As we have declared, this led Estonians to free themselves from Russian rule without anyone being injured or arrested.

All these dynamics are a product of and/or an 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 cherished song from their childhood at the top of their lungs? What if you are one of the many residents of Estonia who were 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 an Estonian or Russian immigrant, 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).

We 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 traitors? 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 polarization builds on a tug-of-war 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?

At one level, the answers to these questions 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 we are 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 passively. As 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) becomes a collective event (in this case, the formation and enactment of a violence-

oriented group). There is a tipping point when a group of desperate (and often dangerous) individuals becomes a terrorist cell. Using the tools of agent-based modeling, we can roughly determine 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 (powerfully and collectively planning and enacting).

One of us [WB] offers an example regarding his consulting work with a specific group of people who were concerned about the behavior of soldiers they were training (the identity of the consultant and client must be kept confidential, given the sensitive nature of the matter being considered):

> My clients had done very careful training of the combatants 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 freshly trained soldiers 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 could now 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" way 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 continue 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 this consulting experience. Levitsky and Ziblatt are correct in warning us about collectively enacted 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 much stronger (using Osgood's framework). The collective planning and enactment of violence comes with the 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 how democracies will die.

As revealed in the experience of consulting clients who work 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 through engagement of several tools introduced elsewhere in this book – specifically confronting people with their own cognitive dissonance, helping them manage polarities, and appreciatively "catching people when they are doing it right." We will have more to say about the use of these tools in the final chapters 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 out of a closed system. In the case of a tyrannical government, this means, as Timothy Snyder suggests, that open communication is curtailed. Actions that might conflict with the government's priorities are 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 completely 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 interconnection of a close governance system with an open finance system is particularly troubling.

Media, Finances, and Loops

We 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 the media, we must ask about the source of funding for these legal threats and control of the media. The funding comes from international financial outreach. While we are seeing some restrictions 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 previously mentioned, 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 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 that exist in conjunction 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 burnout don't seem to be happening in many contemporary governments that are closed and tyrannical.

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 wither or collapse. 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.

Loops and Guardrails

Systems theory and our knowledge of positive and negative feedback loops can also be applied more constructively. We can identify the key role that negative feedback loops play in maintaining an open governance system in a democracy. For Levitsky and Ziblatt, these negative loops are found in gatekeeping and guardrail functions. These are the roles 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 executive and legislative functions. They also may provide legislative or executive oversight of 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, 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 preached a form of populism that appealed to many people (Maddow, 2023, p. 150:

> Long didn't spend much time parsing numbers and statistics in his speeches, but he did have a genius for painting down-home word-pictures to explain the national economy. The Lord, Long insisted, "has called the barbecue. Come to my feast," he said to 125 million people. ["]But Morgan and Rockefeller and Mellon and Baruch have waltzed up and took 85 percent of the vittles off the table. Now how you gonna feed the balance of the people? What's Morgan and Baruch and Rockefeller and Mellons gonna do with all that grub? . . . When they've got everything on the God's living earth that they can eat and they can wear and they can live in and all that their children can live in and eat and wear and all that their children's chldren can use, then we got to call Mr. Morgan and Mr. Melton, and Mr. Rockefeller, and say 'Come back *here*. Put some stuff back on this table *here* that you took away. Leave something else for the American people."

Huey Long posed the potential of using this capacity to control and articulate when mounting a successful bid for the US Presidency during the troubled 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 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 harm the other party or the public that is being served by both parties.

These guardrails, in turn, require what we 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. 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 brinksmanship." This cycle (positive feedback loop) may include budgetary stalemates, failure to pass timely legislation, and directing all communication to outside constituencies (rather than one's fellow legislators). Ultimately, these positive feedback loops produce a collapsed democracy. The tyrant can knock on the door, be welcomed in, and clear up that mess called "democracy."

Friendly Closures

Dramatic examples of how both democracies and tyrannical governments can live and die have been offered. However, the existential threat to both systems is not often readily apparent. As Levitsky and Ziblatt observe, a system's closing can often take place slowly and subtly over time—with a whimper rather than a bang. The three of us have often turned in this book to insights offered by Bertrand Gross (1980) regarding *Friendly Fascism*. 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. 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 in positions of wealth take even more significant steps toward supporting a tyrannical system with closed loops. 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 they are just being "thoughtful" and "pragmatic" leaders of business. The doors are closing.

Before we pronounce the inevitable defeat of democracy and acknowledge that greed and the quest for power and control will always triumph, we can turn to another functional role in democracies that provides negative, corrective feedback. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, p. 78) identify the important role that referees play in preserving 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.

Referees and Democracy

While members of some amateur teams (and teams in schools) might serve as referees at their own games, this is less likely to work when the stakes are high (in professional sports). It seems that the more powerful and energized the loops operating in any system, the greater the need for equally as powerful (and officially authorized) referees. These officials 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 judgments 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 the brakes. Instead, a majority of the judges on this court leverage 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 appears that the role of the referee is both critical and fragile when considering the preservation of a democracy.

Leverage, Hopes and Concerns

We can once again look to system theorists for guidance about how 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 provided by the basketball referee when assigning a technical foul or ejecting a player 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. First, there is the leverage that occurs with a shift in behavior patterns. The referee identifies and calls out a pattern of disrespectful behavior. They may even suggest 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 the extent to which one player can disrupt the movement of another player (basketball).

At a third level, we find leverage embedded in the system's basic structure. It is not just a matter of 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. Fraudulent governing processes must be investigated and thwarted (the negative feedback function provided by referees at this third level). Owners of sports teams 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 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 guide a democracy's operations in a specific society. We 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 explored throughout this book. A referee of democracy must point out when the balance between individual rights and collective responsibility has been disrupted. This referee may be using the polarity management tool introduced later in this book.

In a Polarized Setting

It is interesting to note that polarity is present within all professional sports. 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 harmony of interests among all the participating constituencies in their diverse society. Through their analyses, authors and bloggers such as Applebaum and Richardson can help maintain the ongoing review and updating of this harmony as the world of VUCA-Plus continues to operate in the mid-21st Century.

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. By the way, it might not hurt to have referees at the team owner meetings, representing the interests of their fan base.

Hope and Concern

Levitsky and Ziblatt offer a mixed message of hope and concern, concluding their identification of authoritarian indicators. 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 193Os and Latin America in the 1960s and 197Os. ·

However, there is absolutely no reason for complacency, according to these guides. They point in particular to the 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 198Os 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 violate 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. The 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 full democratization off the political agenda.

Before leaving our two guides with their hopes and concerns, we turn briefly to their subsequent reflections on democracies. These reflections are related to a major tension identified in this book. This is the tension between a collective perspective and the accompanying set of values on one pole, and an individualistic perspective with an accompanying set of values on the other pole.

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 often hold contradictory goals. This process, however, is somewhat eased if a *Harmony of Norms* can be established. Norms concern the way people interact with one another. How do they prefer to communicate with one another, resolve conflicts, solve problems, and make decisions. These are the key components of what has been described as the "empowerment pyramid" (Bergquist, 2003).

Norms are particularly important for those engaged in governance. Leaders of a society should be able to agree on an underlying assumption about how they will relate to one another in an administrative or legislative setting when communicating and while engaging in conflict management, problem-solving, and decision-making. Harmony (and subsequent empowerment) resides not just in skillful engagement of group processes, but also in the establishment of norms to enforce this skillful use of group processes.

The theme of Harmony has appeared in several different forms in this book. We 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. The metaphor of musical harmony is once again applicable. As previously noted, harmony is achieved not by having everyone (voice or instrument) singing or playing the same note or tone. It

is achieved by simultaneously playing or singing different notes. 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 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 the creation of a sublime, harmonically rich sound. Similarly, in the case of the harmony of group norms, we find that actors with differing agendas and styles can share dedication to a single outcome (Sandstrom and Smith, xxx). They acknowledge (often informally) that there is an appropriate way of being with one another that is embraced because of this shared outcome. When these norms are absent, then democracy is in jeopardy. Tyranny lingers close by.

Forbearance

Levitsky and Ziblatt offer an extraordinary insight at this point in describing the role played by norms in maintaining 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 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. The negative loops must be small in number and engaged sporadically. When negative loops are abundant, and these loops are prominent (as in the filibuster rules of the US Senate), 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 between 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 norms aligned with and based on a "harmony of interests," these informal prerogatives of the US federal governance bodies have enabled it to operate rather effectively for many years. At least until recent times . . .

In keeping with the somewhat pessimistic perspective held by the three of us, as authors, 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 (at 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, introduced earlier in this book. As Gregory Bateson (1972) noted, this polarization can escalate the position of both parties or increase the appeasement of one party, which allows the other party to become even stronger and more demanding. While Bateson was basing his analysis on the "primitive" tribes he observed elsewhere in the world, he might just as well have been observing the schismogenetic workings of the contemporary US government.

We observe escalating polarization in the attempts of leaders in one political party to dominate the other party by passing legislation that increases votes for their party and decreases votes for the other party. The appeasement is found in the willingness to tolerate the threat of a filibuster on one issue, while hoping that leaders of the other party are 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 sacrifice a bit of our individual right to disagree with and subsequently block the actions taken by other members of our society. It is tempting to fall back on Bion's assumption that the person (or group) with whom 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 maturely. In psychodynamic terms, we are asked 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 an important collective decision. This decision focuses on 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 was found in the jointly owned and managed pastureland. On this "commons," all members of a community could raise a limited number of cattle so that the common grazing area could 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 enforce their individual rights 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 has taken 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 the allocation of 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 we 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, whom we have referenced, identify the *Grace* that comes from a divine presence or from a shared commitment to community. This grace comes in two related forms.

Collective and Personal Grace

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 found in the early formulation of what is now known as Appreciative Inquiry (Srivastva, Cooperrider and Associates, 1990). We will find personal grace in the articulate appreciation that other members of our society provide us regarding our own distinctive strength and character. We will have more to say later in this book regarding this appreciative perspective as it relates to creating a compelling image of the future.

We re-introduced Paul Tillich's (1948) insights concerning Collective Grace. Tillich suggests that Collective Grace is based on relationships that exist between members of a social system. For Tillich, collective grace is embedded in 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 monographs 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 eco? nomic 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)

Painful Grace

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 evil historically embedded in 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. However, this only occurred because these people and their culture were 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 is often mistaken. 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 an active life 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, forbearance serves critically as a 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 Ziblatt's forbearance.

Commonwealth and Communality

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 Ziblatt exists 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 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, 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 Ziblatt (2018, pp. 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 become collaborative (and we would suggest filled with Collective Grace) (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 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 hand, 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 Ziblatt, 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 Ziblatt, 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 Ziblatt's scenario that one party triumphs (for a limited period). The spirit of the Commonwealth is abandoned. Forbearance is not to be found. Collective Grace dries up.

Viable Future: Vision or Disillusionment

The third tension that we 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"? If we spend time envisioning a compelling future, do we become nothing more than dreamers escaping VUCA-Plus challenges of the mid-21st Century?

In addressing this third tension, we establish a hypothetical setting, using words written by Levisky and Ziblatt. Furthermore, Anne Applebaum is invited to join Levitsky and Ziblatt at our hypothetical table. They deliberate about the future of democracy and envision a future that is compelling yet realistic.

Vision of a Viable Future

We turn first to Levitsky and Ziblatt and ask them about the basis for being optimistic about the future. They offer the following response (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 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, early 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 we contribute our own thoughts. The three of us, as authors, note that substantial

skepticism and disillusionment are found among many people living in mid-21st-century societies. In the original book (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994), strong negative attitudes are evident in the interviews of Estonians following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many contemporary residents of the United States would join this negative chorus when voicing their own skepticism and disillusionment.

Anne Applebaum adds her observation. She notes that skepticism, disillusionment—and downright anger—have existed throughout American history. These negative perspectives have existed at both ends of the political spectrum in the United States. They are often framed within the pronounced political polarization found in mid-21st-century America. Applebaum 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 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 the fragmentation of public media. We all agreed with Anne Applebaum that American society has always been beset by polarization. We also reluctantly agreed that polarization at present contributes to and exacerbates a sense of betrayal on the part of both polarities. Anne Applebaum is invited to describe the source of this polarization and the 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 from 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 voiced 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."

We can imagine Levitsky and Ziblatt agreeing with Applebaum. Her observations are quite accurate and telling. In many ways, this leftish perspective aligns 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 reside in the safe confines of Relativism. These radicals believed that many relativistic academics and social observers were 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 Ziblatt 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 come from relativistic historical accounts (such as those offered by many of our guides) provide essential roadmaps toward constructive societal reform.

Disillusionment of the Right

At this point, our colleagues are asked to turn their attention to concerns voiced by those on the far right of the political spectrum. All three of our guides are relieved to move away from the left extreme to the right extreme. This right-wing disillusionment resides at the heart of the matter when considering 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) specifically identifies one form of right-wing disillusionment that is currently virulent. 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. We note that right-wing sources include not only traditional print-based modes of communication (newspapers, magazines, books) but also digital modes, creating the closed, positive feedback looped system that we 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, joins 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. We should 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, Ziblatt, and Applebaum, we collectively found ourselves pondering an outrageous idea. Does one image of the future have to be destroyed before another one can take root? Must we, at least, be disillusioned with the current offers 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? These questions are addressed in our final chapters.

Ingredients and Prediction of a Viable Future

Bringing our hypothetical forum on the future to a close, we turn one last time to Levitsky and Ziblatt. They are asked why we need to be deeply concerned about the viability of democracy when looking to the future. Furthermore, amidst 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 Ziblatt, 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 re? store 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.

Anne Applebaum (2020, pp.185-186) offers the final word. She is invited 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 coronavirus 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 determine who rules. Maybe fear of disease will create fear of freedom.

Applebaum 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 "libera!" 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.

We thank all three of our guides for reflecting on the nature of the future. We all leave the table, as Anne Applebaum notes, with maddening 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?

Coda: Building a Future When Faced with Frustration

Levitsky, Ziblatt, and Applebaum have provided ample insights regarding the best ways to protect democracy. Yet, are their insights sufficient, given the threats posed since the start of the second Trump presidency? Are the challenges too great for the warnings offered by these social observers to suffice? Our finger might be in the dike; however, are the tides spilling over the top of the dike? At the very least, we might want to look deeper than just the dynamics they suggested, which we have already complemented with some of our own insights and those offered by other social observers, such as Barry Oshry and Heather Cox Richardson.

We will look deeper by introducing concepts related to the psychology of frustration. What occurs when levels of collective frustration are great, as they seem to be today? What can we learn from previous times when frustration levels were high? And are the sources of frustration the same today as they have been at other times in American history (or the history of other countries)? Most importantly, can we possibly build a compelling future if levels of collective frustration are high?

The Nature of Frustration

Some of the same old challenges face us after the shock of the late 2025 election. As we have noted, some unique challenges face us in the near and distant future. We may just have to try harder and become more persistent in engaging the structures, processes, and attitudes needed to build a better, compelling future. However, some of the challenges distort and intensify the challenges we face in confronting an authoritarian regime that is potentially on its way to totalitarian rule. We propose that many of these challenges spring from a state of collective frustration.

Specifically, many of the challenges we face in the Trump era are based on our confrontation of barriers that were not present or were minimal or sporadic prior to Trump's presidency (especially his second term). These barriers are numerous. They consist of many actions that destroy democracy. Such as the blockage of human rights, the inability to govern, the construction of isolationist international policies, and the protectionist stance of our president regarding the enactment of self-serving policies and agreements. The list of blockages grows each day.

We know from numerous psychological studies that barriers create frustration. We race forward, expecting to achieve a goal. We find that the pathway to this goal is blocked. The resulting frustration leads to aggression, regression, fixation, and a pull to escape.

Originating in the psychological laboratories of Yale University, considerable attention has been given to the actions that follow from the cognitive/affective state of Frustration. Based initially on studies of how various animals react to being blocked and become frustrated, the psychological work extended to human experiences and reactions to Frustration. Many of the human-based studies blended the behaviorism of Yale University's Clark Hull with the psychodynamic theories of Sigmund Freud and his followers.

Frustration-Aggression

One of the first observations of the impact of Frustration centered on Aggression. As we noted in Chapter Two, these observations culminated in the presentation of something called the Frustration-Aggression hypothesis (Dollard and Others, 1939). This hypothesis was initially based on laboratory studies. White rats were blocked from achieving their goal (cheese) at the end of a maze. They begin to chew on something (including other rats). A child is brought into the Yale lab. They are prevented from playing with a favorite toy and soon begin beating on a blowup clown with a nearby bat.

The rat and the child become aggressive when frustrated. Most importantly, they become aggressive toward someone or something less powerful than they are. The rat finds a nearby board to chew on that will not fight back or will pick on another rat that is lower in the "pecking order." The child chooses to hit the blowup clown rather than another human being who could hit back. As the adage goes: The frustrated adult arrives home and punches their child. The child, in turn, kicks the family dog.

It is not just dogs that are kicked. Those at the bottom of the human pecking order and those subject to the greatest amount of discrimination have often been kicked and worse. We have already pointed to a very disturbing study conducted by the Yale Group concerning the correlation between crop failure in the American South and the lynching of African Americans.

Though brief in length, the report of this correlation hit hard on implications associated with the frustration-aggression "hypothesis."

As we have noted, when farmers with small plots of land and living a marginal existence find that a sustained drought has produced a dramatic reduction in the amount of cotton they can bring to market. Frustration abounds in the lives of these men and their families living on the edge of poverty. Given this frustration and the accompanying anger about the situation in which they find themselves, who do they blame? Is God or some other divine or natural force responsible for the drought and the crop failure? Perhaps the bankers are to blame who don't provide sufficient financial support or a monetary buffer to "cover" the years of crop failure. Maybe a broader vision should be cast: what about the big-time landowners or even the politicians operating comfortably out of the statehouse? Aren't they ultimately responsible for the financial mess in which the poor farmers find themselves?

Unfortunately, God and nature can't be attacked, and the other potential "culprits" are much too powerful to attack. The farmers must find a vulnerable target—even if this target has nothing to do with the drought or crop growing. Attention turns to the African Americans living nearby. While they might not be doing harm regarding rain and the growth of cotton, they could purportedly "do harm" to the farmer's wife and children. Perhaps even in some bizarre, t theological manner, the black person's presence on earth (representing Satan or some other ungodly force) is cause for God to lay vengeance on the white people. Whatever the reason, there is cause for retribution. Black men must be lynched, so that the white woman is protected, or God is properly avenged. The "black fruit" (to quote Billy Holliday) that is hanging on the trees in an impoverished South is "caused" by the frustration attendant to crop failure.

In Chapter Two, we offered a second example of the frustration-aggression hypothesis in operation. It concerns the drying up of Lake Elsinore in Southern California and the pogrom-like retribution delivered to the Jewish residents of the lake. Once again, the aggression was delivered against those who could not easily retaliate. And we must ask once again, if this hypothesis applies to what is now happening in the United States and to the key indicators identified by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt?

We believe that the answer is Yes. This hypothesis operated in the many fascist states that existed during the mid-20th Century. It was the Jews, rather than the Black men, who were somehow "responsible" for the despair and frustration of the Germans, Italians, Spanish, and Argentinian citizens. Furthermore, we see similar "scapegoating" and aggression operating in many other authoritarian societies today. The Black Men and Jews are replaced by the "Other" ethnic group, religious group, gender, or immigrant population. Aggression attends the "Other", taking the form of not only physical violence, but also restrictions of movement and education, and even imprisonment and death.

The Reign of Huey Long

Most importantly, concerning the focus of this book, something like what has occurred among the tenant farmers of the Deep South and the citizens of Lake Elsinore has occurred on a much larger scale in the United States, much as took place in Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Fascist Spain, and Peronist Argentina. We have already had our own Fascist dictator. Frustration-Aggression was on full display, at a disturbing scale, in the United States. This person quite successfully enacted authoritarian rule within the US borders for an extended duration.

The high-achieving dictator was the aforementioned Huey Long. He ruled the state of Louisiana for many years with a heavy hand. He was only stopped short of ascending to authoritarian rule in the entire USA by being assassinated on the steps of the Louisiana State Capitol. Much like the tenant farmers in the Deep South, many residents of Louisiana were struggling to make ends meet during the 1940s and 1950s. Furthermore, much as in the case of Lake Elsinore, the citizens of Louisiana had someone to blame. Unlike the Southern farmers, the poor Louisiana citizens could blame powerful people because these citizens had someone to protect them. They had Huey Long, who, as a populist, served as a voice and successful advocate for the poor people of his state. These citizens could forgo the established rules of government (Levitsky and Ziblatt's first indicator). As noted by Levitsky and Ziblatt, the residents of Louisiana could reject democratic processes and accept Huey Long's "extraconstitutional means to change the government."

Much like Donald Trump, Long seemed to be "for" the disenfranchised, even though he, like Trump, was really an advocate primarily for his own personal interests. In a speech, Long delivered in the Cajun country of Louisiana (where the famous Longfellow poem of Evangeline was placed), we see this compelling, populist image of the future being conveyed (quoted by Sindler, 1956, p. 54):

> And it is here [at the Evangeline Oak] that Evangeline waited for her lover Gabriel who never came. But Evangeline is not the only one who has waited here in disappointment. Where are the schools that you have waited for your children to have that have never come? Where are the roads and the highways that you spent your money to build, that are no nearer now than ever before? Where are the institutions to care for the sick and the disabled? Evangeline wept bitter tears in her disappointment. But they lasted through only one lifetime. Your tears in this country, around this oak have lasted for generations. Give me the chance to dry the tears of those who still weep here.

It is in this broad-scope commitment to improved schools, roads, and healthcare that Huey Long found his footing in Louisiana (and later American) politics. Like Franklyn Roosevelt (during the frustration-laden years of the 1930s) and Donald Trump (during the frustration-laden days of today), Huey Long offered to meet all unmet needs and to pave a new, prosperous world for the downtrodden.

However, unlike either Roosevelt or Trump, Huey Long brought with him the credibility of being born in 1893 as the eighth of nine children into a poverty-stricken, subsistence-farming family. It is indeed paradoxical that both Roosevelt and Trump were able to voice a commitment to populist policies without having any personal experiences with poverty, hunger, or discrimination.

It is also noteworthy to point out that both Roosevelt and Trump grew up in or near New York City, the "center of action" in the United States. Conversely, Huey Long grew up in a remote region of the United States that was not "really" American in character. In many ways, Long's Louisiana seemed more European than were other parts of the United States regarding both culture and the way politics operated during the mid-20th Century.

We might even dismiss Long's rise to power as somehow a Louisiana anomaly.

However, this dismissal doesn't hold up for very long, given that Huey Long was quite popular throughout the United States before being assassinated. His "Share Our Wealth" program propelled him to a position where he was threatening the re-election of Franklyn Roosevelt. Like Donald Trump, Huey Long was often not taken seriously by either the National Press or his colleagues in the U.S. Senate (to which he was elected after serving as Governor of Louisiana). His basic populist appeal was often underestimated (Sindler, 1956, p. 83):

> Like the national press, the Senate at first was inclined to dismiss Huey as a rustic clown, a Southern oddity in the tradition of Dixie demagogues. It was easy to caricature a man who caricatured himself . . . Most writers thus were misled into viewing Long as a combination vaudevillian and Peck's bad boy. They should have known better. Huey, alone of the rude, plain-spoken agitators of the new South, was founding a personal dictatorship. They soon were to know better.

Although Long worked valiantly for Roosevelt's nomination at the 1932 national convention, very early in his Senate career, he voiced national aspirations that were a portent of his future rivalry with the President. By March, 1932, the freshman Senator had unveiled his Share-Our-Wealth program, whereby "Every man was a king, but no man wore the crown," a phrase adapted by Huey from Bryan's Cross of Gold speech. Share-Our-Wealth was the class program for America's economic salvation and the vehicle for Huey's national ambitions.

We would suggest that there is a cautionary tale that should be taken seriously as we draw important parallels between the political ascension of Huey Long and that of Donald Trump. Huey Long can be considered the "canary in the coal mine" when it comes to warnings related to Levinsky and Ziblatt's first indicator.

It should also be noted that both Long and Trump were subjected to impeachment during their political career. While Trump's impeachment hearings led to his preliminary conviction, and Long's impeachment was unsuccessful, the impeachment of both men energized their support and

further radicalized their own rather paranoid sense of being "hunted." Allan Sindler (1956, p. 67) offers the following account of Long's reaction to his unsuccessful impeachment:

> The failure of the great anti-Long counterattack was most costly! to their cause. Huey spoke grimly of the future, "I used to try to get things done by saying 'please.' That didn't work and now I am a dynamiter. I dynamite 'em out of my path." The abortive impeachment of Long thus served to intensify his class program and his lust for personal power.

The frustration-aggression hypothesis is directly applicable to Huey Long's actions. He is understandably frustrated by being put through the impeachment process. This frustration turns into aggression as he decides to become a dynamiter. Something similar emerged after Donald Trump survived his own impeachment. Trump became a variant on dynamiter: he became a champion of personal retribution—and represented the irrational desire of his MAGA disciples to find their own frustration-based retribution.

Is there something important to be learned here regarding the best ways to block authoritarian rule? Rachel Maddow (2023, p. 310) puts it this way:

> If we're willing to take the harder look at our American history with fascism, the truth is that our own story in this wild, uncertain twenty-first century has not an echo in the past but a prequel. For our turn in history—and for the next time this comes around too—we have the advantage of knowing that which preceded us.

We assume that Rachel Maddow is correct in her assessment and have often offered historical references to past leanings toward authoritarian rule and fascist leadership in America and elsewhere in the world. At the very least, we need to add another item to Levitsky and Ziblatt's list of authoritarian indicators. Perhaps something about legal backfiring might be added: *Legal attempts to curtail authoritarian behavior are unsuccessful and only drive authoritarians to further paranoia and increasingly distorted perspectives, policies, and practices.*

Frustration-Aggression in 21st Century America

We return to our current times. While the frustration-aggression hypothesis has been subjected, justifiably, to considerable criticism and modification, there is still a profound truth: people tend to become angry when they are denied their aspirations and dreams. Furthermore, they do look for a vulnerable victim to punish. We would suggest that the most important modification of (actually an addition to) the frustration-aggression hypothesis concerns the virulence of aggression. Albert Bandura and his associates at Stanford University demonstrated many years ago that we often become aggressive when observing the aggression of other people (Bandura, 1977). Thus, we don't personally have to be frustrated to become aggressive. If folks around us are frustrated and angry, then we are inclined to join in when the mob is preparing to lynch someone.

This contagion might better describe what is occurring in the United States during the Trump era than does the strict frustration-aggression hypothesis. Many of those attacking the U.S. Capital on January 6, 2021, may not have been personally frustrated. However, they got wrapped up in the conspiratorial narrative, found that they could feel the dopamine surge in their veins as they joined with those who did concoct a grievance that justified the January 8 attack in Washington, D.C.

A similar analysis might apply to the current violence initiated by the ICE agents recruited by the Trump administration. While those recruited might have a personal proclivity toward violence, there is also the contagion factor. They witness violence being perpetrated by other ICE agents, get stirred up by the aggressive comments made by the protestors, and are soon swinging their bats, waving their guns, and threatening to retaliate against the protestors.

Given Bandura's observations, we can return to Levitsky and Ziblatt's third indicator regarding violence with some additional insights. We can look not just at concrete indicators of the propensity toward violence (such as paramilitary forces and mob attacks), but also at the psychology of violence that underlies and nurtures these indicators. American society is filled with portrayals of violence. Our movies, television programs, and news media are saturated with the artificial portrayal of violence being used to rectify frustrations, as well as the reporting (often amplified) of "real" violence being engaged throughout America (and throughout the world).

Our world of sports is another important source of aggression that we find attractive. Furthermore, our in-person (or TV viewing) attendance at these events might provide a significant outlet for our collective frustration. The Saturday and Sunday afternoon football games in the United States might serve a function similar to that served by major events at the Roman Colosseum many centuries ago. The frustrations of Roman citizens may have been "managed" by the offering of sporting events, competitions, and even deadly combat or sacrifice at this venue.

Now, in the 21st Century, we are particularly impressed by violence at an early age. Years later, as adults, we must make decisions individually and collectively about engagement in violence. There often seems to be no option other than aggression:

"If we don't strike back right now, then we are encouraging aggressive actions – remember what happened when British Prime Minister Chamberlain appeased Hitler."

"They deserve to be punished, given what they have done! They will learn from the stick, but not from the carrot."

"I have every right to punish this person (my child, spouse); they are under my protection. My individual rights are violated if you try to tell me what I can and cannot do."

Most importantly:

"Everybody else is doing it. So, why can't I!"

The key point to be made is that all of these reasons for engaging in violence are simply "dressing" on a fundamental act of violence that we have vicariously enjoyed and wish to model. Levitsky and Ziblatt got it partly right. However, we must add to their third indicator the observation that aggression is contagious. It is not just a matter of not encouraging violence. It is also a matter of finding ways to discourage aggression (not easy to establish) and replace it with peaceful ways of being in the world (even harder to establish).

Frustration-Regression

Beginning with both the work of Sigmund Freud and Kurt Lewin, there was recognition that under anxiety-filled and frustration-laden conditions, there

is a tendency for human beings to regress. This regression may be a return to former patterns of behavior or ways of thinking and feeling. Regression can also be a retrieval and embracing of old memories. We find regression in the intense admiration for public figures. We project our own aspirations and dreams onto them. Political figures become heroes. Movie stars are assumed to embody in real life the persona they played on the Silver Screen. Parades and major celebrations enthrall us. And we end up equating a symbol (such as a national flag) with the actual values it represents (such as justice for all citizens). We become dependent on the political figure. We live life vicariously through the movie star. We fight for the flag rather than the values it represents. We are frustrated in our daily lives. We regress to a more primitive state of cognition and affect.

Collective regression can be seen in the adoration of Adolf Hitler by many German people. Perhaps there was a similar adoration of Franklyn Roosevelt by the American people. Leni Riefenstahl offers a powerful portrayal of the massive Nazi rally held at Nuremberg in 1934. We are regressively pulled to the pageantry and volume of this rally, much as we are pulled to the powerful declaration of war produced by Franklyn Roosevelt after the bombing of Pearl Harbor ("A Day of Infamy"). The German people were frustrated with their country's loss of power and status following World War I. The American people were frustrated with their country's failure to protect their own interests and those of their allied nations against the terrible "Huns" and "Japs." We favor aggressive action when we are blocked, frustrated, or threatened. We regress to an impassioned state of patriotism when blocked, frustrated, and deprived.

Levitsky and Ziblatt offer valuable insights regarding the focus of regression in many settings when we are denying the legitimacy of political opponents (Indicator Number Two). Under this anti-democratic condition, we move (regress) past viewing people with whom we disagree as the "loyal opposition." In addition to declaring them to be our opponents, we declare them to be "different" from us in some fundamental way(s). We turn primitive in our bifurcation of people into the categories of "Us" and "Other"—the latter being our opponents. We live on Earth. They live on some other planet, be it Venus or Mars. They are aliens. We are "authentic" and owners of all earth-rights.

As Levitsky and Ziblatt might suggest, the bifurcation can "regress" from simply a shutting off of communication with the "Other," to Barry Oshry's stereotyping of the "Other," to make them alien from us. As South Carolina senator James Henry Hammond explained in 1858, society is made up of two groups (Richardson, 2023, p. 195):

> [According to Hammond,} most people were "mudsills," names for the timbers driving into the ground to support gracious homes above. They performed "menial duties" and had "a lower order of intellect and but little skill." A few people made up "that other class which leads progress, civilization, and refinement." They oversaw the mudsill's 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.

At this point, the regression concerns not just the "polarization" of Us and Other, but also the assignment of "Enemy" to our opponents. They hold terrible intentions regarding our welfare and often operate in subterranean, conniving, and conspiratorial ways. Referring once again to Osgood's Semantic Differential, we are in the business of assigning to our opponent the amygdala-based labels of bad (evil), strong (conniving), and active (conspiratorial). Levitsky and Ziblatt have rightfully pushed the polarized landscape of contemporary American politics to a deep level of Dantean Hell. This level makes it virtually impossible to arrive at a Harmony of Interests or collectively build a compelling future that can hold democracy close to the collective heart.

Is this rather negative, and certainly quite dramatic, portrayal of Levitsky and Ziblatt's second indicator overdrawn? We should suggest that this portrayal is not overdrawn. As David Graham has suggested in a recent article in *The Atlantic*, we should be worried "more about the limits of [our] imagination than about the hazards of speculation" (Graham, 2025, p. 22). Given this concern about limits of imagination, we can proceed further in suggesting that the regression now taking place in the United States involves not just demonization of the Other, but also "heroization" of those serving as leaders of each side of the polarization.

We find that the MAGA folks regress in making Donald Trump into a bigger-than-life savior and warrior. To deploy Osgood's categories once

again, President Trump is benevolent (good), strong, and actively working on behalf of his MAGA followers. These followers can overlook Trump's many faults and betrayals. We might add that the "loyal opposition" at present has not identified a "hero." Barack Obama probably was the last person to wear the Democratic Party "crown" with Michele Obama standing alongside Barack as the other half of the Royal couple.

We might further ask: Is regression apparent in the portrayal by Trump and his followers of all immigrants as the "invaders? Does this perspective differ very much from the regressive perspective of many Germans during World War II regarding Jews, Gypsies, and those with nonfascist political viewpoints? How "Nazified" is the MAGA view of those unlike themselves regarding ethnicity, race, sexual preferences, and political views? Is there a pattern of regression among all of us in the United States when we partition our country into the "good guys" and "bad guys"? Even more deeply, does the legacy of slavery haunt us in the mid-21st-century as we confront our VUCA-Plus related frustrations? Is our "social unconsciousness" (Hopper and Weinberg, 2019) filled with the vile toxins of prejudice, isolation, and aggression? Are we justified in extending our imagination this far?

Frustration-Fixation

Considerable attention was directed in the field of psychology during the last half of the 20th Century to processes of problem-solving and decision-making. Of particular interest was a phenomenon introduced by the Gestalt-oriented researchers. This was a process, called *Einstellung* (in German), which involves the establishment of perspectives and frameworks that do not change over time, even if a new, fresh viewpoint is required. Under certain circumstances, we become cognitively stubborn and hold on to old ways of perceiving our world, despite the demand for new perspectives and frameworks.

Frustration is one of the circumstances that produces *Einstellung* (Maier, 1956). Research on laboratory rats (Maier, Glaser and Klee, 1940) and a later tracing of organizational implications (Maier, 1949) pointed to the tendency of both rats and humans to think less clearly when we bump up against impenetrable barriers. When we become frustrated, there is a strong tendency for us to fixate on old strategies in our continuing attempt to somehow achieve the frustrated goal. A widely cited quote that is wrongly

attributed to Einstein is directly relevant to this state of fixation: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

While we find that Levitsky and Ziblatt's focus on forbearance and commonwealth to be inspiring and hopeful, given their predominantly bleak portrayal of contemporary democracy, we also wish to offer a cautionary note, given the propensity to fixate when experiencing frustration. On the one hand, forbearance is founded on an openness to other perspectives, and commonwealth is a desired state of collective support among people with differing perspectives and interests. On the other hand, these collective states can lead not to productive collaboration, but instead to destructive collusion (Bergquist, 2013).

Our seeming "openness" to the ideas of other people might be an attempt to "get along with someone else" rather than searching for a viable version of reality. We are frustrated that our own view is not accepted, so we simply "give up" and "go along." While on the surface this would seem to indicate flexibility rather than fixation, the outcome is one of being frozen into a state of indifference or conformity. When we have given up in a group, there has been the loss of at least one voice in the group—and our departure from interactive participation is often contagious, leading other people soon to "get along" and, in effect, "drop out."

Fixation is engaged in a quite different manner when we are frustrated that the "right" way in which to conduct oneself is not being accepted as the "norm" in a group. The "commonwealth" is not commonly shared, leading to competition among different factions in the group regarding the "norms" of the group. Representatives on each side of the normative polarization become stuck in their position. And the group becomes "stuck" in its inability to determine how best to operate as a functioning body.

Worse yet, the group moves forward without becoming a commonwealth. This leads, in turn, not just to dysfunctional group operations but also to a fixation on specific ways to solve problems and make decisions in the group. Everyone tries harder, becomes increasingly frustrated, becomes increasingly rigid, and becomes increasingly ineffective. There is often a collective flip at this point to one or more of the other frustration-based moves to aggression, regression, or escape. This is not a very pretty picture.

Frustration-Escape

We suspect that the animal sitting in a Yale University maze, staring at a blocked entrance to the reward, would prefer not to get angry, regress, or fixate. Rather, they would prefer to "get the hell" out of the maze. Their preferred means of dealing with the frustration they experience in the maze involves finding a way out of the maze.

One of us [WB] has some experience with animals in mazes. His experience would seem to confirm this frustration-escape hypothesis. Here is his account:

> It was summer. I was asked to do a fellow student a favor. We were both enrolled at Occidental College in the Los Angeles area. My friend was earning his way through college by handling the animals brought in to run the Psychology Department's mazes. My friend wanted to take a two-week vacation and asked me to "babysit" the Guinea pigs who were trained to run the department's mazes. As someone who is "kind" to animals, I decided to bring the ten Guinea Pigs home with me. I built a large temporary enclosure for them and let them roam freely around it. I soon discovered that the Guinea pigs were growing larger in size and were becoming quite frisky. After the two-week vacation for my friend (as well as the Guinea pigs), I brought the lab animals back to the college. It was a disaster!! The guinea pigs began to leap out of the mazes when placed in them. Obviously, they preferred a maze-less environment such as I provided. Escape from confinement in the maze enabled them to avoid the frustration that they inevitably found at the end of the maze (where they would find a barrier to the food). My friend was not very pleased with my "caring" of the lab animals, nor were those conducting the experiments.

As human beings, we also typically do not prefer living in confined areas. Like the Guinea pigs, we prefer the growth to be found in freedom. However, as we have noted throughout this book, this initial "hit" of freedom often gives way to a desire to escape from the freedom. In either case, the preferred option is Escape rather than aggression, regression, or fixation.

As human beings living in the mid-21st century, we are faced with many VUCA-Plus-related barriers to "sane" living. We seek out stability but find volatility. While looking for certainty, we discover nothing but uncertainty. A life of simplicity does not await us. A life of complexity does. There is also the matter of ambiguity. We would like things to be clear, but they often are not. Turbulence plays havoc with quietude and calm, while contradiction is much more abundant than consistency.

Conclusions

Like the guinea pig in the maze, we want to leave this world of VUCA-Plus. We want to leap out of the maze and find our way out of the Occidental College psych laboratory. Having left the campus, we don't know what awaits us. However, we do know that anything is better than the frustration and boredom of bumping up against barriers in the lab. Soon, we are greeted by a showman—a wizard, a healer, a politician. They point the way into a rabbit hole where a life without frustration is to be found. We plunge through the rabbit hole to a wonderland of Serenity. Stability, certainty, simplicity, and clarity (SC^2) are assured, as are calm and consistency. We escape rather than face frustration. Everything is a whole lot better for a while – but at a cost.

This cost can be the loss of any democratic rules (Levitsky and Ziblatt's first Indicator). We are relaxing and living comfortably in our world of Serenity. Suddenly, we have an idea about how our world might be improved. Or we wish to do something different in our daily life. The other generously accepting residents of this Serene Wonderland suddenly become a bit rigid: That is simply not the way we do things around here! If we start entertaining new ideas, then things will once again get volatile, uncertain, and complex. We will have to start living again with ambiguity, turbulence, and contradiction. That's what we left behind out there in that other world.

This is what occurs in the perfect "planned communities" where there is the "right" color to paint your home, the "preferred" flowers to plant in your garden, the "proper" place to store your automobile (not on the street), and the "correct" amount to pay each month for the privilege of living in this perfect community:

> By the way, we would prefer that those "kind of people" find some other place to live. We are not prejudiced but do want to ensure

that our community continues to convey a strong sense of personal and cultural quality. Some people simply don't belong here.

There is another cost to living in Serenity. This concerns loss of civil liberties, which leads to the diminution of our access to valid and useful information (Levitsky and Ziblatt's Indicator Four). The world of Serenity has its own social medium. Messages from the outside world are few in number and heavily "redacted." As the aforementioned Wicked Witch of the East in *The Wiz* declared: "Don't Nobody bring me no bad news!"

Given this restriction on the view that we have of anything outside our wonderland, it soon becomes apparent that we will never be able to leave this land. We are not prepared to face the stark reality of a life filled with the civil liberties that illuminate rather than block out. Our prayers now center on finding this world of serenity somehow to be eternally blissful. For we will never be able to leave it.

At some point, we recognize that we are actually living in a prison and have granted ourselves a life sentence. It is not easy to live with this recognition. Serenity becomes a little less (or a lot less) serene. As Anne Applebaum has observed, disillusionment can set in regardless of one's political perspective. Cracks appear on our prison walls of Serenity. Maybe a "hit" of something will get me through the day . . .

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Section Four

The Architecture of 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 confronting tyranny and the protection of democracy that accompanies it. We will be on the offensive and will move beyond protection. We will be envisioning fragments of a compelling future where true freedom resides. This more proactive step is being taken because we believe that the protection of democracy is more than just the absence of tyranny, just 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 prevails.

The hypothetical forum on the future that we offered in Chapter Thirteen opens the door to the topic on which we focus in this final section of the book. We pull everything together and summarize what is envisioned to be the fundamental ingredients of a viable future for American society—and hopefully other societies in our mid-21st Century world. As noted in our reflections on the forum for deliberations, we are particularly interested in the settings (containers) in which constructive dialogues can be engaged.

The three of us call in one of our guides to assist in designing the container and identifying 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. We look to her guidance in this fourth section of the book when seeking 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.

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 resemble. Thus, a first step in crafting a compelling future is to acknowledge what now exists and why it is no longer (perhaps never was) tenable. Kamila Harris, then 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 ones. We revisit the two possible components of the new image of the future that we 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 where 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 may 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 found in past societies, and those without historical analysis.

David Graeber and David Wengrow propose that we have gotten the history of humanity quite wrong. 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 by the perspectives and practices offered by the Aboriginal societies of the Americas. Early in their account, this anthropologist and archeologist consider ways in which many North American tribes organized and operated their communities. The accounts offered by representatives of these tribes and 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, Graber 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 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. It was now 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 an 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 Lallemant 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

One of us [WB] is reminded of a 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, *Conrak*). WB offers the following recollection:

> 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 Sharon) 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 Sharon's home. A card table was placed in the aisle. 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 strong and engaged sense that all members of a community are responsible for one another.

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

We 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.

A similar policy operates in another North American nation—the aforementioned 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 like 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 single family or clan became too rich or too poor. Honor was bestowed not by accumulating wealth, but instead by giving wealth away.

The Potlatch ceremony was also enacted to honor specific members of the community (through the offering of "coppers"). The Potlatch also acknowledged the coming-of-age of young community members. 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 the 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 Buffett or Melinda Gates) to give away large sums of money they have earned. However, this "exchange" occurs at a much later point in the accumulation of wealth. Those who distribute the wealth have a greater say in how the wealth is distributed. Furthermore, the non-economic components of the exchange processes of Potlatch ceremonies and celebrations are 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 we find very interesting and important. In large part, this is because one of us [WB] participated for many years in a weeklong program that was patterned after this tradition. The following narrative is offered:

> It began with a one-time meeting I helped to plan that addressed the need for coordinated efforts among faculty members in

Western Canadian 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 called the "Potlatch" meeting. A third weeklong program was then held—followed by a 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 were 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, participants at Naramata gained status and appreciation by giving. With generosity and candor, they shared their own perspectives and practices regarding faculty development initiatives engaged 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 remains 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 welcome 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. A group of educators was able to do so at Naramata—but it took hard work and some soul searching. Graber and Wengrow have something to say in this regard. They offer the following summary of how the Wendat ensured social equality and contrast this with the way in which European societies (and in particular French Society) operate (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, p. 54). They rely on the critique offered by a noted Wedant sage (Kandaronk): "the whole apparatus [according to Kandaronk] of trying to force people to behave well would be unnecessary if France did not also maintain a contrary apparatus that encourages people to behave 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, we can reintroduce insights offered by George Lodge, who is certainly not a communist. He is a mainstream 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 formed by people residing in quite different settings from those in North American countries (and most other countries in our mid-21st Century world). Our indigenous ancestors dwelled in a world where there was not a massive population (overcrowding) and where the environment was not being destroyed. We

can't re-create the settings in which those offering Potlatch ceremonies lived; however, we can at least design and offer our own versions of the Potlatch.

We can't easily create a newly envisioned future. George Lodge's communitarian dream is not easily realized. Even an exceptional doctrine such as that articulated in the Declaration of Human Rights, which was formulated soon after the founding of the United Nations, is not enough. As the primary architect of this Declaration, Eleanor 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, we 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 them with a call to action among those who should take some responsibility?

We suggest that responsibility be assumed by engaging in an appreciative process. We can identify moments when elements of the new future are manifest—and when the 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 take place. In alignment with Otto Scharmer's (2009) "learning into the future," we can apply this appreciative learning to our journey into the future.

Transition Point

Perhaps, now is the time for a new collective future to emerge. We might be at a transition point. Some good news may be associated with this potential for change. One of our guides, Heather Cox Richardson, borrows from a comment made by Ernest Hemingway: bankruptcy occurs 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 l 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 and 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. We would add to Richardson's list the profound and existential challenge posed by the COVID-19 virus. We wandered slowly all over the place, trying to make sense of and treat this virus. We 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 World War II.

Even slower and more confusing strategies appeared regarding the massive intrusions of great destructive forces in Africa (such as Rwanda) and the Middle 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 to this point in the 21st Century become a fast, large-scale change as Heather Cox Richardson seems to be suggesting?

Chalice and the Blade

In seeking to further flesh out a viable and compelling vision of the future and distill the essence of true freedom, we turn to our guide, Rianne Eisler, who offers us the vision of a world 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 availability 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 modem history re?ported 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 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 chalice 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 a 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."

We 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 offers the distinctive focus of her book. It is a focus 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 . . . 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 the 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? 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, can

we 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 loss of individual freedom? Ultimately, as we have suggested throughout this book, it is all about finding a harmony of interests and a way to balance individual rights and collective responsibility. A shared, compelling vision of the future is to be secured.

Potential Pathways

How then does 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-threats by many global forces (some being national leaders and others being powerful lone actors).

While our current condition yields doubt about the formulation of a compelling image, 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, we might turn to a systemic insight offered by Karl Pribram, a prominent Stanford-based neuroscientist, who suggested in an informal session that a major change in any system might usually (perhaps always) be preceded by a brief moment of rapid oscillation or "dithering."

We can apply the concept of dithering to Heather Cox Richardson's aforementioned analysis of societal movements between fast and slow. Perhaps the slow phase of a major social revolution is constituted of the kind of dithering and oscillations 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 . . .

In the dithering 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. An old version of this 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 at this moment. The first pathway leads us to denial. We simply stick our heads 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 . . . 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—we turn briefly to another time when American society was fragmented and deeply polarized. This is 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 amid a breakup of traditional cultures and the challenging of long-standing autocracies. In offering this perspective on the past, we continue to borrow Richardson's insights. We also consider 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. Not every man (and certainly not all women) was treated as an equal. 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 America—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 America in the mid-19th Century has been portrayed by Daniel Boorstin (1973), an 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, manifest destiny propelled the Puritans as they left England to find a new world created by God that they could colonize. This theme of manifest destiny, however, is usually associated with

a distinct culture—that of the American West. 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 worshiping 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, the label "tree-huggers" is assigned to them. 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 team 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 American 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 found this characteristic and shared image in the American West. The American West was a good place for refugee from older laws. However, it offered no refuge from the community. For example (Boorstin, 1973, p.19):

> . . . .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. 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 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 appears 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 its offering of gambling). The allure and prohibition of liquor (and today many other mind-altering drugs) certainly fit 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 running 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 portraying a vision of the American future in the midst of fragmentation than with some words offered by President Lincoln:

Abraham Lincoln as an Advocate for Freedom: 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.

Protection of property is crucial to this system, but so is opposition to the accumulation of great 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 control most of a country's money or resources, 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 Beacher Stowe as an Advocate for Justice: At about the same time in American history, other prominent observers of American society—coming from quite different perspectives--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 (Richardson, 2022a):

> 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) 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 must 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's "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, 2022e) comes from Nancy Pelosi on the day when she left the long-held speakership of the American House of Representatives:

> 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) also turns to the vision offered by Joe Biden, our former 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 ind1v1dual 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.

We 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, prioritizing the country over party affiliation, and ultimately setting global equity over national interests. A compelling image of the future must also incorporate Biben'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 dominated the hearts and minds of those who had left the land to establish 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 lives. Fred Polak (1073, 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."

While American society was struggling with the matter of slavery and a new (unrealized) image of a just future was being created, similar struggles were being engaged in other parts of the world. Slavery had become a major issue in many Europeans 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 widespread industrial revolution. God was nowhere to be seen.

A new secular world was proclaimed. A new vision was extolled that was primarily 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 all 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 shifted 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 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 more often portrayed 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.

One distinctive function served by the arts is particularly relevant 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 critics in the arts suggest that being mired in the mud of present-day life leaves one little room for creative expression. Others would say that reality (and reform) requires that we wallow a bit in the mud.

As someone preparing next year's concert schedule in 1854, do we 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 we 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 our bed. Do we savor his rich imagery? Or will it "do us good" if we

pick up a book that portrays a dystopian world? Perhaps we will read a short novel about the dispossessed in our society! Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* is sitting there on our table. Do we absorb ourselves 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 America). 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 a 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 attendees didn't have time in their daily lives to enact this vision. Furthermore, since this vision was 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 our 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. As with Harriet Beecher 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 we 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 again mostly addressing what should NOT be part of a more just societal future. Furthermore, it was easily distorted with paternalistic control of how 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 non-governmental, nonprofit agencies (such as the Salvation Army after 1865).

We find similar operations in Asia. Confucius' philosophy is applied to a collective perspective that honors all members of a community. The traditional Confucian focus on family is expanded to include the broader "family" found in the 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 primarily 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 we 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), shared comments made several years ago at the Brookings Institution by Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor:

> "The world needs an international economic system that works for our wage? earners, 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 long been 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 offered 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 suggest 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 the 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 resembles 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 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 an 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 halt deadly disease, and 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 an image of the future that can be embraced by all nations.

Writing from the perspective of someone from the Netherlands who was immersed in the Cold War of the late 20th Century, Fred Polak (1973, p. 303) had 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.

As Polak (1973, p. 303) observes:

> 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 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 presented in an organization such as the United Nations ever arrive at a vision that is not only articulated (the UN Charter) but also enacted?

The brief review we 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, we will suggest, in the final chapters of this book, ways in which we might collectively come to a vision that is harmonious, balanced, and just.

Coda: A Bigger and Stronger Chalice

While we will offer suggestions regarding the pathway to true freedom in Chapters Fifteen and Sixteen, we can gain a fuller perspective on the challenges we will be facing in discovering this pathway, given the events of 2025. These challenges must be addressed through not just political reform, but also the much broader reform of institutional structures, interpersonal processes, and personal attitudes—in other words, reform of the fundamental culture in which we reside. The chalice holding a compelling vision of the future must be strong and ample in size if it is to serve as a buffer and even a sanctuary protecting us from the alienating and dispiriting forces operating in mid-21st-century societies.

In her presentation of the concept of a chalice, Riane Eisler certainly intended to provide us with a very broad, culturally based chalice. While the concept of chalice (and the related concept of container) has been applied to the establishment of successful psychotherapeutic practices (e.g. Bion, 2023) and organizational operations (e.g. Bergquist, Sandstrom and

Mura, 2023), it must now be expanded back to what Eisler initially intended. It is what Frederick Jameson intended when writing about the structures, processes, and attitudes required to confront what he identified as the "troubling ambiguity" of postmodern life.

The Chalice and a Perceived Present

As one of us suggested in Chapter Six, if the events of 2025 and those leading up to this disruptive year have left us with a post/postmodern condition, then a new set of structures, processes, and attitudes might be required in constructing a viable cultural chalice. We might, for instance, turn to the social observations offered in the December 2025 issue of *The Atlantic*.

It is in this issue that we find David Graham's aforementioned disturbing portrayal of the upcoming 2026 election in the United States. He predicts that the "mayhem" and political manipulations associated with this election will exceed our own dire fears: "I worry more about the limits of my imagination than about the hazards of speculation." (Graham, 2025, p. 22). The fears voiced by Graham range from hackers creating electoral chaos to military intervention, to an extension of Trump's term in office (as noted in another of *The Atlantic* essays: "President for Life") (Luttig, 2025). If Graham is correct in suggesting that what we imagine will occur during the election process is too limited, then we must also assume that our chalice must be particularly strong to protect us from the freezing anxiety and collective angst that would inevitably be solicited by destructive electoral mayhem.

The chalice must be strong enough to address not only the authoritarian proclivities of President Trump, but also the catastrophes associated with this president's policies or lack of policies in certain areas. As one of the other essayists in this issue of *The Atlantic* noted, certain locations in the United States may be uninhabitable by the middle of the 21st Century as a result of climate change (Newkirk, 2025). The "dead zone" identified in this essay may be replicated in the dead zones created in certain poverty-ridden urban neighborhoods and in communities where the "unwanted" and "other" are located. Nutritional, human service, and cultural deserts will be created by the engagement of extreme punitive measures supported by an alienated MAGA populace.

When a psychotherapeutic session involves deep emotional issues, then the chalice (container) associated with this session must be strong. Strict therapist/client roles must be observed, fifty-minute durations must be enforced, and a protected therapy office (sanctuary) must be provided. Similarly, when an organization (such as a hospital) is saturated with anxiety, the specific roles of those in the organization must be enforced, and the distinctive subcultures of the organization must be acknowledged and supported (Bergquist and Brock, 2008). Protective individual and collective chalices must be produced and maintained when an entire society is filled with personal anxiety and collective angst, amplified by the threat of electoral mayhem.

What would these chalices look like? While we will examine these chalices more fully in the remainder of this book, we can suggest at this point that they would provide viable societal structures. Legal and physical protection is provided to those who are most vulnerable, as well as those who advocate for reform. These chalices would also involve processes. They would help people better listen to and appreciate those with different perspectives (David Brooks, 2016) and provide a "safe space" for open dialogue regarding alternative perspectives, policies, and practices. Most importantly, chalices of tolerance, based on acceptance of VUCA-Plus conditions, must be ensured. As we have shown throughout this book, this acceptance is not easy. A scurry down the rabbit hole into Serenity is always an option.

Furthermore, cultural change is never easy. Especially in our present societal settings, in which it is not only hard to view what is happening in Trump's current world, but also what we can expect in the near future. There is even the sense that any viable future is eluding us and that, as Mark Fisher has concluded, our current culture is leading us to the cancellation of any viable future. Our chalice must be even stronger and broader if this is the case.

The Chalice and a Cancelled Future

If this threat of a cancelled future is viable, then we might look to the social observations that Mark Fisher is offering if we are to construct a strong and broad-based chalice. Mark Fisher is an heir to the broad, cultural observations made by Fredrick Jameson (1991). Like Jameson (and Kenneth Clarke), Fisher focuses in his widely cited essay, "The Slow Cancellation of the Future," on the representation of culture in the world of music and the arts rather than either politics or organizational life. For Fisher, there is a

stoppage of time in the world of 21st-century culture (at least in his home country of England), as well as a certain "haunting" of cultural artifacts in our present world.

Cultural Stand-Still: By suggesting that time has stopped, Fisher is pointing to what he sees as the failure of new cultural forms and cultural expressions to emerge in our contemporary times (Fischer, 2014, p. 7):

> Rather than the old recoiling from the 'new' in fear and incomprehension, those whose expectations were formed in an earlier era are more likely to be startled by the sheer persistence of recognizable forms. . . . [I]t is the very sense of future shock which has disappeared.

While Jameson and other "postmodernists" wrote about the pastiche (combination) of late 20th-century culture that was a messy mixture of the old and new, Fisher is suggesting that we are now faced only with the old. Everything today, according to Fisher, is just a remake of the old (Fisher, 2014, pp. 6-7):

> While 20th-century experimental culture was seized by a recombinatorial delirium which made it feel as if newness was infinitely available, the 21st century is oppressed by a crushing sense of finitude and exhaustion. It doesn't' feel like the future. . . We remain trapped in the 20th century. . . In the last 10 to 15 years . . . the internet and mobile telecommunications technology have altered the texture of everyday experience beyond all recognition. Yet, perhaps because of all this, there's an increasing sense that culture has lost the ability to grasp and articulate the present. Or it could be that, in one very important sense, there is no present to grasp and articulate any more.

It is quite understandable that this quite troubling statement has received so much social critical attention, given the audacity of what Fisher states. First, we must recognize that Fisher is setting a very high bar regarding what he considers to be a new and innovative cultural expression. He looks to quite radical artists when identifying new productions. Second, we need to recognize that Fisher, like Jameson, enters his analysis with a strong social/critical perspective that is forged on the anvil of neo-Marxist thought.

Yet, there is much of what Fisher has articulated that relates directly to the challenges we face in the world of retro Trumpian pronouncements and perspectives. We are living in a world filled with old ideas, now out of date. Nothing new is present. There is only rehashing of ideas and reactions against ideas on both sides of the political spectrum. It seems that we not only prefer the simplicity of messages distilled on a social posting, but also the repetition of messages with which we are already comfortable. It might also be that the rehashing exemplifies the state of Fixation that we identified in Chapter Thirteen. The tendency to stick with old, outmoded ideas (*Einstellung*) might result from pervasive Frustration. If we live in a frustrating world where all of our aspirations and dreams are blocked, then we might get cognitively and emotionally stuck.

It is hard to create a compelling future when we have no present and only a repetitive past.

Cultural Haunting: Fisher introduces another provocative theme in his assessment of a future that is lost. Making use of a term, "haunting", that was first offered by Jacques Derrida, the crown prince of obscurity, Using this term to provide a much clearer analysis then was offered by Derrida, Fisher (2014, p. 18) speaks of "hauntology" as: ". . . *the agency of the virtual*, with the spectre understood not as anything supernatural, but as that which acts without (physically) existing."

Fisher goes on to distinguish between two forms of haunting: the *no longer* and the *not yet*. Fisher goes on to suggest that:

> The first refers to that which is (in actually is) no longer, but which remains effective as virtuality . . . The second sense of hauntology refers to that which (in actuality) has not yet happened, but which is already effective in the virtual.

We see this "hauntology" abundantly present in the words and actions of Donald Trump and his minions. There is not only the "haunting" presence of very old racial and ethnic grievances, outmoded economic theories, and distorted international policies that are still alive "virtually" in the rhetoric of the White House and MAGA minority, but also the "haunting" presence of economic, political, and military threats that have not yet been realized but still impact the way our government operates.

Fisher takes this haunting even further by turning to a thesis we referenced as the start of this book. It was Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History* (Fukuyama, 2006). Fisher suggests that while history (and alternatives to capitalism) has not ended, the lingering (haunting) assumption about this end is still present. He deploys the label "capitalist realism" when reflecting on the haunting assumption that capitalism is now dominant in our world. Furthermore, we are haunted by the seeming disappearance of communism, which has not disappeared but taken on various forms, as both resistance to dominating capitalism and as an economically thriving form of state capitalism.

It is hard to envision a compelling future when we are haunted by what is no longer present in our society and when we are fearful about what could be present in the near future. It is difficult to be visionary as an individual citizen or organizational leader when filled with anxiety about that which doesn't really exist. It is even harder to be collectively visionary when our culture is haunted by both that which is no longer present but still effectively virtual, as well as that which has not yet happened, yet is already effective in an imaginary state.

Mourning of a Loss: In addressing the matter of hauntology, Fisher considers a distinction drawn by Sigmund Freud (1917/2017) between mourning and melancholia (Fisher, 2014, p. 22). While both conditions result from a sense of loss, mourning refers to the slow, painful withdrawal of libido from the lost object, while melancholia refers to a condition whereby libido remains attached to what has disappeared. In non-psychoanalytic terms, we might consider mourning to be associated with a sense that something has died and will never return; conversely, melancholia is associated with a lingering sense that something lost will sometime return.

As Fisher has indicated, this distinction is important to consider when facing the loss of any compelling future. We mourn the loss of a future that will never return, whereas we fall into a state of melancholia when waiting for a future that is never likely to be found. Fisher (2014, p. 22) suggests that haunting:

> . . . can be construed as a failed mourning. It is about refusing to give up the ghost or—and this can sometimes amount to the same thing—the refusal of the ghost to give up on us.

The primary ghost to which Fisher devotes attention is the aforementioned capitalist realism. This is a state of contemporary culture that is based on the assumption that capitalism is the given in our society. In a previous book, Fisher (2014, 17) observes that:

> Over the past thirty years, capitalist realism has successfully installed a 'business ontology" in which it is simply obvious that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run as a business.

While contemporary communication technologies and, we would suggest, Trumpian perspectives and practices have destroyed or at least called into great question the viability of capitalist realism, the ghost of capitalist realism continues to haunt us—especially in the many forms of culture that pervade our daily lives.

Fisher (2009, pp. 12-13) offers a penetrating example of this cultural haunting:

> A film like Wall-E . . . performs our anti-capitalism for us, allowing us to continue to consume with impunity. The role of capitalist ideology is not to make an explicit case for something in the way that propaganda does, but to conceal the fact that the operations of capital do not depend on any sort of subjectively assumed belief. It is impossible to conceive of fascisms or Stalinism without propaganda—but capitalism can proceed perfectly well, in some ways better, without anyone making a case for it.

Fisher suggests that if capitalism is a given, then even the criticism of capitalism is driven by consumer-based, capitalist strategies. We want anti-capitalist books to sell well at bookstores. And, today, we also look for sales on the internet. Money is required if we are going to finance our campaign against making money. Fisher offers a paradoxical (and painful) observation at this point that has also been made by other astute media critics (Fisher, 2009, p. 13): "Donald Trump might be correct in suggesting that the liberal media is dependent on him for the sale of their magazines, subscription to their cable channel, and sale of their books".

As Fisher concludes, we don't need to promote capitalism if it is the given. Even in an era when we are witnessing the dangerous distortion and extreme engagement of capitalism, the reporting on this distortion and

engagement is being financed by those capitalistic enterprises that are colluding with President Trump and his minions. Fisher might be painfully correct in observing that (without success) we will mourn our loss of an ability to confront and defeat capitalist realism.

We declare Trump and the MAGA movement to be anti-democratic and anti-humanity, yet in our struggle against these forces, we are giving them visibility and their own anti-elite credibility. If we suggest in any way that capitalism is "bad" and that there is an alternative to this form of society, the label of "socialist" or "communist" will be assigned to us. And our analysis will be totally dismissed. It is hard, if not impossible, to forge a new compelling future that diverges in any way from capitalist realism if we remain haunted by this realism.

*Melancholia Regarding the Future That Will Never Be***:** Fisher (2014, p. 23) introduces not only the mourning of a liberal cause that is drowned in the lingering presence of capitalist realism, but also the melancholia that resides in a belief that the old might not have been great, but it was certainly better than what we now have. This form of *Left Melancholia* is based on a stance of resignation:

> Although they weren't perfect, the institutions of social democracy were much better than anything we can hope for now, perhaps the best we can even hope for.

Fisher (2014, p. 23) quotes Wendy Brown, who has written about Left Melancholia:

> [I]it is a Left that has become more attached to its impossibility than to its potential fruitfulness, a Left that is most at home dwelling not in hopefulness but in its own marginality and failure, a Left that is thus caught in a structure of melancholic attachment to a certain strain of its own dead past, whose spirit is ghostly, whole structure of design is backward looking and punishing.

This form of melancholia also seems to have been on display in the pronouncements made by one of the characters in Olga Tokarczuk's (2024, p. 204) *Empusium*:

> I, my dear sir, believe that democracy is a sham system. It always has an element of theater, and inherently tends to bring out a strong

> leader who will push toward building an autocracy. Fortunately, outstanding, talented individuals are always going to be born who will not find a place for themselves within a democracy; at most, they will take advantage of *its* mechanisms to assume the lion's share of power and subordinate the democratic community to themselves. That is how it works, such is the law of the development of societies. Therefore democracy is a transitional system, impermanent by nature. Ours is a hierarchical world, so it was established by God. There is no clearer confirmation of this hierarchy than that recorded in Genesis."

Winner of a Nobel Prize in Literature, Tokarczuk might be conveying some of the Left Melancholia to be found in her country (Poland), where the post-Soviet dream of a fully liberating democracy has not been fully realized. This melancholia might be particularly prevalent among those creative artists, such as Tokarczuk, who wish to convey their own distinctive and creative vision without restriction.

We may be witnessing this melancholia in the pronouncements of some American left-wing critics that traditional democratic institutions might no longer be viable, especially given the polarizing impact of social media. They would suggest that Donald Trump has been the canary in the mines, signaling to all of us that we need to restructure our society. We weep the demise of our mediocre democracy rather than envisioning how it might be improved.

Fisher also introduces a second form of melancholia that he labels *Postcolonial Melancholia*. While this second form might be specially aligned with the British society in which Mark Fisher resides, it certainly is aligned with a comparable form to be found in the ghost of American slavery. Fisher (Fisher, 2014, p. 24) quotes another social observer, Paul Gilroy, who describes the melancholia associated with the avoidance of a painful societal past (in this case, colonial occupation):

> . . . [I]t is about evading 'the painful obligations to work through the grim details of imperial and colonial history and to transform paralyzing guilt into a more productive shame that would be conducive to the building of a multicultural nationality that is no longer phobic about the prospect of exposure to either strangers or otherness.'

Once again, Fisher seems to have identified a theme that is directly relevant to both American and British society. If melancholia concerns a future that will never be realized, then this sense of loss can be assigned to an American perspective that we will always be haunted by our history of slavery and racial abuse. We also have our own version of colonization in our history of the invasion of the American continent and the existing indigenous people (Native Americans) by the European settlers. It is indeed ironic that a war is being declared against the "invading" population of Mexicans and Central Americans, when it is the Americans from the United States who "invaded" and colonized the Hispanic populations of the American Southwest. Recall that much of this region of the United States was once part of Mexico . . .

This second form of melancholia is particularly concerning at present, for it is widely acknowledged that colonialism is closely aligned with fascism. It might even be appropriate to suggest that fascism is simply colonialization directed inward toward the citizens of one's own country. The ghosts of American colonialization of the indigenous American population could be used to unconsciously justify the fascistic "colonialization" of American citizens. Much like the residents of African countries and pre-European America, we find that contemporary Americans with and without citizenship are being denied their rights and handled in a dehumanizing manner.

Furthermore, Donald Trump's prevalent racism and anti-immigrant sentiment become confirming evidence that American society is stained by and perhaps even saturated with a toxic mix of racism, social-class discrimination, and entrenched white upper-class power. Ghost swirl around and haunt the chambers of the American capital, producing a melancholia regarding unsolvable societal problems associated with race, ethnicity, and many other forms of discrimination. It is hard to envision a compelling, humane future when the table around which caring collaborators gather is covered with blood and when ghosts of past abuse hover over the proceedings.

We offer a third form of melancholia recently introduced by Colette Shade (2025). Seeming to build on the critique offered by Erich Fromm (1955) in the 1950s regarding American consumerism, Shade describes a tendency for Americans of the 21st Century to have become alienated from one

another (meaner, more violent, more childish), as well as more materialistic, racist, and vindictive as a result of the failure of a Y2K vision of the future to never be realized. The "end of history" declared by Fukuyama was never realized. The collapse of authoritarian regimes never occurred. And there is unceasing violence. Shade suggests that for the Millennial cohort (of which she is a member), the unrealized faith in a new future was replaced by a more tangible faith in consumerism.

As Shade declares in the subtitle of her book, we have been forced to face a "future that never was." Led by privileged adolescent and young adult populations, who faced abundant lies at the turn of the century about the future of American society, an obsessive focus on consumption would seem to be driven by a melancholia associated with the recognition that this bright future will never be realized. Much as we are inclined to go on a buying spree after disappointment in our job or love life, we might be going on a collective buying spree as a result of a *Y2K melancholia*.

Conclusions

Given Mark Fisher's observations, how might we redesign our personal and societal chalices to meet the distinctive challenges to be found in his hauntings? Once again, we will be offering multiple suggestions in later chapters; however, it is worth noting at this point that Fisher's chalice is more psychological than those suggested by Eisler or by ourselves earlier in this coda. Chalices that protect us against ghosts are much harder to design than those intended for "real" challenges. As Freud (1917/2017) noted, psychological containers that block or at least buffer the intrusion of mourning and melancholia are elusive and often thwarted by the sheer intensity of accompanying emotions.

What we can do is openly acknowledge that something has been lost; however, something new can be gained. We can focus on the lessons to be learned from the loss and assume agency for how this learning can be applied to a new, compelling future. What, for instance, has Trump taught us about the vulnerability of our democratic system? His actions have been publicly visible; they have not just been spoken. Actual changes in our system have been made. These changes can be reversed. The old system can be restored. Better yet, we can create something new to replace when he has engaged, having learned from Trump about the vulnerabilities in the old system.

It is one thing to reform what someone else has said; it is quite another matter to reform what they have done. Words are ghostly and often hard to eliminate. They linger and "haunt" us. We can often scare away ghosts by taking action and learning from this action. At a personal level, we can become reflective practitioners (Schön, 1983), testing our new ways of being in the post-Trump world. We can learn from what we have tried (successfully or unsuccessfully). At a collective level, we can formulate a new policy and set of program initiatives that are tangible and therefore measurable. As we note at several points in this book, there is potential engagement of action research, whereby new ideas are tested out, learning is engaged, and reform of the presenting idea occurs.

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Chapter Fifteen

Architecture of the Future

Visions of the future must be frequently renewed, reimagined, and revamped. We must serve as architects in our envisionment and building of this future. In this chapter, we 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—amidst the conditions of VUCA-Plus. We provide even more detailed guidance in four attached appendices, focusing on each of the six VUCA-Plus conditions.

The Unique and Potential Challenges in 21st Century Life

We 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. We do not need to return to them at this point. We 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 makes the establishment of true freedom 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). Although their futuristic projections are now somewhat outdated, they remain concerned about potential events that may occur several years in the future. Their projections are still relevant. We also incorporate some of the futuristic guides referenced earlier in this book, as well as offer our own reflections on both expected and unexpected events. We couch this brief analysis of 21st-century challenges within the dichotomy previously provided in this book between an external locus of control and an internal locus of control.

External Locus of Control

Some external events 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 more anchored in this appraisal of big external events. However, John Matson did suggest that we could find a way to communicate with extraterrestrials (or they find a way to communicate with us). George Musser wrote about the discovery of a fourth dimension and this discovery's impact on all 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. We would add to this disturbing list the potential, catastrophic eruption of the volcano that resides beneath the large caldera in Northwest Wyoming or the eruption of a 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 imminent. However, each of them could be used to justify the imposition of temporary martial law or even used as a 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 when 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 outcomes by authoritarian rulers.

There are also more positive events to be identified. Thomas Friedman (2007) has famously identified a flat earth of extensive communication and interaction between people from all members of the global community, though Friedman (2008) later wrote about a world that is both hot and flat. There is also the counternarrative offered by David Smick of a world that is curved and dangerous. We 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 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 contains those who believe that we will find technologists to solve many of our problems or will make scientific discoveries 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 geoengineering. 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 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 shift. Several even

broader geo-engineering strategies are reviewed by Benjamin Twining (2024) that concern the broader problem of excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, which contributes to global warming. Twining focuses in part on the iron fertilization of the ocean. This would encourage the growth of microscopic algae, which in turn eat carbon dioxide. Having consumed a large amount of this gas, they sink to the ocean floor.

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. They can place these agents and parameters on a modeling platform that identifies 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. Bioengineering initiatives are found in the field of genetic engineering. They involve the use of artificial tissues, organs (or organ components) to replace damaged or 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 currently improves language use, guides our cars, and provides 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 possibility 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 Futurist camp. These are the scientists and environmental advocates who attend 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 favored by 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 environmental 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 prospect of global environmental collapse.

As we turn to our SA authors, we find that David Biello describes the impact that 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). Jay Forrester and his system dynamics colleagues provided much of this clarity, 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 we have already mentioned, these computer models 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 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 we 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? What about those 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? We are about to provide some guidance in this regard (relying once again on our guides). However, before doing so, we introduce some cautionary notes regarding what we have labeled "leaning into the future" and what our guide, Otto Scharmer, has labeled "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. We turn once again to the wisdom offered by two of our guides: Wilfred Bion and Fred Polak.

Bion's Paradox

As we 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 of a group and its leader(s). One of these important points concerns the point at which a group and its visionary leader actualize this vision. As architects, we stand before the building we have designed and helped to construct. Now what? A beautiful city on the hill that has been envisioned for many years has been established. Waters of equity and justice are flowing down to the sea from our city. Eventually, these waters quench the thirst for equity and justice shared by all other citizens of our world. 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 effectively use biotechnology to extend the human lifespan. 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 openly and genuinely with people who are quite different from ourselves?

Do important trade-offs come with a perfect city? Is there any room for deviance? One of us [WB] spent a fair amount of time teaching in the city-state of Singapore. In many ways, this is a perfect city. WB offers the following account:

> I noticed one man living on the street [in Singapore]. 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 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 our 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 fought over the past century, there is also a sense of insecurity. 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.

An additional challenge 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 our own work as consultants (to organizations) and coaches (to leaders), we 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? Perhaps we can 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 in favor of a higher-order set of goals. We have found a way to bioengineer 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 our ocean floor is littered 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. One of us 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 a medical specialization. These remarkable women had achieved everything they had originally set out for themselves. However, we found that the theme on which they wanted to work concerns their regrets. They had set aside many priorities for career success. Many had never had the "time" to marry or have children. These women often felt lonely and were uncertain and anxious about their lives as they approached retirement. To achieve our dreams, we often set aside important parts of a "normal" waking life. Furthermore, our future is confiscated when we have been successful. We find ourselves living uncomfortably beyond our dreams.

Finally, there is the matter of a future vision that is never actualized. According to behavioral scientists, regret is often a stronger emotion than loss; however, the latter can still be quite powerful. We hate to lose, especially when this loss comes after expending a large amount of time, energy, and money. When we have been unsuccessful, our future becomes problematic. It disappears or fades away. We finally realize that this future will never be achieved. We find ourselves living uncomfortably without our dreams. 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 bioengineering 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 assigning 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 about 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 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 become vulnerable to this future, whether it is realized or not 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 matters of control, and 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 have a physical location. They might be doing fine when envisioned in theory. However, they shrivel away when realized – or even just hypothetically located in physical space.

Polak (1973, p. 225) goes even deeper in proposing this challenging dilemma. Using 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 ail images of the future. This puts an end to ail 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, despite its shell of absolutistic dogma.

An alternative auto-destruct and auto-correcting dynamic is operating in the 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, given this pessimism regarding the human condition, Hobbes identifies a corrective dynamic that can also be found in human societies. We 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.

We 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, we would suggest that human systems operate as polystatic entities (Bergquist, 2026). There is no 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 more appropriate and sustainable balance between individual rights and collective responsibilities. A new search for harmony of interest gains central importance. Differences in values along with differing perspectives and practices are set aside, at least temporarily, in favor of the commonwealth and the community of Grace.

There is no built-in time bomb if the polystatic system is continually adjusting its image of the future. As we mentioned about "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)?

We specifically propose that collaborative ventures and future envisioning require the knowledge of a social architect (structural expertise), the skill of a team facilitator (process-related expertise), and the 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. The effective functioning of a project, organization, or society requires 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 "snapshots" of the organization. The second dimension (process) provides guidance regarding 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 aforementioned Empowerment Pyramid. Critical interpersonal functions, such as communication, conflict-management, problem-solving, and decision-making are incorporated, hierarchically, on this pyramid (Bergquist, 2003).

The third dimension (attitude) identified by Watson can't be seen or viewed either as a snapshot or a movie. Attitude is felt but not seen. As we have already noted, Chris Argyris and Don Schön (1974) offer a comparable distinction between "espoused theory" (what we say) and "theory in action" (what we do). Attitude is inferred from how 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."

Attitudes are displayed in the way members of an organization or society feel about working within 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. We begin with structures that enhance the recognition and use of collective expertise.

Structures that Provide a Pathway to True Freedom

At one level, the structures we need relate to the government we have established, the rules, policies, and budgets we have approved, and the ways in which we vote for this government, these rules, policies, and budgets, and the people who will oversee and help to implement what we have chosen. As many American political figures on the left (and even some on the right) have recently advocated, substantial rebuilding of our government will be required following the Trump presidency.

In some ways, as already noted by us, the Trump presidency has taught us a great deal about the safeguards that currently are not present in our government, and about the balance of power between the three branches of

our federal government that we have always taken for granted. Perhaps of greatest importance is the protection of voting rights in the United States, so that all members of our nation can be "at the table" and allowed to participate in the voting process.

Protections

Several years ago, Carol Anderson (Anderson, 2018) prepared a comprehensive review of the ongoing status of voting rights in the United States. She specifically focused on the "one person, no vote" status of the American voting system that existed in 2018. This disturbing condition has gotten worse under the second Trump administration. Anderson concludes her review by pronouncing the need for Americans to "warrior up" (Anderson, 2018, p. 159) in addressing this condition and identifies a large number of initiatives mounted throughout the United States in recent years. She concludes her book with the following statement (Anderson, 2018, p. 195):

> Without the protections of the Voting Rights Act, American democracy remains imperiled. It is clear that far too many policymakers believe that the right to vote is something to be earned-after, perhaps, paying a modern-day poll tax, or walking miles to the nearest polling station, or standing in line for hours to cast a ballot. It's also clear that, with the gutting of the Voting Rights Act, a major legal and political paradigm shift has occurred. The responsibility for upholding the right to vote has been lifted off the broad shoulders of the state.
>
> This responsibility has been placed squarely on the backs of the individual citizen. States apparently don't have the time to find an accessible polling site, yet Native Americans were given just a few weeks to establish a physical street address if they wanted to vote. Georgia can use a racially discriminatory registration system to put citizens in electoral limbo, but it's the American who must drag a treasure trove of documents to the polling station, hoping that one will prove their right to cast a ballot.
>
> In 2018 [and now in 2026], the people and civil society, therefore, had to "warrior up" and fight an arguably wealthier, entrenched, and more powerful opponent. If they hadn't exclaimed that "we are

> the defenders," there wouldn't even be a hope of a United States of America in 2020 [and in 2027].

Obviously, many of the structural changes required when clearing the way for viewing (let alone joining) the pathway to true freedom relate to the matter of governance. They begin with voting rights but continue with the many changes identified in this book.

There is another level at which structural changes must be made. Much as we must address the micro-skills that can make a leader effective in addressing the challenges of the Trump administration and, more broadly, the conditions of VUCA-Plus, we must consider micro-structures at the team, organization, and community levels that will make these social systems effective. The first of these micro-structures is the composition of systems formed to fight the battle. 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 them in many settings, especially in the organizations with which we work and the communities in which we live.

The second micro-structure relates to the type of system being formed. We 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 heartfelt societal structures in many ancient civilizations. Two of our often-referenced guides, Graeber and Wengrow identify these special settings existing during specific seasons among many aboriginal tribes in North America (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021):

> 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.

This same duality of structures operates in contemporary times. There is the traditional, hierarchical structure that is engaged 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 (Graber 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 Innuit, 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 we will also mention shortly, the Potlatch ceremony served another critical function: it enabled

wealth to be distributed equitably among tribal members. This was quite a multi-purpose collateral organization that contrasted sharply with the "normal" hierarchical functioning of the Kwakiutl.

Sanctuaries

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.

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. 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 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, a small corner of our home is designated informally as our sanctuary. Or there is an altar with a crucifix, or a puja table in India holding flowers, incense, and a picture. A prayer window provides a view of the garden. Sometimes it is a time and a ritual, like evening prayers for the Jew or one of the five prayer times for the Muslim. Sometimes it is a specific 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 sufficient 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 new forms or old recovered forms of sanctuary. A future study of any society may reveal cycles involving the renewal of old forms of sanctuary and the invention of new forms. There is 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 present.

What Sanctuary Does: The need for sanctuary seems to reside in 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 a sanctuary when it is found?

First, sanctuaries enable us to stop, hide, get away, and rest. We all need to stop. We need to stop physically, mentally, emotionally, and perhaps spiritually. Most animals seem to devote considerable time to 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 a refuge 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, hospitals still have distinctive separate rules. 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 of defeat. That is where you go to lick your wounds so that you might 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 find a sanctuary where they can

regroup. While their defeat or firing provides an opportunity for grieving and regret, it can also be a place for renewal and reinvention.

Third, sanctuary enables us to find our deep center and reorient to our own deeper compass again. At the heart of a sanctuary for many people is the sense of a place, time, or situation where the conditions of ordinary living are temporarily suspended. This differentiates sanctuary from all other domains 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, and empowerment.

In a sanctuary, there is a real possibility for renewal and healing at a deep level: nurturance, body, mind, interpersonal, spiritual, and 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, and envisioning oneself in new possibilities. There is a possibility 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 outer and then returning. There is a close relationship between sanctuary and learning. We have identified sanctuary as refuge. Yet, sanctuary can also introduce challenges and learning. Learning occurs both within the context of what is to be acquired and what else is to be acquired apart from the intended part. One must have direct experience, but also reflection from a place of disengagement. The place of disengagement is a temporary sanctuary.

A key point is that 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 enable not only the presence of difficult issues but also resources 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. A challenge occurs in the process of engaging an issue. Support often means the provision of physical, emotional, social, or intellectual resources. A challenge accrues in small, manageable increments at a speed of assimilation and accommodation with which the learner can 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, the 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 place 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 in a single animal family or species, there are times and places, seasons and locations, when animals of the same species will not hunt or kill one another. 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. 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, healing, or transformation. It is 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 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 society in our 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 unneeded 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 a sanctuary. Team sports provide an opportunity for collaboration, reflection, and skills-acquisition in a safe and supported environment. They provide "play space" and align with the human proclivity for play (*homo ludens*). 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, solitude, and reflection. Much 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 years of a lifetime. Only time alone can provide a deep and intimate relationship with the Self and all that is. Only time in the community allows us to hone our sense of self to a mature level of application and service. Only alone can you hear yourself. As Ken and Mary Gergen (Gergen and Gergen, 2004) have noted, only in community can you hear others. The two can become one.

Joseph Campbell (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 in a sanctuary). There, they can face their real self and come 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 return in a deeper state. We are oriented to

our own true North Star. A mature life (and a mature society) requires this altered state.

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 *Tai Chi*) or walking, hiking, or running in 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 controversial. It requires 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 nurtures 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.

It is in conjunction with finding the right people and establishing the right settings that sanctuaries are of greatest benefit when seeking to find the pathway to true freedom. We need micro-structures occupied by nurturing people to build trust. And the micro-structure of an appropriate setting to ensure that this trust is warranted. And it is in the establishment of sanctuaries that we allow ourselves to dream about the pathway and find the motivation and sense of renewal to potentially begin this personal and collective journey to true freedom.

Processes that Provide a Pathway to True Freedom

Many process-based interpersonal and group tools and strategies 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 is a specific set of process-based tools and strategies that are particularly effective in facilitating collective expertise and incorporating 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 is founded on a willingness to engage with one another with mutual respect. It involves a mutual search for distinctive competencies and strengths (areas of expertise). With a view to helping each party fulfill their aspirations and potential. At first, this simple set of statements may seem naive and idealistic, but at its core, they hold the promise of collective expertise.

This perspective takes several forms and has diverse 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 enable this understanding. We offer a paraphrase of what another person has said so that we might not only benefit from what they have said but also gain 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 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—through active listening—then we are "valuing" what they have to contribute. When we fully appreciate our colleague's unique viewpoint 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, understood, and valued our colleagues 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 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 shown when creating conditions that allow people to "do it right." And exhibit all 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." We 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 not only in the processes being engaged but also in 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 one another by seeking to understand each other, through valuing each other, and through being attentive and thoughtful in acknowledging all 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 building an enterprise with collective expertise. We grow to appreciate our collective effort by investing it with optimism. We embrace both Personal and Collective Grace. We invest a sense of hope in our graceful lives. This is a sense of hope for 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 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 a reconstructed narrative of the past, the conversations are directed toward constructing a new narrative concerning the future. While we appreciate what has been successful in the past, we don't dwell on the past with nostalgia. Instead, we continually trace 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 potential of people working within this setting. Even in a setting possible competition, appreciation transforms envy of the other person's expertise into learning from this expertise. Personal achievement and individual contribution of expertise are 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 when 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 realizing the inherent potential and uncovering latent strengths rather than on identifying 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 a 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 bring about a search for common understanding, non-judgmental acceptance, and potential integration of diverse perspectives and accompanying practices.

Yet another paradox is found in the engagement of this appreciative strategy. A culture of appreciative diversity 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 an era of diversity featuring significant differences in vision, values, and culture among people participating in collective ventures. (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, attitudes concern the way we see the world in which we live and work. Our attitudes direct the narrative we construct 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 we have already noted about 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 contrasts with an objectivist framework that was prevalent during the modern era. It is based on the assumption that reality and "facts" can be established and confirmed. The emergence of a dynamic constructivist perspective represents a revolutionary revision in the way 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 themselves reality. They are not just a reflection of reality. The inside and outside of the cave are the same thing. The cave doesn't exist as an independent entity.

Narratives about Our Time and Our Self: We are often distant from many important events that have impacted 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 experiencing them.

Language itself becomes a 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 a difference does exist, for the narratives and conversations are not just *About* experiences; they *Are Themselves* experiences. This sense of a constructed reality, reinforced by narrative and conversation, is a starting point for dynamic constructivism.

The key point about dynamic constructivism is that each specific conversation itself is a reality. Shared narratives and language are where we actually meet - self and others, self and society, self and shared cultural narratives. 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 suggests that our childhood stories, 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 are 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. This personal construction is conveyed through stories we tell about ourselves and

perhaps stories we inherit from and about our family and immediate community.

The Hermeneutic Circle and Use of Metaphors: There is a third level of narrative that makes the dynamics of constructivism even more complex and challenging. We co-create narratives (and ultimately create reality) with people through our interactions with them (Brothers, 2001). All meanings or statements refer 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 a 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 a 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 dynamic constructivists, reality for the 21st-century manager is a shifting phenomenon that is subject to change and uncertainty. It is meant to be expressed in nuanced, ever-changing ways. Repeatedly in response to new contexts. These dynamic constructions can't be avoided—even when we escape down the rabbit hole into a distorted wonderland. Movement takes place even inside 21st-century wonderlands. It is hard to remain fully ensconced in a static belief system even when residing in a sheltered wonderland.

Heroes 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 the residents of Wonderland. The questions for these residents become: Do I leave Wonderland? Do I instead try to find a way to somehow make sense of swirling 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. The conversations that are most effective in bringing about organizational integration often take the form of metaphors that are conveyed through stories. (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003) Metaphors portray something about an organization—in particular, 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. As such, they create, recreate, and strengthen the experience of shared values. Analogies, parables, and similes can enrich communication processes and shared understanding; similarly, the metaphors we use can enhance our ability to offer compelling and insightful observations regarding the conditions in which we are operating (Bergquist, 2021a).

The stories of an organization are important to fully appreciate for yet another reason: they are critical bridges between the present and the past. Organizations exist at the present time. The past life of an organization is retained largely in 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 of the present and the past. Similarly, the organization's future is shaped in current conversations about this future. Narratives do more than tell stories; they create a framework in which the organization's identity 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 is restructured? From the perspective of anyone facing the challenge of Fact-finding in an organization, there are major concerns about the nature of narrative and identity being conveyed by the organization—and the narrative and identity of each employee. In particular, there are concerns about the person reflecting on the Facts and making decisions based on this reflection. Who is standing at the front of the cave, blocking the view, holding up images that cast shadows on the walls of the cave, or interpreting the meaning of the cave's shadows?

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 gain credibility, particularly in what is often referred to as a postmodern frame of reference in both the sciences and humanities (Bergquist, 1993). As already noted, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (Berger and 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 for the constructivist perspective. This support exists in the field of economics among those who have championed the interdisciplinary initiative called behavioral economics. Kahneman, Tversky, and Thaler have received Nobel Prizes in recognition of their success in 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 conversations by these highly influential participants? It is in the establishment of criteria for judgment 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 colleagues 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 (Gergen and Gergen, 2004) have 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 (Gergen and 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 are themselves reality.

Direct Experience and Shared Narratives: We often view important events that impact our lives from a distance. 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 a shared experience. This sense of a constructed reality, reinforced by narrative and conversation, is a starting point for dynamic constructivism. The key point is that each specific conversation is itself a reality.

Shared narratives and language are where we meet 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. They 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 personal, group, and organizational successes and failures is critical to the processes of change and transformation at any of these three levels. Pathways are laid through these stories that enable us to begin our journey to true freedom.

Coda: "Can We Build a Beautiful City?"

If pathways are laid through storytelling, then what stories have been told that point to a future of true freedom? What stories provide a context –a city—in which true freedom might thrive? One of these stories is conveyed through song by Stephen Schwartz in *Godspell*, one of his early musicals. This song, called "We can build a beautiful city," conveys something of the spirit of youthful optimism and religious imagery. "Hippies" who were dwelling in an urban junk yard and dressed in clown clothing and make-up, sang about "building a beautiful city." They suggested that a new American generation can envision and begin to create a beautiful city of love:

We can build a beautiful city

Yes, we can, yes, we can

We can build a beautiful city

Not a city of angels

But we can build a city of men

We may not reach the ending

But we can start

Slowly but truly mending

Brick by Brick

Heart by Heart

This song concerns the building of a secular city (a city of men) rather than a sacred city (a city of angels). We wonder if this secular city can be built and wonder what it would look like. The fragments of the bricks and elements of the heart needed to build this city are offered in this Coda.

A compelling though highly tentative vision of this beautiful city is offered in the next chapter.

As we look to the bricks and heart needed to build this city, it is important to mention that Schwartz offers some old-fashioned themes of Christian sacrifice and service to the underserved in *Godspell*. More generally, in the characterization of Jesus, we find the portrayal of a tragic clown. This theme of Jesus as a humble, loving, and persecuted clown is found in many other theological texts, notably in Harvey Cox's *Feast of Fools* (Cox, 1969). For Schwartz's Jesus, a struggle is inevitable when seeking to build a beautiful city. A sustained commitment is required to a new world that is filled with peace and justice:

Is it possible to build Schwartz's beautiful city today, during the mid-21st Century? These were simpler years in 1971 when the song was written. These hippy kids were not faced with the kind of threatening leadership that we find in mid-21st-century Washington D.C. There are no VUCA-Plus challenges to be faced. Yet is this really the case? The original production of *Godspell* occurred during the Vietnam War. Protests occurred on the streets of America. A major party convention had fallen into disarray several years earlier. The American government was saturated with the potent mixture of arrogance and ignorance. It was in the midst of this strained and violent setting that a musical was produced on Broadway that included this song about building a beautiful city:

Out of the ruins and rubble

Out of the smoke

Out of our night of struggle

Can we see a ray of hope?

One pale thin ray reaching for the day

We can build a beautiful city

We must ask if the ruins, rubble, and smoke of the early 1970s are what we now face. It is interesting to note, for instance, that Stephen Schwartz's later Broadway productions did not take place in the "real world," as did *Godspell*. His clowns were dwelling in a garbage-filled lot of an American city (New York City in the movies). Rather, Schwartz's later musicals took place in a fantasy world filled with actors swinging on ropes (*Pippin*) or, even more notably, in the concussed mind of a Kansas teenage girl (*Wicked*). While these later productions address important issues, such as the search for meaning and happiness. And discrimination against people of color (Green). It is telling that Schwartz chose to explore these issues in alternative worlds rather than in the "real" world of deeply embedded violence and discrimination.

We would also note that Victor Garber, the actor who originated the role of Jesus Christ in the movie version of *Godspell*, would later play the role of John Wilkes Booth in Steven Sondheim's *Assassins*. Rather than representing the savior of humankind (Jesus), Garber portrayed a man who killed Abraham Lincoln, the potential secular savior of humankind (or at least those living in one post-Civil War nation). The shift from Jesus to Booth seems indicative of a less hopeful setting in which we might now be building a beautiful city. Today's ruins, rubble, and smoke do seem different from those of Schwartz's 1971 junk yard.

Superficial or Genuine Beauty?

We have already mentioned one beautiful city in our current world. This is Singapore. There are also several beautiful cities in Switzerland. The entire country of Switzerland is often mentioned as being beautiful and hovering on the edge of perfection. It is not hard to acknowledge that, in many ways, Switzerland is a "beautiful city [country]", as is Singapore (which is often

identified as the Switzerland of the East). The mountain landscape of Switzerland is breathtaking.

While the physical beauty of Singapore is not quite as magnificent, we find the lovely setting of the river running through the city/state of Singapore, as well as its colorful buildings. Switzerland is noted for its charming architecture, while Singapore is known for its Tall and Novel architecture. A dramatic Singapore casino has been labeled the "new" 21st Century Stonehenge or the representation of a postmodern pyramid or cathedral!

Singapore and the cities of Switzerland are incredibly clean. The streets of Singapore and of most communities in Switzerland are well organized – much like New York City (and very much unlike Boston). There are only new automobiles in Singapore (no cars more than 10 years old are allowed), and these cars are few in number (very expensive with large sales tax). As a result, there are very few traffic jams in Singapore. It is an easy drive to Singapore's downtown from the beautifully designed Singapore airport. Similarly, trains and other forms of public transportation in Switzerland operate without the traffic and pollution problems found in many other countries.

Perhaps the greatest distinction in these two countries is the thoughtful way in which they are governed. Switzerland, the home of watchmaking and the Calvinist order, is noted for its deliberate, balanced governance, while in Singapore, a thoughtful political process is manifested in the declaration of an off-work day before an election. Furthermore, there is no campaigning until a short time before the elections (contrasting with the long-enduring campaigning in the United States).

In short, both Switzerland and Singapore might be considered the "perfect" example of what a "beautiful city" (Singapore) or "beautiful country" (Switzerland) might look like. However, beneath the veneer of perfection, resides the shadow side in both countries. As the Jungians are inclined to declare: The brighter the light, the darker the shadow. The Dark side in Singapore includes excessive gambling and restrictive and expensive living conditions. As noted by one of our colleagues, Richard Lim (Lim Say Teck, 2018), pervasive fear of being invaded resides in the consciousness (and unconsciousness) of Singapore residents: "We are a small and weak country, surrounded by big and strong countries!" In some ways, this quite conscious fear is realistic, leading to a heavy investment in the military. Collective

anxiety (angst) is also manifested in the cautious operations of Singapore institutions (Lim Say Teck, 2018).

There is also a fear of rejection. This is based not only on the early history of a free and independent Singapore, but also on the preponderance of Chinese immigrants in Singapore. These immigrants are often considered the "Jews of Asia." They are often despised by and discriminated against by other Singapore residents, even though (or perhaps because of) their financial power. As Lim notes, there may be a pervasive "social unconscious" operating in Singapore that leads to this fear of invasion and rejection at a personal and collective level.

For citizens of Switzerland, the shadow city is manifested in some of the same crises and conflicts we find in Singapore. Most Swiss cities are facing major affordability crises regarding housing. As in Singapore, only the wealthy can purchase or rent a home in cities like Geneva and Zurich (where vacancy rates are below 1%). The Swiss have also not solved the problem of health costs, nor have they successfully integrated new people from diverse cultures into the tight (enmeshed) fabric of Swiss life. There is also an important problem of addiction that they share with Singapore. While citizens of Singapore may be addicted to gambling, the addiction issue in Switzerland resides in the abuse of drugs.

Finally, there is the matter of climate change. Switzerland might be able to shield itself from the politics of surrounding nations. However, it can't provide a shield against the alterations occurring worldwide regarding temperature and precipitation. Rising temperatures have led to the retreat of glaciers, while shifting patterns of precipitation, along with the glacial melt, have produced devastating floods and landslides. While the rise in sea levels will not impact Singapore for one or more decades, the shifts in climate are already having a direct impact on the citizens of Switzerland.

These are the immediately evident crises and conflicts facing the Swiss. They are fully aware of the affordability, integration, and climate challenges impacting their daily lives. As in Singapore, there is also the impact of a social unconscious among the Swiss. The long, deep history of Switzerland invites a perspective of escape and sanctuary. We go to Switzerland not to find something new, but to escape something old.

Ronald Colman's *Shangri-La* offered a safe place for someone who had been harried, threatened, or simply left with little hope of establishing a good life in a world filled with barriers and violence. Switzerland has provided the same form of sanctuary during the 20th and 21st centuries. It is a "beautiful city/country" for retreat rather than for invention and creation. One might wonder if Steven Schwartz's beautiful city is also one of retreat—in this instance, retreat from the ruin, rubble, and smoke of the Vietnam War. Schwartz's pale ray of hope might resemble the hope found by Colman in Shangri-La. Colman's character was also retreating from a world filled with war and destruction.

So, what should we do to build a beautiful city that nurtures our three pillars (harmony of interests, balance of rights and responsibilities, and compelling vision of the future)? How might this city serve as a model and source of guidance for our personal and collective journey to true, sustained freedom? As we have done throughout this book, we address these critical questions from different perspectives. We first pull out the psychological lens.

Psychological

We find a strong dose of Hope when looking at the almost perfect world of Singapore society. The presiding edifice in Singapore is a gambling casino. This is the building we just referred to as a 21st-century Stonehenge. This might be an apt description since one of the most powerful contemporary "religions" exists in the casinos of the world. Many people find faith in the slot wheels or are hopeful when sitting down near the roulette wheel or playing "21" at the card table. Much as Switzerland is a nation to which one can escape, Singapore is a nation to which one can run to find a fortune or simply get "high" in anticipation of winnings.

It is in Asian cities and countries such as Singapore and Macau, as well as American cities such as Las Vegas and Atlantic City, that we find the middle class of gambling. It is in James Bond's world of wealth that we find the legendary gambling of Monte Carlo. Regardless of the location or socio-economic class, something is compelling about Hope. It is a strange attractor. The behavioral economists tell us that the "high" (often dopamine) comes not from winning at the slot machine or roulette wheel; it is produced by anticipating the reward.

Dopamine kicks in when we enter the casino, not when the coins come rushing out of the slot machine. Perhaps, one of the psychological features of the Beautiful City is the presence of Hope (as Schwartz suggests in his song from *Godspell*). This need not be the Hope that resides in the act of gambling; it could be the hope that is found in the Aspirational spirit that resides in a major city such as New York "The Big Apple") or in an entertainment capital such as Hollywood ("La La Land"). Stephen Schwartz would seem to suggest that authentic Hope resides in the humility, love, and compassion to be found in the personification of Jesus as a caring clown.

Then there is the matter of Freedom. While true freedom might be produced in the Beautiful City, it also might be one of the psychological factors that already exist in this city and help (along with Hope) to make it a beautiful city. There is the superficial Freedom that exists in a city like Las Vegas. This city attracts people not just through the addiction of Hope but also the sanctuary-like boundaries that supposedly allow people to feel "Free" in this "Sin City." Apparently, what we do in Las Vegas "stays here in Vegas." New Orleans has a similar reputation for freedom and "sin." One of us recalls observing an old man stripping one evening on Bourbon Street. Apparently, this elderly gentleman is quite wealthy and finds Freedom each year by engaging in this unclothing on a street of escape and sin.

What about the freedom to be found among the characters in Godspell? They sing and dance on the streets and in the parks of a major urban city, flaunting the clothing norms, gently chiding the pursuit of wealth, and displaying the joy of a free, unfettered life. Do we find authentic freedom in the lives of these young adults who have not yet addressed the challenges of employment, family, and thoughtful citizenship? Can their freedom be somehow sustained throughout adulthood? What if a Godspell update were performed today, with the major characters (and Jesus) being portrayed as 75-year-old grandparents? Have they found some freedom in retirement? Can they once again dress as clown (or "hippies")? As Jenny Joseph declares, they can at least wear purple (Joseph, 2014/2021)!

Is a sanctuary of some kind important in establishing a Beautiful City? Should it be a junkyard reserved for hippies or some other "marginalized" group? Should it instead be the very clean sanctuary to be found in Switzerland? Perhaps both the junkyard and cities of Switzerland are

appropriate for those seeking to escape discrimination, repression, or even violence. Today, with many people seeking to find asylum from the repressive regime in their home country, it is understandable why not just Switzerland, but many other countries in the world are providing sanctuary –and are experiencing the challenge of integrating these refugees into their established economy and culture. Might a similar case be made for the value of finding a sanctuary of Hope (Aspirations/Addictions) and Freedom (Liberation/Sin) in a world filled with psychologically disruptive VUCA-Plus? Are there good and valid reasons for Americans to move to France – or perhaps Bali?

Sociological

We now take out our sociological lens and propose that there is a strong, sustaining sociological factor operating in the Beautiful City. This factor is Trust. A powerful sacred image of this factor is conveyed in Schwartz's Jesus of humility and love (found in *Godspell).* A secular version of Trust is to be found in the binding force of interdependence, as identified by Emile Durkheim (1893/1933) many years ago. This pull toward interdependence is critical to the creation and maintenance of society. Specifically, Durkheim proposed that there is a tendency for societies to become more complex as they grow larger, primarily because there is an increasing possibility of struggle and violence in a densely populated world, as compared to the more widely dispersed populated world of prehistoric times.

Durkheim believes that this increasing struggle and conflict creates the need for specialization of functions. If people can do different jobs, they will be less likely to compete with one another. We honor differences rather than defeating and banishing people who are different from us. We cooperate with others rather than compete with them when space and resources are limited on a densely populated planet. We provide specialized jobs and become dependent upon one another. According to Durkheim, this effort to reduce social tension is the primary reason for the division of labor and the development of complex organizations. He doesn't believe that organizations need to become more complex simply because they have grown larger.

Durkheim first identified this theme in his analysis of the division of labor in modern organizations. He was certainly not the first social analyst to notice that jobs tend to become more specialized as organizations become

larger and older. However, he was among the first to note the paradoxical relationship between differentiation and individual autonomy, on the one hand, and integration and interpersonal dependency, on the other hand, that is inherent in this division of labor. Durkheim observed that there is an increasing differentiation of functions in all organisms as these organisms mature and grow larger.

Furthermore, a division of labor is to be found in all sectors of society (economic, political, administrative and judicial, aesthetic and scientific). Durkheim notes that a society in which each person provides a specialized service is a society in which each member of the society possesses a distinct identity and personal autonomy. It is also a society that requires each of its members to rely heavily on the competence and trustworthiness of other members of society, each of whom also offers distinctive and indispensable services.

During the premodern era, when organizations were relatively undifferentiated, every person knew how to do virtually every job. They were frequently involved in all aspects of the organization. As a result, no one had to rely on anyone else for the provision of specific, specialized services. By contrast, during the modern era, any one person could perform only a small percentage of the total number of tasks that must be accomplished to meet the needs of individuals in society and to maintain the stability of society itself. According to Durkheim, modern era interdependence helps create *feelings of solidarity* among community members. As we mentioned earlier in this chapter, a division of labor can produce a culture of appreciative diversity.

Yet, the specialization of functions also creates a *feeling of isolation* among these same members, for they can't readily communicate about their work with one another. Specialized language is developed. Guilds and associations were created that bring workers together only with those who do similar work. Workers began to identify with their trade rather than their families. Specific churches in some European countries were dedicated to specific trades. Isolation and silos flourish in the midst of specialization.

Durkheim uses the example of the husband and wife to explain this paradox concerning the division of labor. During the modern era, husbands and wives began to do quite different jobs. Men went off to work. Wives stayed home to perform domestic chores. This differentiation of function helped

solidify a marriage and made husbands and wives more dependent on one another. The husband depended on the wife for a clean home, and the wife depended on the husband for the paycheck. However, this differentiation also tended to create a gap between husband and wife, as they increasingly began to live quite different lives. Often during these times of domestic division of labor, the husband felt burdened as the "breadwinner," while the wife felt trapped at home as the dutiful "housewife." While this division of labor is now a relic of the past, there are many other ways in which a division of labor still makes people dependent on one another. At the same time, they are resentful of this dependence.

For Durkheim, this tension between solidarity and isolation was of great importance in fully appreciating the dynamics operating in a human system. Every society must somehow find a way for the solidarity to "win the day." If the binding force of solidarity gives way to the animosity of isolation and a feeling of inequality, then we find what Durkheim identified as *Anomie*. Much as is the case with collective Angst, a widespread Anomie leaves members of a society with an acute sense of unease and disorientation. It is in the midst of disruptive VUCA-Plus that we are likely to find a mid-21st-century manifestation of Durkheim's Anomie. It is also, hopefully, in our mid-21st-century society that we find Durkheim's binding force. This force might be needed if we are to build and maintain the Beautiful City. As Stephen Schwartz suggests, this city is built "heart by heart."

Anthropological

Given the challenging perspective offered by Durkheim, where might we find the binding force in our current American society (or, for that matter, in other societies in our contemporary world)? Is this force available in today's America? Traditional anthropologists would say it all comes down to the matter of culture. In this regard, contemporary American society seems to have been assigned a failing grade. One of our guides, Anne Applebaum (Applebaum, 2026, p.134), is among those raising major concerns about the American culture of the mid-21st-century—especially as this culture is viewed by those living outside the United States:

> American culture is no longer synonymous with the aspiration to freedom, but with transactionalism and secrecy: the algorithms that mysteriously determine what you see, the money collected by anonymous billionaires, the deals that the American president

> makes with world leaders that benefit himself and maybe others whose names we don't know. America was always associated with capitalism, business, and markets, but nowadays there's no pretense that anyone else will be invited to share the wealth. USAID is gone; American humanitarian aid is depleted; America's international medical infrastructure was dismantled so quickly that people died in the process. The image of the ugly American competed with the image of the generous American. Now that the latter has disappeared, the only Americans anyone can see are the ones trying to rip you off.

Anne Applebaum (Applebaum, 2026, p.134) goes on to identify the probable broad impact of this decline in the quality of American culture:

> The impact of this change around the world will be profound, far-reaching, and long-lasting. The very existence of American democracy inspired people in every corner of the planet, and the decline of American democracy will have the same effect. Perhaps the mere existence of Trump's America will boost new autocratic parties that will carry out assaults on their own democratic political systems.

Applebaum (Applebaum, 2026, p.134) then turns specifically to the impact on our own country:

> More unpredictable is the impact of the change on Americans. If we are no longer a country that aims to make the world better, but rather a country whose foreign policy is designed to build the wealth of the president or promote the ruling party's foreign friends, then we have fewer reasons to work together at home. If we promote cynicism abroad, we will become more cynical at home.
>
> Perhaps expecting Americans to live up to the extraordinary ideals that they proclaimed in the 18th century was always unreasonable, but that language nevertheless shaped the way we thought about ourselves. Now we live in a world where America is led by people who have abandoned those ideals altogether. That will change all of us, in ways we might not yet be able to see.

What then has occurred regarding American culture? What was once holding us together. What is now tearing us asunder? Or at least not

providing the “glue” of harmony, balance, and vision? As we noted earlier in this book, Alexis De Tocqueville thought such a binding force was uniquely present in the American communities he visited during the 1830s. George Packer has recently aligned this binding force with a sense of patriotism. According to Packer (Packer, 2026, p. 143):

> . . . Alexis de Tocqueville saw American patriotism as different from that of tradition-bound, hierarchical Europe, where an "instinctive, disinterested, and undefinable feeling" connects "the affections of man with his birthplace." In the young republic, Tocqueville found "a patriotism of reflection"—less a passion than a rational civic pursuit: "It is coeval with the spread of knowledge, it is nurtured by the laws, it grows by the exercise of civil rights, and, in the end, it is confounded with the personal interest of the citizen."

Packer (Packer, 2026, p. 143) offers this important observation:

> For Tocqueville, this democratic patriotism depends on a belief in equality, inalienable rights, and the consent of the governed-in effect, on the beliefs and actions found in the Declaration of Independence. But that universal creed can't exist solely in abstract nouns. To mean anything—to survive at all—it requires the participation of the governed as citizens. The purpose of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address was to remind Americans that self-government would not endure without the efforts of patriots on its behalf. When ancestry defines national identity, patriotism requires nothing other than allegiance. But the blood of the Union dead and the soil of the cemetery that Lincoln had come to dedicate bore a larger meaning: the liberty and equality of all human beings. Patriotism was the devotion of Americans to these principles, and to preserving them through self-government.

George Packer (Packer, 2026, p. 145) goes on to say more about distinctive American patriotism as viewed many years ago by de Tocqueville and how patriotism plays out in contemporary America:

> De Tocqueville wrote: "In the United States it is believed, and with truth, that patriotism is a kind of devotion which is strengthened by ritual observance." In a democracy, that observance takes the

> form of participation in public life. Harder still, it requires a vision of that life with everyone in it. We cannot wish away the other party, the other states, the other faiths, the newest arrivals, the oldest tribes. In his Claremont speech, Vance said one true thing: "Social bonds form among people who have something in common." A nation—especially this one, with its short memory and incomprehensible diversity—can't cohere simply as a geographic boundary and a set of laws. It needs a common language and culture-a way of life.

At this point, Packer seems to be hovering on the edge of de Tocqueville and Bellah's "habits of heart," for a "way of life" is certainly to be found in one's habits of their individual and collective heart. He (Parker, 2026, p. 145) continues. He focuses on the critical point that America is founded not on geography or ethnic identity, but rather on an "idea":

> American culture is as distinctive as that of any other nation, but it's the only one that comes from an idea. That idea is the equality of all human beings; their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; the form of self-government that secures their rights, including the right to change their government if it becomes tyrannical. This idea produced a mass culture famous for loud voices, informal address, innocence and ignorance, generosity and violence, bluntness and cluelessness—a culture of individualists who refuse to accept that anyone is their better, any station fixed for life, any possibility closed to them.

Packer now points to the inclusiveness of American culture (Parker,2026, p. 145):

> It is the easiest culture in the world to join, and if the first generation can't then the second will. It absorbs, changes, and is changed by each new one, blatant and accessible enough to provide a *lingua franca* in which they can all understand and be understood. It has no elaborate rules or ancient secret codes. It flattens and simplifies other cultures into music, clothing, food, and words whose vulgarity appalls and seduces the rest of the world. It is stronger than any religious orthodoxy or class rank. What Americans have in common is a way of life made by their creed.

Robert Bellah and his colleagues (1985) suggested that some of this binding force—habits of the heart and distinctive American patriotism—is available in mid-21st~ century America. As we have noted, Bellah wrote of the lifestyle enclaves that are prominent in contemporary American society. With his colleagues, Robert Bellah also identified a wide variety of practices in American society that contribute to a habit of heart regarding the collective welfare of all its members. We wonder if these habits have been lost in the short time since *Habits of the Heart* was published. If Parker is correct in identifying the American habit and patriotism as critical to the identity (and perhaps survival) of our country, then their loss would portend the decline of not only America's status in the world for also the basic fabric of our society in the United States.

At this point, we bring another social observer into the conversation who, like Robert Bellah and his colleagues, offers a more contemporary perspective. This observer is Francis Fukuyama, whom we referenced early in this book, declaring the end of history. According to Fukuyama (1995, p. 26), the factor of Trust is critical to the creation of a "prosperous" society:

> Trust is the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of that community. Those norms can be about deep "value" questions like the nature of God or justice, but they also encompass secular norms like professional standards and codes of behavior. That is, we trust a doctor not to do us deliberate injury because we expect him or her to live by the Hippocratic oath and the standards of the medical profession.

In this proposal (made about a decade before he assessed the death of political ideologies), Fukuyama is following in the tradition of Durkheim and de Tocqueville. In fact, Fukuyama offers a quote from both of these earlier societal analysts at the very start of his book on trust:

> A society composed of an infinite number of unorganized individuals, that a hypertrophied State is forced to oppress and contain, constitutes a veritable sociological monstrosity. . . . Moreover, the State is too remote from individuals; its relations with them too external and intermittent to penetrate deeply into individual consciences and socialize them within.

> ". . . A nation can be maintained only if, between the State and the individual, there is interposed a whole series of secondary groups near enough to the individuals to attract them strongly in their sphere of action and drag them, in this way, into the general torrent of social life. Occupational groups are suited to fill this role, and that is their destiny". -Emile Durkheim *The Division of Labor in Society*

> "The art of association then becomes, as I have said before, the mother of action, studied and applied by all". ~ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

For Fukuyama, the foundation of Trust resides in what he labels *Spontaneous Sociability*. This is a sentiment that Fukuyama directly relates to Durkheim's sense of solidarity (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 27). He would undoubtedly also be comfortable in relating his concept of sociability to De Tocqueville and Bellah's "habits of the heart." Fukuyama further proposes that Trust provides the foundation for establishing social capital in a society (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 26):

> Social capital is a capability that arises from the prevalence of trust in a society or in certain parts of it. It can be embodied in the smallest and most basic social group, the family, as well as the largest of all groups, the nation, and in all the other groups in between. Social capital differs from other forms of human capital insofar as it is usually created and transmitted through cultural mechanisms like religion, tradition, or historical habit. Economists typically argue that the formation of social groups can be explained as the result of voluntary contract between individuals who have made the rational calculation that cooperation is in their long-term self-interest. By this account, trust is not necessary for cooperation: enlightened self-interest, together with legal mechanisms like contracts, can compensate for an absence of trust and allow strangers jointly to create an organization that will work for a common purpose. Groups can be formed at any time based on self-interest, and group formation is not culture-dependent.

We have already addressed the concept of social capital in this book. We introduced Ron Kitchen's metaphoric use of rocks, pebbles, and sand as representations of social capital sources. These are the major institutions

(rocks), supportive (often human service-oriented) agencies (pebbles), and character/norms (sand) of a community. Fukuyama would probably suggest that "spontaneous sociability" is to be found in the sand of a community, and that with the building of Trust through this sociability comes the building of Trust-supporting human service agencies (pebbles) and Trust-filled institutions.

As Fukuyama (1995) has observed, collective ethics reside at the heart of any culture. When the culture decays, ethics soon lose any sustained relevance. We are reminded of the 1995 Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was established in South Africa after apartheid was brought to an end. In many ways, this commission played a major role in restoring collective ethics and preventing cultural decay in this country. Some citizens of the United States suggest that a similar commission be established in America following the termination of the Trump presidency; such a commission might be valuable in reestablishing trust in the institutions of government in the United States and, more generally, restoring the collective ethics and fundamental American culture. Truth and reconciliation might be key features of a pathway to true freedom.

We might also ask if the sense of collective responsibility is critical to any attempt to find societal truth and establish reconciliation? Is collective responsibility a key component of collective ethics? Is it deeply embedded along with individual rights in the American culture? Is the "social capital" featured by Ron Kitchens also embedded in culture? Does Fukuyama's *Spontaneous Sociability* serve as the sand alongside and intermixed with a society's rocks and pebbles? Even more basically, does Anonymous's concern for convergent interest guide a collective sense of responsibility, and is culture lost when a society no longer finds a point of shared collective interests?

At this point, we bring in a highly unlikely source of insights. These insights are from a sociological perspective with specific economic/political biases. The source is American neoconservatism. As the supposed foes of our liberal perspective on contemporary America, neocons offer a perspective that actually complements what Fukuyama has proposed. David Brooks (Brooks, 2026a, p. 21) has recently noted neocons assert that "character is destiny: "if you disregard truth . . . you will wind up in some pretty ugly places. We can assume that Fukuyama's "trust," as well as Bellah and de

Tocqueville's "habits of the heart," require this character of truth-telling. According to Brooks (Brooks, 2026a, p. 21), the neo-conservatives also align with Fukuyama, Bell, Bellah, and de Tocqueville in their focus on culture: "If you want to improve the character of a nation or an organization, you have to change its culture so that it nurtures basic decency".

David Brooks (Brooks, 2026a, p. 21) reminds us that the founding character of America is based on:

> . . . pedestrian bourgeois virtues. Aristocratic societies may do better at inspiring heroism, genius, love of honor. But democratic societies rely on showing up on time, working hard, being there for your neighbor, listening with curiosity, respecting traditions.

This sounds like Bellah and de Tocqueville's "habits of the heart." A third point that David Brooks (2026a, p. 21) made about the potential positive contributions to be made by the neo-cons also sounds a whole lot like Bellah and de Tocqueville's habits and might provide the foundation for Fukuyama's trust and spontaneous sociability:

> The third crucial insight from the neoconservatives is that culture drives history. The assumptions people rely on, the mental categories in their heads, the things they admire and disdain, the way they process the world, their norms and habits—all of this will determine how they behave.

And it is in the embracing of this perspective on culture and character that the neocons join we liberals in believing that "the American dream is real," we can build a beautiful city, and a pathway to true freedom can be found.

While it feels uncomfortable to find ourselves somewhat aligned with the American neoconservatives, it is also important for us to establish that character, culture, and trust are not sufficient when building a beautiful city. These societal elements certainly will not lead us directly to a viable pathway to true freedom. In our contemporary world filled with VUCA-Plus challenges, it is not enough that character, culture, and trust are established in specific American communities. Social capital must be found in the relationships that exist between organizations, communities, states, and even nations that share resources and collaborate to better meet the needs (including safety) of their members/citizens. Contemporary representations

of these trust-filled relationships are to be found in the complex networks identified by Donald Schön (1973). It is particularly in the nodes of a network that trust must be found.

Not too many years ago, these nodes would be found operating destructively in the political alliances (such as Tammany Hall) that ran city governments. More constructive, politically based nodes are now to be found in the community activist groups that use social media to organize large urban demonstrations. Non-political nodes in our digital age are now found in the sales mecca of *Amazon* and in the communication mecca of *TikTok*. Strategic relationships of many kinds are found in the society where we now live and work (Bergquist, Betwee and Meuel, 1995). They range from the "modest" partnerships to be found in CPA firms and marketing agencies, to the consortia involving many institutions (often found among colleges). There are compact agencies involving cost-saving collaborations among states within nations, as well as treaties based on shared defensive agreements among nations.

As Fukuyama proposes, Trust is the critical feature to be found in the creation of viable communities and in the successful creation and maintenance of these diverse collaborative enterprises. Specifically, as we noted previously in this book, three modes of trust must be present if Durkheim's sense of solidarity is to be achieved and Fukuyama's Trust is to be realized. First, those involved in the collaborative enterprise must trust in the competency of all participants in this enterprise. Do all participants display the requisite skills, knowledge, and aptitudes to engage in complex collaborative relationships? Does everyone truly understand the nature and scope of challenges we face? Is everyone involved in this collaborative venture mature enough to work collaboratively without being driven by a demanding ego?

We suggest that these multiple forms of competence are particularly important (and often lacking) in our contemporary VUCA-Plus world. Can everyone working in this collaborative enterprise handle the volatility, complexity, and uncertainty? Are they sufficiently tolerant of ambiguity and able to navigate turbulence? Can they also live and work alongside the contradictions and conflicting viewpoints that are likely to appear once the collaborative project begins?

Second, there must be a shared trust in the intentions of all participants. Each participant must believe that all other participants are interested in both their own welfare and the welfare of all other participants. Obviously, this criterion of trust is particularly important when several nations are involved. We see the potential loss of trust that operated until recently in the long-standing agreements forged between the United States and its European allies. Somewhat less dramatic, yet just as challenging, concerns about intentions are to be found in the partnerships formed between those running a marketing firm (what's most important, quality or profit?) or state government officials who are involved in an interstate compact agreement (in what areas do we go it alone and in what areas do we share resources?).

Third, a shared perspective is requisite. This is particularly difficult to find in the formation of many international collaborations. While our world might now be "flat," with the crumbling of international boundaries, it is not particularly flat when it comes to the presence of distinctly different attitudes, norms, and narratives about "reality." It is not only the different languages spoken by collaborators from different countries, but also the distinct (and often contradictory) ways to behave in the world and ways to interpret what is occurring in the world at any one point in time. The Western-based "grand narrative" which dominated most international engagements during the 19th and 20th centuries is now something of a relic and certainly not embraced by all participants in an international collaborative venture.

What then about Singapore and Switzerland? Do they enjoy a level of solidarity and sufficient trust to support their own vision of being a beautiful city/country? Do they possess the heart identified by Stephen Schwartz that is needed to build and maintain this beauty? What about meeting Kitchen's social capital criteria? Clearly, there are ample rocks in both nations. The banks of Singapore and Switzerland are particularly noteworthy.

We would also have to acknowledge that both countries are providing some important human service pebbles. Though major issues in both nations (as in many other countries) linger regarding immigration and addictions. What about the sand? Are the clean streets and thoughtful governmental processes in both nations sustained by strict law and a socially unconscious push toward obedience, or is there a genuine habit of heart operating in one or both nations? Most importantly, is there something that we

Americans can learn from these two societies? Or is it better that we go it on our own, relying on the habits of the heart that still reside deep in the soul of American culture?

At the very least, we must acknowledge that what Durkheim, de Tocqueville, Bellah, Packer, Fukuyama, and Kitchens have to say is particularly relevant to the fundamental matter of establishing a harmony of interests and balance of individual rights and collective responsibility. Earlier in this book, we concluded that a community of coherence might ultimately help to ensure a harmony of interests. We might need strong habits of the heart to ensure not only this harmony but also the balance between individual rights and collective responsibility. Durkheim's sense of solidarity and Fukuyama's Trust might be prerequisites for the creation or discovery of a pathway that leads to the discovery or creation of a beautiful city and, ultimately, to true freedom.

Economic/Political

Finally, we take out the economic/political lens. Obviously, the Beautiful City will require substantial resources, ranging from buildings and highways to an ample workforce and solid financial foundation. As Stephen Schwartz suggests, the beautiful city will be built "brick by brick." Many people dismiss the notion of a Beautiful City and Viable Future because of this requirement. However, in recent years, several perspectives have been offered that tend to frame the presence of adequate resources in a manner that yields hope for building the Beautiful City.

Unacknowledged Societal Resources: First, there is the matter of identifying resources that are already present but not fully valued or engaged. At an economic and political level, we can turn to the insights offered by Hernando de Soto, who promotes the formal (and legal) acknowledgement of abundant resources that typically are never given any attention or used in any way. De Soto (2000) has offered an insightful analysis of the reasons why some countries in the world have capitalist economies that thrive, while others have been unsuccessful in enacting capitalism. As a Peruvian who has consulted with the leaders of many third-world and former communist countries, De Soto is aware of the challenges these leaders face when embracing Western capitalism. He believes, however, that the problem resides not in the absence of capital in these countries, but rather in the

formal and legal processes whereby the vast capital that already exists in these countries is recognized.

In making his case for new strategies to bring these countries to economic prosperity, De Soto (2000, p. 45) offers the analogy of a lake that holds unrealized potential:

> Consider a mountain lake. We can think about this lake in its immediate physical context and see some primary uses for it, such as canoeing and fishing. But when we think about this same lake as an engineer would be focusing on its capacity to generate energy as an additional value beyond the lake's natural state as a body of water, we suddenly see the potential created by the lake's elevated position.

De Soto suggests that many third-world countries are like the lake. They possess many assets that have never been fully recognized. These assets can't be fully leveraged for new investments, can't be traded on the open market, and can't be fully protected when disputes regarding ownership arise.

We propose that similar conditions exist in our own nation. We also possess massive resources that are rarely realized in their full potential. These resources are the talents, energy, commitments, skills, ideas, and knowledgeable insights that emanate from members of our nation (both citizens and noncitizens). This vast human capital stands as a lake that holds deep, unrealized potential. An appreciative society is one that fully realizes this human resource potential. And thereby releases its human capital in full alignment with the fundamental mission, vision, values, and purposes of this society.

De Soto identifies two challenges that confront a third-world country. First, leaders of the country must formally recognize the capital currently in their country. Second, these leaders must identify or invent a mechanism for converting this capital into a sustainable and useful form that promotes their country's welfare. Returning to the analogy of the lake, De Soto (2000, p. 45) suggests that:

> The challenge for the engineer is finding out how he can create a process that allows him to convert and fix this potential into a form that can be used to do additional work. In the case of the elevated lake, that process is contained in a hydroelectric plant that allows

> the lake water to move rapidly downward with the force of gravity, thereby transforming the placid lake's energy potential into the kinetic energy of tumbling water. . . . As electricity, the potential energy of the placid lake is now fixed in the form necessary to produce controllable current that can be further transmitted through wire conductors to faraway places to deploy new production.

Similarly, for the leader of an appreciative society, one first identifies those exceptional competencies that already exist within this society. The second step is to convert these competencies into fixed and sustainable forms that can further the building of a beautiful city. According to De Soto (2000, pg. 45):

> What was required [in realizing the potential of the mountain lake] was an external man-made process that allowed us, first, to identify the potential of the weight of the water to do additional work and, second, to convert this potential energy into electricity, which can then be used to create surplus value. The additional value we obtain from the lake is not a value of the lake itself (like a precious ore intrinsic to the earth) but rather a value of the man-made process *extrinsic* to the lake. It is this process that allows us to transform the lake from a fishing and canoeing kind of place into an energy-producing kind of place.

The same holds true in an appreciative society. It is not the structures, processes, or culture of a society that make it successful. Like the lake, these elements of the society only hold their potential; they are not, in and of themselves, the realization of this society's potential as a Beautiful City. A society saturated in appreciation is successful in our contemporary world because the value of these structures, processes, and culture is acknowledged. Appreciative strategies enable the leaders of a nation to fully deploy these structures, processes, and culture in alignment with the nation's character and mission.

De Soto has something more to say about capital. His wisdom is directly applicable to our understanding of appreciative organizations. Like the potential energy of the mountain lake, capital is dormant until it is put to use: Bringing [capital] to life requires us to go beyond *looking* at our assets as they are to actively *thinking* about them as they could be. It requires a process

for fixing an asset's economic potential into a form that can be used to initiate additional production" (De Soto, 2000, p. 45). Similarly, it is not enough to identify and enumerate the sources of strength in a social system. It is not enough to appreciate the contributions already made, or to be made in the future, by members of this system. An appreciative society has embraced and endorsed a way of "actively *thinking* about" these strengths as they might be fully engaged by its citizens.

Hidden and Unacknowledged Personal Resources: A broad appreciative perspective suggests that there are personal resources in an organization or society. There are the unacknowledged and hidden strengths of people living and working in the organization or society. The effective use of these existing personal resources can make a difference (Shrivesta, Cooperrider, et al., 2000).

As we journey outward in learning to appreciate one another and those settings in which we live and work, we also begin to understand and appreciate ourselves in new ways. We come back full circle to ourselves and to self-understanding—a necessity for anyone wishing to facilitate collaborative expertise. The Appreciative Window of Expertise suggests a way to comprehend the self-insight gained from an appreciative perspective. It becomes a fundamental tool for building a community that fosters collaborative expertise.

There are essentially two ways in which we come to appreciate our own distinctive strengths: through self-perception and through the perceptions of other people. Our self-perceptions of strength are based on reflection about our own impact on the world in which we live and work. They are also based on comparisons we draw with other people who are also having an impact on this world. The perceptions of other people are made known to us through their direct or indirect feedback. In some cases, we know our strengths. In other cases, we do not. Similarly, in some instances, other people know of our distinctive expertise. In other cases, they do not.

Given this analysis, we can conclude that there are four views of our strength—as the widely used Johari Window (Luft, 1969, 1984) has popularized:

The Appreciative Window of Expertise

	Known to Community	Unknown to Community
Known to Self	**Public Expertise**	**Private Expertise**
Unknown to Self	**Obscure Expertise**	**Potential Expertise**

First, some of our expertise can be known both to ourselves and to other people. These are *publicly recognized areas of expertise;* if well-used, they will be a major part of our success strategy. We can celebrate these areas of expertise with our colleagues—and also be alert to over-use.

Second, we might personally be aware of other areas of expertise that we possess; however, other people might not be aware of these areas of expertise. These are our *private areas of expertise*. We may be aware of them, but they are rarely of much value to us, given that others never see them being used, like the poetry one may be writing in one's mind. We elicit such private areas of expertise from our colleagues by listening attentively to their stories of past successes. This gives us an opportunity to encourage them to experiment and apply the lessons learned from past successes to currently challenging situations.

The third possibility is one in which we are not fully aware of a distinctive strength we possess, whereas other people are aware. These are *obscure areas of expertise*. These areas of expertise are of little value to us until we have become fully acquainted with them and know how to put them to work. When a promotion feels undeserved and/or intimidating to a manager, it is often because they don't see their own areas of expertise as clearly as their colleagues and superiors do.

Finally, there are areas of expertise we possess that have never been acknowledged by anyone, including ourselves. These are *potential areas of expertise*. They represent the farthest edge of our growth and development.

The process of appreciation, in which a collaborative setting plays a central role, expands the size of the *public window* by providing an opportunity - through appreciative support and feedback - to learn more about our

observed areas of expertise. It also provides collaborative participants with an opportunity to reflect on the nature of their areas of expertise. The *private window* becomes smaller in an appreciative culture. We begin to feel more comfortable in sharing personal insights based on our distinctive areas of expertise and talents. The *obscure window* also shrinks with appreciation: We have access to clearer information regarding our distinctive areas of expertise when the climate allows us and other participants to feel comfortable in providing such observations.

Finally, when both the private and obscure windows shrink in size, the *potential strength* window grows smaller and feeds into the public one: Potential areas of expertise are recognized for the first time by our colleagues and us. Effective, collaborative sharing of expertise relates directly to this process of expanding the public domain of our acknowledged areas of expertise. Structures that provide sanctuary and temporary settings for collaborative diversity (such as Future Search or Open Space) enable dynamic constructivism to take place—building on expanding recognition and use of participant expertise.

Renewable Resources: There is the matter of identifying resources that are often ignored. We declare that most resources can't be renewed. In the not-too-distant future, we may be running out of many sources of energy (e.g., oil) and minerals (e.g., lithium). Yet, as those who first sounded the alarm about nonrenewable resources (Meadows, et. al., 1972; Meadows, et al., 2004) have noted, many resources are either renewal, if carefully managed (such as fish, crops and lumber), are readily available or replenishable, if carefully managed (such as solar power and water), or are inexhaustible (such as education and creativity) (Meadows and Randers, 1992).

It is these latter, inexhaustible resources that are the focus of a recent, challenging economic/political analysis offered by Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson (Klein and Thompson, 2025). At the heart of any contemporary theory of resources in society is the balance between supply and demand. There must be a supply of resources and a corresponding demand for their use. From one political perspective (conservative), the supply side is of greatest importance, while from the opposite side of the political spectrum (liberal), the demand side reigns supreme.

According to Klein and Thompson, neither side is getting it right. The supply side doesn't work very well when there is minimal demand (often

because many people lack the financial resources to purchase the resources). Furthermore, the supply side usually ends up not in the allocation of wealth to people and business owners in the furthering of production; rather, the funds are delivered to those who already hold most of the money. On the demand side, liberals push for greater public access to the resources; however, resources are not being produced in sufficient quantity (in part because of inadequate investment by the government and big business in increased production).

Klein and Thompson propose that there should be a new emphasis on the supply side; however, the increase in supply should relate not to commodities but rather to things such as technological innovation and community organizing. Meadows and Randers (1992) would identify such resources as education, training, and various modes of self-improvement. These are things that the Limits-to-Growth folks say have no limits. These include the undiscovered personal strengths and knowledge of individuals (the window of strength), as well as the unacknowledged resources and sources of wealth identified by De Soto. We appreciate and expand the supply of resources; we foster new laws regarding ownership and expand resource supply. We shatter the supply/demand polarization and expand the supply of resources, which also enables us to encourage and support the capacity to demand these resources when building a beautiful city. We act like clowns, with humility, love, and a touch of irrelevance for established societal norms.

As transcendent beings, we have the capacity to reflect on our own experiences and to place these experiences in space and time. Like Stephen Schwartz's characters in *Godspell*, we have the capacity to envision a beautiful city. This is the human challenge, the human opportunity, and the human curse of transcendence.

Our sense of a dynamic, constantly reconstructed universe, based on our interactions with other people, inevitably leads us to a collective sense of bewilderment. The Beautiful City seems to be nothing more than an entertaining vision contained in a song from an old 1970s musical. At a more immediate level, we are confronted with the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence, and contradictions of contemporary life. How does one find the courage to stand in the face of this "awe-full-ness"? How do we build a Beautiful city amid present-day ruin, rubble, and smoke?

Richard Stengel (2026), a noted journalist (former editor of *Time*) and expert on international affairs (Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy in the Obama administration), has recently declared that the United States is now far away from offering a "beautiful city." The "shining city on the hill" where democracy, freedom, and human rights are sacrosanct is no longer represented by our country as it is viewed by those living in our mid-21st-century nations. Stengel asserts that:

> [An] old image of America as a narcissistic and culturally insensitive bully is back with a vengeance. . . When we talk about freedom and the rule of law abroad, but do not demonstrate them at home, we are rightfully seen as hypocrites. I'm afraid there is no soft power action [restored reputation], no movie, no song, no video game, that can make up for an errant Tomahawk missile that kills dozens of children at a girl's school.

Stengel concludes his Guardian essay by noting that the United States was:

> . . . never quite the shining city on the hill we thought we were. But, post-Trump, the United States will become little America. Smaller, meaner, less shiny.

We must ask: Is Stengel correct in his assessment of Post-Trump America? Clearly, the task before us is daunting. The envisioning of and movement towards a beautiful city requires personal and collective commitment and courage—particularly courage:

When your trust is all but shattered

When your faith is all but killed

You can give up bitter and battered

Or you can slowly start to build

A beautiful city.

Our personal sense of self, purpose, and reality, as well as our collective sense of identity, purpose, and reality, are always in flux. As Richard Stengel observes, the United States has never quite been "the shining city on the hill." Beauty in civic life has always been elusive for American citizens (and citizens of other countries throughout human history). How do we live with this instability? As we have asked throughout this book, how do we live with

and navigate a world that is volatile, complex, turbulent, and filled with uncertainty, ambiguity, and contradiction (VUCA-Plus)? Yes, it takes courage to sustain our commitment to building a beautiful city.

Conclusions

In reflecting on the requisite courage, we return to the 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 lives, 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, spiritual demands are being made on us as we confront the dynamic challenges of the society in which we live.

So, as we turn, in Chapter Sixteen, to our own envisioning of the Beautiful City, you will find that it incorporates both secular and spiritual elements. So, please stay tuned . . .

———————————

Chapter Sixteen

Toward the Pathway to True Freedom: Building the Beautiful City

Up to this point, we have introduced some of the elements that we might bring to a compelling image of the future. The formulation of this future as an architectural enterprise has been described. It involves careful construction of an edifice that can be envisioned but does not yet exist. We have dwelled on the nature of dynamic constructivism because it plays a central role in shaping a shared attitude regarding the purpose 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 demanding interpersonal work. Why do we do it? This engagement in collaboration and the development of collective expertise requires the 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. 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. We bring this book to a close by considering the key ingredients of a successful collaborative construction of a beautiful city. And with this achievement comes the capacity to discover and treat the personal pathway to true freedom.

Visionary Leadership: Builders of the Beautiful City

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").

Stories

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 is found in 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 the visionary leader's own life and struggles, it must also resonate with and align with the stories and personal aspirations of those receiving 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 typically phrased: "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."

Three Steps

Our guide, David Brooks, offers a three-step process for leaders to follow in building and gaining acceptance for a compelling vision. For Brooks (2026b, p. 139) it begins by noting the distinctive advantage now held by the prevailing power of Donald Trump and MAGA:

> Trumpism, like populism, is more than a set of policies—it's a culture. Trump offers people a sense of belonging, an identity, self-respect, and a comprehensive political ethic. Populists are not trying to pass this or that law; they are altering the climate of the age. And Democrats think they can fight that by offering some tax credits? \

It is at this point that Brooks (2026b, p. 139) suggests the first step toward confronting Trump and his power:

> To beat a social movement, you must build a counter social movement, And to do that, you need a different narrative about where we are and where we should be heading, a different set of values dictating what is admirable and what is disgraceful. If we fail to build such a movement, authoritarian strongmen around the globe will dominate indefinitely.
>
> The traditional American story is built on hope and possibility. The MAGA story is built on menace and threat. The traditional American story embraces risk. The MAGA story clings to security. For most Americans across our history, utopia has lain in the future; for Trumpian populists, utopia lies in the past. The traditional American mindset is premised on the possibility of limitless growth that can be widely shared; the populist mindset is that everything is zero-sum competition.
>
> The story Trump tells isn't truly American; in fact, his story is the one Russian nationalists tell: *The good people of the heartland are under threat from foreigners and urban modernizers; I will protect you.* If the representative American images were once the covered wagon or the car, today's representative MAGA image is a wall.

Americans will eventually reject MAGA, not only because it's like a foreign implant in the body politic. Eventually, it will become clearer that Trump's ethos doesn't address the real problems plaguing his working-class supporters: poor health outcomes, poor educational outcomes, low levels of social capital, low levels of investment in their communities, and weak economic growth. The Trumpists focus on their civil war against the elites—hurting Harvard, hurting USAID, hurting the National Institutes of Health. Cutting off public broadcasting may be emotionally satisfying in an own-the-libs kind of way, but how does this help the working class? Trump's largest legislative achievement is a tax cut for the rich. How does that help the working class?

Brooks (2026b, p. 140) seems to be aligning himself with Fred Polak in recognizing the key role to be played by a compelling vision of the future:

> The second task is to construct a vision of America that is more inspiring than MAGAs. Roughly 125 years ago, when the Declaration was half as old as it is now, America was struggling to cope with the Industrial Revolution. The 1880s witnessed the vicious depression of 1882-85, massive political corruption, astounding concentrations of corporate power, huge inequality, and lynchings and other racial terrorism.

Brooks (2026b, p. 140) also seems to be borrowing from the playbook of Scott Page, our systems-oriented, complexity and diversity guide:

> The third task, of course, is to actually build the movement around the vision. Social movements are bigger than political parties, and focused on more than just passing bills in Congress. They push for change on civic, cultural, institutional, and legislative fronts all at once. They change the climate of the age.
>
> Successful social movements find ways to build civic power. Authoritarians seek to divide and isolate their opponents to prevent collective action, so the mere act of organizing a coalition creates power. Individuals may be powerless, but groups are not.
>
> Successful movements are microcosms of the society they hope to create. An anti-MAGA movement would have to be a cross-class movement, one that joined members of the educated class with members of the working class, shrinking the social chasms that gave rise to populism in the first place.

Finally, David Brooks (Brooks, 2026b, p. 140) also seems to be borrowing from John Lewis's "good trouble" playbook:

> Successful movements create civic power by increasing social tension. Through marches, bus boycotts, and lunch-counter sit-ins, the civil-rights movement created tension that threw sand in the gears of white supremacy. Saul Alinsky, the influential community organizer, used to argue that power is not what you have; it's what your opponents think you have. In the 201Os, the Tea Party movement, though small in numbers, rarcheted up the tension on establishment Republicans, convincing them that resisting Tea Party goals would be costly.

Thus, we find a blending of several different change strategies in David Brooks' game plan presented in this book. In seeking to join with other people in building a beautiful city, it is important to keep in mind the futuristic vision of Fred Polak, the systemic and inclusive perspective of Scott Page, and the troubling actions of John Lewis (and Saul Alinsky). Yes, we can build a beautiful city, despite the faux populism of Donald Trump and his obedient MAGA followers.

Visionary Settings: Nature of the Beautiful City

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 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 select 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? What guides 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.

Five Criteria

We wish to expand on these descriptions by proposing that there are five primary criteria concerning 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 identify these criteria and then suggest how they 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. The right people are always there to build the future. As Ken and Mary Gergen (Gergen and Gergen, 2004) propose, it is only a matter of facilitating a shared exploration of the "truth." Expertise exists 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. The visionary leader (especially if new to this role) will often 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 become the visionary leader who holds a vision that is now dated 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 accompanied by 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 without a mission is rarely either heard or engaged over an extended period. The "expert" is likely to hear something like the following when not aligned with the mission: "This is nice to know, but not really relevant to what we are working on today."

The expert should pause before offering their insights and advice 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 this

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 won't) we do 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 those sacrifices made at Gettysburg is based on his firm commitment to preserving the cherished union. The "ends" (vision) never justify the use of inappropriate or unethical "means" (values). Expertise may 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 a formally identified sense of purpose: what difference does our family, clan, organization, or social system contribute to the lives of people living in this community, country, or world? What social purpose are we serving? How does this purpose relate to our vision of the future? Our vision can be self-serving or even profoundly destructive 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 changes 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 be articulated by a visionary leader, collaboration and appreciation are required if the expert advice and vision are to be truly owned by those who must use 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, as well as the sharing of stories (not just the visionary leader's stories) and the identification of moments of "greatness" in the past organizational history and present organizational realities. 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 a long-term impact. The neurosciences offer an important clue regarding what occurs after listening to the expert or motivator.

Recent hormonal system studies reveal the important role played not just by adrenaline, but also by oxytocin. This hormone brings us closer together rather than leading us to fight or flee. Oxytocin is a "bonding" agent. 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 that turns (to use Martin Buber's phrase) an "I-It" relationship into an "I-Thou" relationship (Buber, 2000).

We 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 only 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 not 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 to a vision (as well as mission, values, and purposes). This is the key to enacting collective expertise and sustaining a vision. Expertise and vision must enliven a sense of community and shared commitment. Hence, neither expertise nor vision can just be the product of one person's advice or sense of the future.

If people are open to shared 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 their 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 is ignored or if the vision is actualized. We continue to seek 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 Settings

We must find appropriate settings for testing, reflecting on, and revising our image of the future. We 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 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. Taleb's (2012) antifragile perspective is fully in operation. 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 taste the endpoint to which they are striving.

Several key questions are appropriately posed. How do we create these systems in the organizations in which we work and the 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?

Finding the Chalice

As Eisler has suggested, we mold a chalice to contain anxiety and direct the energy (support), while also wielding the sword of change and transformation (challenge). The sword helps to mobilize creativity and energy, while the chalice makes it safe for this mobilization to occur. Chalice and blade allow us to learn and flourish.

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 we 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 we have noted, many of the societies studied by Graeber and Wengrow established nonhierarchical systems on a temporary basis. They often relate to seasons of the year or specific community functions.

We 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 rather than replacing traditional (often hierarchical) structures.

Collateral Organizations: Building Multiple Cities

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 skirting seemingly intractable problems. They might even transform their organization by introducing a matrix design, enabling multiple perspectives on 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 engaged in a temporary setting (such as a collateral organization) 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 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

Several collateral organizational designs have been identified in this book. These include Future Search and Open Space. At this point, we offer a more generic description of the Collateral Organization, for this structure can be designed in many ways and used for multiple 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 great 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 about what the collateral organization must do 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 introduces unique perspectives and practices.

The third and fourth steps will vary depending on the nature and purpose of the collateral organization. The third step involves specifying measurable objectives, along with assigned tasks. This step may 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. When taking the fourth step, we identify the people who will be invited to participate in this collateral organization. At one extreme, we find a collateral organization set up specifically for members of the C-Suite or perhaps those from the C-Suite together with members of the governing board. At the other end is a 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 ground rules (norms) for operating 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? Establishing the boundaries between this collateral system and the standard, daily operating system of the organization is also critical. 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 from 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 different 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 is rarely done and not recommended. It is challenging to sustain a distinctive mode for an extended period. 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 Collateral Organizations

Standard team management tools can be deployed to facilitate 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. For instance, the Delphi technique provides progressive focusing of team members (through successively collated judgments by team members regarding a specific issue). Other traditional facilitation strategies include setting ground rules, delegating roles, providing breaks, and taking notes (usually on a flipchart or through the use of PowerPoints). 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 must 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 that is related to the brainstorming and group circle process we have just described. Originally engaged by George Prince and William Gordon (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 "breakthrough" outcomes.

Viable Images of the Future: Cities That Can Be Built

We have proposed that certain forms of leadership and specific collateral structures can be of great value in constructing a viable image of the future. We now return to Fred Polak (1973) and the wisdom he offers regarding the construction of a compelling image of the future.

We 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 actively and inquisitively engage their world. 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. We find no reason to face the continuing challenge of survival. We find little reason to produce or prepare 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), children receive no attention. 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 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. We have already noted one of the great ironies that emerge when the vision has been realized, abandoned, or ignored. If a vision is no longer required, 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 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 the Western European countries were certainly better off after World War II than they were during the war, there was no new Europe. The United Nations couldn't resolve 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 such as Churchill, Roosevelt, De Gaulle, and 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. Ironically, crisis is common in community groups and organizations when they achieve a modicum of success and have realized part of their dream. What do we do now that we have completed this five-year plan? We have obtained this grant and initiated our new programs, but nothing has really changed. We are still hustling for 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

We have already noted that a new set of goals (a new baseline) should be established if the environment or constituencies being served change. 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 important that the achievement of 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. We should 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 a new leader). The half-life of a vision is now shrinking, and visionary leaders are readily tossed on the trash heap.

Oftentimes, the "dispensable" expert and visionary leader must embrace the Irony and step aside for the new expert and vision. They have finished the task and await a period of rest and reflection on what has been achieved. At other times, old experts and visionary leaders can move beyond Irony by becoming updated experts and new visionary leaders. They find renewed energy and commitment while collaborating with others to provide expertise and formulate 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 do next 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: A "Good" City

Visionary leadership and safe and supportive settings are needed to guide the ship through the world of VUCA-Plus. This expertise is found inside each of us and in our groups. 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 must 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.

When buttressed by appreciative processes and attitudes, communities of head and heart provide teams with a framework for reflection on their own areas of expertise. These processes and attitudes enable participants to receive feedback from one another regarding the areas of expertise that they most want to leverage for their own growth and for the collaborative enactment of a shared vision. With appreciative processes and attitudes in place, there is the remarkable (and rare) opportunity in these settings 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 reference a spiritual source to gain insights into 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 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. Human societies are deeply rooted in the history of this planet (though short-lived by geographic standards). However, according to Niebuhr, human beings have made comparatively

little progress during this lengthy period in solving the problem of their aggregate existence. According to Niebuhr (1932, p. 1):

> 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. We can also imagine a set of personal wants that are not yet (and probably never can be) fulfilled (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 1):

> 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 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 collectively done 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 (2011/2013) 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 (Niebuhr, 1935, p. xi) 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 (Niebuhr, 1935, pp. xi-xii) 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 (Niebuhr, 1935, p. xii) 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?

Living and working in a mid-21st-century society that is saturated with VUCA-Plus, we 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-related conditions of moral contradiction and ambiguity.

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, the three of us have hopefully provided some understanding and appreciation for the challenges of expertise and belief that exist in our VUCA-Plus world. We have also offered some strategies and tools that may aid in the movement from understanding to action. If we have been successful in this endeavor, then our multi-year work on preparing this book has been worthwhile.

Can We and Do We Really Want to Build a Beautiful City?

There are those of us who are dedicated to building a beautiful city, and those who mouth the words and sing the song but take no steps in joining

the architects and construction team. In some cases, this level of dedication is related to our tolerance for dreaming and for envisioning what this city might look like. We are realists who are entrenched in the land of numbers, facts, and analytics. Or we are idealists who are floating in the clouds of aspirations, visions, and speculation.

From Near or Far

There is also the matter of our current condition. How far away from our current reality is that beautiful city? Are we living in the desert with only a faint vision of this city? Instead, like the Essene community in Qumran, we can imagine the restorative waters flowing down from nearby Jerusalem. With the New Jerusalem in sight from their residency on the shores of the Dead Sea, the Essenes could envision the waters of this renewed city restoring life in their sea.

With this vision clearly in mind, this community could produce a Gospel of Peace and contribute to the reformation of the Jewish Church that prepared the way for Christianity. Are we preparing our own Gospel of Peace that can guide us in building the Beautiful City? Perhaps, instead, we take the lead from President Trump, who returned the title of our defense department to its original name: the War Department. We can prepare a Gospel of War. This would not be hard to do. It would simply be an update and expansion on the Project 2026 document that has guided much of the Trump administration's actions.

What about those living in the American past who lived in a desert of poverty and helplessness? Were they hopeless and bereft of any vision of a Beautiful City? Did they envision any restorative water pouring down upon their sea of death, bringing new life and opportunity to themselves and their community? Certainly, there were communities living in the American desert of depression during the early 1930s. Compounded with the drought and dust storms of these years, the challenge of staying alive was great for those living in the American Deep South and in the Dust Bowl of the lower American Midwest.

Most people living under these conditions would seem to live a long way from hope. While some residents of the Dust Bowl lived with the hope that Franklyn Roosevelt was their savior and would lead them to a Beautiful (or at least not as dusty) City via his New Deal (Egan, 2006), there was

ultimately little to find, day to day, in the reforms introduced by Roosevelt and Frances Perkins, his brilliant and visionary Secretary of Labor (who was the first woman to serve in a president's cabinet). There was only the here and now, and the honor, joy, and beauty to be found in the everyday.

It is this framing of a Beautiful City that was to be found in the poetic depictions offered by James Agee and the penetrating photographs taken by Walker Evans in their legendary, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Agee and Evans, 1939/1960). Living in Hale County, Alabama, the three families portrayed by Agee and Evans were all tenant farmers who lived marginally in small, dilapidating shacks without water, electricity, or much hope of improvement. Yet, for these families, there was something of a Beautiful City to be found in their limited vision of such a city, the joy they took in their own modest setting, and the way they discerned beauty.

Something similar is offered by Paul Harding (2009) in his discerning portrait of a dying father and son's simple life. Great beauty is to be found one afternoon by the father as he interweaves blades of grass and flowers to form a panel that glimmers green in the setting sun. Something similar is also found in Harding's (Harding, 2023) later book about an actual island community in Maine. The great beauty of their island was discerned by these poor and bedraggled men, women, and children.

Honor: For these families, the city was to be found and was on display through what Agree identified as the Altars that were to be found in the tenants' homes. As Ruesch and Kees have observed, the things most of us value in our lives are often on display in the vertical structures (altars) we have in our homes (Ruesch, Jurgen and Weldon Kees, 1969). For one of Agee and Evan's families (the Gudgers), the altar consisted of artifacts placed on their table as well as their shelf:

> On the table: it is blue auto paint: a white cloth, hanging a little over the edges. On the cloth, at center, a small fluted green glass bowl in which sits a white china swan, profiled upon the north.
>
> On the mantel against the glowing wall, each about six inches from the ends of the shelf, two small twin vases, very simply blown, of pebble-grained iridescent glass. Exactly at center between them, a fluted saucer, with a coarse lace edge, of pressed milky glass, which Louise's mother gave her to call her own and for which she cares

more dearly than for anything else she possesses. Pinned all along the edge of this mantel, a broad fringe of white tissue pattern—paper which Mrs. Gudger folded many times on itself and scissored into pierced geometrics of lace, and of which she speaks as her last effort to make this house pretty.

Agee' list of altar artifacts continues. He turns to what is placed on the walls of the Gudger's home (Agee and Evans, 1939/1960, pp. 163-164):

> On the wall, pasted or pinned or tacked or printed, set well discrete from one another, in not quite perfected symmetric relations:
>
> A small octagonal frame surfaced in ivory and black ribbons of thin wicker or of straw, the glass broken out: set in this frame, not filling it, a fading box-camera snapshot: low, gray, dead-looking land stretched back in a deep horizon; twenty yards back, one corner of a tenant house, central at the foreground, two women: Annie Mae's sister Emma as a girl of twelve, in slippers and stockings and a Sunday dress, standing a little shyly with puzzling eyes, self-conscious of her appearance and of her softly clouded sex; and their mother, wide and high, in a Sunday dress still wet from housework, her large hands hung loose and biased in against her thighs, her bearing strong, weary, and noble, her face fainted away almost beyond distinguishing, as if in her death and by some secret touching the image itself of the fine head her husband had cared for so well had softly withered, which even while they stood there had begun its blos\\Owing inheritance in the young daughter at her side.
>
> A calendar, advertising ~'s shoes, depicting a pretty brunette with ornate red lips, in a wide-brimmed red hat, cuddling red flowers. The title is Cherie, and written twice, in pencil, in a schoolchild's hand: Louise, Louise.
>
> A calendar, advertising easy-payment furniture: a tinted photograph of an immaculate, new-overalled boy of twelve, wearing a wide new straw hat, the brim torn by the artist, fishing. The title is Fishin'.
>
> Slung awry by its chain from a thin nail, an open oval locket, glassed. In one face of this locket, a colored picture of Jesus, his right hand blessing, his red heart exposed in a burst spiky gold halo.

> In the other face, a picture by the same artist of the Blessed Virgin, in blue, her heart similarly exposed and haloed, and pierced with seven small swords.'

What do the Gudger's artifacts seem to convey about what is of value to them right now and what might they consider to be of value in the future? There is an immediate valuing of simple art objects. Mrs. Gudger finds the milky glass saucer to be of great value (perhaps because it was given to her by someone important in her life). Appreciation of and devotion to family is also evident in the cherished pictures of family members at various stages of life. Then there is the matter of fishing. Apparently, this is an important recreational activity in the life of the Gudgers. It might also provide some food for this impoverished family.

There are also objects that were made by Gudger family members to make their home "pretty." Alongside advertisement of goods to be purchased, there are images of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin. Crass commercialism (the profane) seems to be pitted against religious devotion (the sacred) (Eliade, 1959). While this family can't afford to indulge in the profane, there is no cost associated with their devotion to a higher power (the sacred). Fishin' also doesn't cost much (except time!).

While most of the family's artifacts relate to the here and now (or the past history of family members), the family's valuing of Christian images suggests that there is also the perspective of a potential future (in heaven?). For the Gudger family, and the other two families, it is a matter of balancing off what might be labeled a proximal appreciation with what might be labeled a distal appreciation. That which is immediately at hand in time and space is given loving attention and is displayed on the altar. Homesteaders, such as the Gudgers, are dwelling right now in the Beautiful City—however downtrodden it might be. It is only for them to appreciate what they now have.

The proximal appreciation shown in James Agee's writings might actually be what we witness in our book. Members of the three families might know only despair; however, there seem to be too many instances of the sharecroppers' proximal appreciation in this book for this appreciation to exist only in the mind and heart of James Agee. We would also note that proximal appreciation is vividly present in the photographs offered by Walker Evans. His pictures have been widely displayed in venues other than

his book. They are celebrated precisely because they convey something about the American spirit and the unique abiding character of those living in our country.

By contrast, distal appreciation is displayed in the images of Jesus and the Virgin Mary found on the Gudgers' locket. A loving future might await the Gudgers in a life after death. This distal perspective was also apparent in the life of the Essenes. They are waiting for a New Jerusalem to bring new life to their world. Their Gospel of Peace may be enacted right here and now (proximal). Ultimately, however, it is being enacted on behalf of the envisioned future. As children, we learned at Christmas time to be good "because Santa Claus is coming to town." The Essenes (and later the Christians) were encouraged to be good "because the New Jerusalem is coming to town." The compelling vision of the future we present in this book is also rooted in a broader perspective of appreciation. Is it possible that this distal perspective is not needed for us to achieve true freedom? Can this freedom be found in an Alabama shack—or is all of this just the figment of James Agee's fertile imagination? Is Walker Evans a successful photographer because he gets us to see more in his pictures than is really there?

Joy: In *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, we often find James Agee dwelling on the joy that comes with the proximal appreciation of life being lived on a tenant farm. By contrast, in the present book, we have often dwelled on Flow and Awe; perhaps, the three of us should also consider the feelings of joy that come with the more mundane appreciation of everyday life. Rather than seeking Flow on the side of a cliff or finding Awe on a trip to the Grand Canyon, perhaps, like the three families, we should savor the always-present surroundings in which we now live. James Agee describes the experience of joy in the life of his three families (Agee and Evans, 1939/1960, p. 227):

> This lucky situation of joy, this at least illusion of personal wholeness or integrity, can overcome one suddenly by any one of any number of unpredictable chances: the fracture of sun-light on the facade and traffic of a street; the sleaving up of chimney smoke; the rich lifting of the voice of a train along the darkness; the memory of a phrase of an inspired trumpet; the odor of scorched cloth, of a car's exhaust, of a girl, of pork, of beeswax on hot iron,

> of young leaves, of peanuts; the look of a toy fire engine, or of a hundred agates sacked in red cheese-cloth; the oily sliding sound as a pumpgun is broken; the look of a child's underwaist with its bone buttons loose on little cot-ton straps; the stiffening of snow in a wool glove; the odor of kitchen soap, of baby soap, of scorched bellybands: the flexion of a hand; the twist of a knee; the modulations in a thigh as someone gets out of a chair: the bending of a speeding car round a graded curve: the swollen, blemished feeling of the mouth and the tenacity and thickness of odor of an unfamiliar powder, walking sleepless in high industrial daybreak and needing coffee, the taste of cheap gin mixed with cheap ginger ale without much ice: the taste of turnip greens; of a rotted seed drawn from between the teeth . . .

Does the evidence of joy-filled appreciation for one's dilapidated home and surroundings on an Alabama homestead relate in some way to what Hernando DeSoto is proposing regarding the legal appreciation of shacks on the side of the hill in Rio de Janeiro? Can the poor people of Rio appreciate the psychological value (joy) to be found in the homes of equally poor people homesteading in Alabama?

Beauty: It seems very appropriate in our introduction of the "Beautiful City" image in this book, that we should find a reflection on the nature of beauty in the midst of James Agee's study of the three tenant families. He has this to say about a "sense of beauty," especially as this sense related to the world in which these families lived. Agee first relates "beauty" to class structures (Agee and Evans, 1939/1960, p. 314):

> Is this an 'instinct' or a product of 'training'. In either case there appears to be almost no such thing among the members of these three families, and I have a strong feeling that the 'sense of beauty,' like nearly everything else, is a class privilege. I am sure in any case that its 'terms' differ by class, and that the 'sense' is limited and inarticulate in the white tenant class almost beyond hope of description. (This quite aside from the fact that in other classes, where it is less limited, it is almost a hundred per cent corrupted.)

It is at this point that Agee is declaring the land and life of the three families to, in fact, be quite "beautiful." He seems to be aligning with our suggestion

that his tenant farmers are assuming a proximal perspective about "beauty" (Agee and Evans, 1939/1960, p. 314):

> They live on land, and in houses, and under skies and seasons, which all happen to seem to me beautiful beyond almost anything else I know, and they themselves, and the clothes they wear, and their motions, and their speech, are beautiful in the same intense and final commonness and purity: but by what chance have I this 'opinion' or 'perception' or, I might say, 'knowledge'? And on the other hand, why do they appear so completely to lack it? This latter, there seem good reasons for. Habit. No basis of comparison. No 'sophistication' (there can be a good meaning of the word). No reason nor glimmer of reason to regard anything in terms other than those of need and use.

Perhaps, the matter of proximal perspective ties in with the pragmatic perspective that these three families must assume if they are to survive. Beauty is found in use. Beauty is also found in the products that this use will yield. Agee suggests that beauty without use becomes a "rotted prettiness." James Agee would seem to be declaring that this "pretty" form of beauty is unnatural (Agee and Evans, 1939/1960, p. 314):

> Land is what you get food out of: houses are what you live in, not comfortably: the sky is your incalculable friend or enemy: all nature, all that is built upon it, all that is worn, all that is done and looked to, is in plain and powerful terms of need, hope, fear, chance, and function. Moreover, the profoundest and plainest 'beauties,' those of the order of the stars and of solitude in darkened and empty land, come at least partly of awe, and such in a simple being is, simply, unformulable fear. It is true that in what little they can obtain of them, they use and respect the rotted prettinesses of 'luckier' classes; in such naivety that these are given beauty; but by and large it seems fairly accurate to say that being so profoundly members in nature, among man-built things and functions which are almost as scarcely complicated 'beyond' nature as such things can be, and exist on a 'human' plane, they are little if at all more aware of 'beauty' nor of themselves as 'beautiful,' than any other member in nature, any animal, anyhow.

Thus, it seems that a proximal perspective on the beautiful city might be found in one's home and backyard. Much as Dorothy found in *the Wizard of Oz*, there is no need to leave home in search of an Emerald City. Everything you desire is ultimately to be found in Kansas (or Alabama). It is a matter of Proximal Appreciation.

Agee's reflections on the nature of beauty seem to relate directly to the processes of appreciation on which we have often focused in this book. Perhaps, once again, we should invite an inquiry into the nature of both proximal and distal appreciation as these two perspectives relate to the need for a compelling vision of the future when finding a pathway to true freedom. Yet again, it might be of value to explore alternative notions about value. For Agee and Evans, there was honor, joy, and beauty in all that they witnessed and in which they participated while joining in the life of their three "famous" families. As Agee (1939/1960, p. 459) concluded, "everything that is, is holy."

Apparently, we don't have to look elsewhere than in our own home for the Beautiful City. We are all "famous" men (and women), even though most of us are not widely known but are known deeply by those living in our proximal life (Agee and Evens, 1939/1960, p.445):

And some there be which have no memorial; who perished as though they had never been; and are become as though they had never been born; and their children after them.

But these were merciful men, whose righteousness hath not been forgotten

With their seed shall continually remain a good inheritance, and their children are within the covenant.

Their seed standeth fast, and their children for their sakes.

Their seed shall remain for ever, and their glory shall not be blotted out.

Their bodies are buried in peace; but their name liveth forevermore.

In yet another venue, James Agee identifies a mindset related to a cherished world that is not envisioned in the future. In this instance, Agee is describing the world that existed in 1915. He focuses on his own cherished childhood, living in Knoxville, Tennessee. This depiction is shared not only in his own writings (Agee, 2005) but also in lyrics sung by a soprano in a

symphonic work composed by Samuel Barber (Barber, 1986). This poetic recollection (accurate or inaccurate) begins with the following passage:

> It has become that time of evening when people sit on their porches, rocking gently and talking gently and watching the street and the standing up into their sphere of possession of the trees, of birds' hung havens, hangars. People go by; things go by. A horse, drawing a buggy, breaking his hollow iron music on the asphalt; a loud auto; a quiet auto; people in pairs, not in a hurry, scuffling, switching their weight of aestival body, talking casually, the taste hovering over them of vanilla, strawberry, pasteboard and starched milk, the image upon them of lovers and horsemen, squared with clowns in hueless amber.

Later in this rendering, Agee speaks with great appreciation of his childhood family:

> All my people are larger bodies than mine,...with voices gentle and meaningless like the voices of sleeping birds. One is an artist, he is living at home. One is a musician, she is living at home. One is my mother who is good to me. One is my father who is good to me.

Agee ends with the following poignant and haunting phrase:

> Sleep, soft smiling, draws me unto her: and those receive me, who quietly treat me, as one familiar and well-beloved in that home: but will not, oh, will not, not now, not ever; but will not ever tell me who I am

James Agee seems to be leaving himself, as a young child, with a hollow sense of not knowing who he is. As a child, James is defined solely by a strong social context (Knoxville in 1915), retained in nostalgia, and by the loving embrace of his blessed family. Where is this child, personally, to find themselves in the midst of this enveloping sense of once upon a time and place? Could it be that we must possess an image of a future that is different from what now exists or has seemed to exist in the past, if we are to complete our sense of self? In doing so, we risk becoming isolated in our individualism and our distinctive thoughts and feelings about where we want to be or should be in the future. In doing so, we also construct a barrier on the way to our own construction of a beautiful city and our own discovery of the pathway to true freedom. In our isolation, we cease our quest for a

convergent harmony of interests and a balance between individual rights and collective responsibilities.

In many African cultures, one's "right" (and ability) to identify a personal self is dependent on the ability to embrace and enrich the welfare of one's community (collectivism) when young (Bergquist, 2021b). Similarly, in his youth, Agee should be fully enveloped in a sense of self that is defined by social context and family. The right and ability to construct a unique sense of self, and the accompanying ability to define a future that is different from the present or past, might have to be "saved" for adulthood. There might not be a distinctive image of the future for us during our youth. This image may await a time and place when we can think and feel independent of the "gentle rocking and gentle talking" in our own real or imagined youth that is equivalent to Agee's 1915 Knoxville.

What then do we make of these astonishing portrayals of honor, joy, beauty, and nostalgia provided by James Agee (and Walker Evans)? Are we all "famous" people whose names shall live forevermore? Or are we merely temporary actors who are playing out an often-undesired role right now as hapless observers of a democracy being destroyed? Are we all still children living in a 1915 Knoxville-like world of grace and love? Or do we remain a child living with a loving family and in a beautiful city of thoughts and feelings for only a short period? At some point, must we realize that a new and better city is built in collaboration with one another? Is a "real" pathway to true freedom found and traveled hand-in-hand with others?

The words and pictures of Agee and Walker have received critical praise over the years since their book was first published. In their own way, these three families did become famous and have been the subject of other studies conducted at later post-depression points in American history. The words of James Agee, transformed to lyrics, have been conveyed with great emotional force in the often-performed symphonic composition of Samuel Barber. Something of enduring importance seems to be conveyed in these words, pictures, and lyrics. . . .

A similar portrait might be offered regarding a very different American who also lived a long distance from the source of any resources or power to build the beautiful city. Though at one point he resided close to this source. This alien from power is Scott Nearing, who taught for many years at Swarthmore College and the Wharton School. Dismissed from Wharton

for his radical, leftist views, Nearing became a *cause célèbres* for the socialist and later the communist party in the United States.

Finding very little support for his leftist and pacifist perspectives in America, Scott Nearing and his wife, Helen, abandoned traditional public life and purchases a plot of land in Vermont and later Maine, where they established a "utopian" farm, featuring subsistence farming, Co-authoring Living the Good Life: How to Live Simply and Sanely in a Troubled World with Helen (Nearing and Nearing, 1970), Scott became a leading figure in the "back to the land" movement, while also advocating organic food production and a vegan diet. For many years, Scott and Helen hosted young people and aging "hippies" who found inspiration and guidance in the life and work of the Nearings. A beautiful city of peace and natural life had been established, becoming a welcoming sanctuary for those who felt alienated from the dominant world of highly processed achievement accompanied by highly processed food (Nearing and Nearing, 1990).

The Nearings obviously lived a very different life from the three families featured by Agee and Evans. The Agee and Evans families did not choose to live on the land. They had no other choice. Poverty allows for very little freedom. The Nearings, on the other hand, did choose to live on the land. They did not come from a state of poverty, living intentionally under a set of self-imposed guidelines based on respect for all living beings.

However, like the three families featured by Agee and Evans, Scott and Helen Nearing found beauty in the land on which they resided. They found joy in tilling the soil and raising their crops. Most importantly, they were able to honor all sentient life by consuming only that which can be renewed and by avoiding all animal suffering. We find in both the lives of "famous men/women" and the Nearings, an envisioning and creation of a beautiful city that is "close by" – for it resides in their heart and in the land on which they live.

Every Now and Then

We have just identified one way to build a beautiful city. We can assume a proximal viewpoint by finding ways to appreciate the beauty of our current condition. We can also embrace a proximal viewpoint by creating a "minimalist" city on a plot of land that we cultivate. Expanded a bit, we can turn to the folk wisdom provided by Pete Seeger, who taught us to think

globally but act locally. Like Scott and Helen Nearing, Pete Seeger shifted from the swift and challenging world of advocacy to a more gentle and personally gratifying ecological restoration of his beloved Hudson River.

There are other options. We can engage in talk but little action. This involves a weak level of commitment to building a beautiful city. We use the term "every now and then" to describe this marginal commitment. On occasion, we will think about and perhaps even help construct the beautiful city. Many critics of political demonstrations propose that the "every now and then" option is being engaged by those who demonstrate. These folks end up feeling better about themselves, but their actions do little to change our current conditions.

There is a counterargument to be made about those participating in demonstrations. They are taking action. And in large enough numbers, the demonstrators do influence the formulation and revision of public policies and priorities. This might be labeled a "collective now and then" – for the demonstrations don't have to occur every weekend. However, an occasional big-time demonstration involving thousands of people can be a tipping point. We need only turn to the civil rights demonstrations held in Washington, D.C. These include the August 1963 demonstration where Dr. King delivered his "I have a dream" speech, the 1993 demonstration for LGBTQ+ rights, and the recent (2014) Black Lives Matter convening of large human rights communities.

There are also the women and men of the mid-21st-century who display a strong level of commitment. They also embrace the "every now and then" motto; however, they assign an unusual meaning to this phrase. "Every" (all the time) "now" (at every moment) "and then" (I will think and act in a new way) on behalf of building the beautiful city. These are the activists who not only find a way to gain a broad understanding of the challenging VUCA-Plus world in which they live and work (a relativist perspective); they also find a pathway that enables them to navigate with sustained commitment to building a beautiful city.

We find extraordinary examples in American history of those who have established and enacted these commitments while retaining a relativistic perspective (Perry, 1970). We need only look at the actions taken by heroes such as Dr. King, Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Tubman, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. We can even extend our appreciation for thoughtful leadership

by turning to such international figures as Mahatma Gandhi, Sun Yat-sen, Mother Teresa, and Aung San Suu Kyi (during her earlier years). All of these leaders conveyed a compelling image of the future for their country or for all humankind. They also sought a harmony of interests and a balance between individual rights and collective responsibility.

A Beautiful City and the Tears of Things

It would certainly be appropriate to turn to one or more of these formally elected or informally appointed leaders when seeking to find the architects and builders of the beautiful city. However, we believe that it is even more appropriate to access the wisdom and guidance provided by biblical leaders of the distant past. They sought to build the New Jerusalem upon which our image of the beautiful city is based. Fortunately, we have a recent account of these New Jerusalem leaders. They dwelled in a region of the world that was troubled more than a thousand years ago in the history of humankind. This region remains troubled, as are most regions of our contemporary world. We still need wise leaders for our troubled times.

This account is offered by Richard Rohr in his recent book, *The Tears of Things* (Rohr, 2025). He focused on what can be learned from several prophets portrayed in the Jewish Torah and the Christian Bible. Subtitled, *Prophetic Wisdom for the Age of Outrage,* Rohr's book speaks directly to the current challenges faced by those who wish to build the beautiful city continually ("every"), at every moment ("now"), and with an open frame of mind ("and then").

As Rohr (2025, pp. xiv-xv) noted:

> For hundreds of pivotal years—starting around 1300 B.C. and continuing through the eras of Israel's kingdom, exile, and conquest-prophets like Samuel, Jonah, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel performed [an] utterly important task. Besides being truth-tellers, they were radical change agents, messengers of divine revelation, teachers of a moral alternative, and deconstructors of every prevailing order. Both Isaiah 58 and Ezekiel 3 describe a prophet as a "sentry" or a "watch-man," whose job is to hold Israel maddeningly honest, and to stop the Israelites from relying on arms, money, lies, and power to keep themselves safe and in control.

At this point, Rohr (2025, pp. xiv-xv) introduces societal dynamics that seem to have been operating since time immemorial in human history:

> In this way, [the prophets] introduced a completely novel role into ancient religion: an officially licensed critic, a devil's advocate who names and exposes their own group's shadow side! Few cultures, if any, develop such a counterintuitive role. By nature, civilization is intent on success and building, and has little time for self-critique. We disparage the other team and work ceaselessly to prove loyalty to our own. Maybe that's why the prophets seem most active from the time after Moses until about five centuries before Jesus, when Israel returned from exile in Babylon. After the exile, except for the moralisms of Malachi and the scattered fragments of Zechariah 9-14, there seems to be a lack of interest in the prophets, and their voices largely disappear from the scriptural account. Maybe that is why the people of Jesus's time were not ready for him. Their religious and spiritual community was too dispersed to know how to maintain a strong inner spiritual life. External observance had taken over, symbolized by the oft-repeated New Testament opponents of Jesus, the scribes and the Pharisees.

Rohr (2025, pp. xv-xvi) now advances his analysis to the present day:

> The same dynamics operate today, with those in power or trying to gain power more interested in protecting their own interests and positions than in seeking justice. . . .Without prophets, we have settled for violent revolutions and righteous reformations in just about every century. Societies have had no mechanism for reforming from within, and so our histories became about ferreting out heretics, imprisoning and murdering would-be rebels, and protecting shifting, angry, dualistic, and ambitious in-groups, each of which was more invested in their own rightness than the previous group. Revolutions took the place of evolutions, in which both order and disorder are allowed to work together. This is not a good way to move forward.

It is at this point that Richard Rohr (2025, p. xvi) offers a key insight regarding the distinctive role played by prophets (that is applicable today):

> If we look at what prophets do and how they do it, we can see that they follow a classic pattern. When prophets see that the status quo is not working, they encourage what I call "holy disorder," a scenario in which the fundamental conditions and relationships of the group are disrupted (as when the Israelites were conquered by the Babylonians or persecuted by their enemies). This disruption can take positive form or negative form. Either God outgrows our present, limited understanding and we grow with God . . . or we regress due to our inability to love and trust what is happening. Then society reverts to legalism and formality until it ultimately disintegrates. From these disruptions, a new order arises (what I call "reorder"), in which human relations can work at a higher level that is more imaginative, less dualistic, and usually less violent than the first order or the reactive disorder.

A wonderful example of contemporary disruption is offered by Rohr (2025, pp. xvi-xvii):

> The process of allowing and creating holy disorder is surely what Representative John Lewis called getting into "good trouble." He was referring to the good and necessary trouble of civil disobedience in the pursuit of racial justice, but his philosophy is equally powerful when we think about the prophets. For them, good trouble and holy disorder could draw forth better things--an entirely different consciousness characterized by more justice, more mercy, greater closeness to God. Of course, the process is never linear, and it never stops. The new reorder soon becomes a new order, and we need prophets to keep us from idolizing the new status quo. The only thing more dangerous and more common than narcissism is group narcissism. We have always needed a mechanism for positive change that is organic and comes from within, although we did not usually know that.

Much like Kurt Lewin, Rohr is describing a process of unfreezing that must precede any meaningful change. The unfreezing, in turn, comes from the offering of what today is often called “inconvenient truth” (Rohr, 2025, p. xix):

> Prophets, then, are full truth-tellers, not fortune-tellers. They pull back the veil to radically reframe our preferred storyline of history:

> the boring and predictable narrative of winners and losers, rewards and punishments. They are by definition those rare individuals who see reality in its fullness and dimension, rather than in dualities like totally right or totally wrong, all good or all bad.

As in the analysis offered by William Perry (1970), the key contribution to be made by the prophet is to move their community from a collective dualism ("totally right or totally wrong") to a relativistic framework—and eventually to commitment in the midst of this relativism.

However, a troubling question must be asked: Is truth-telling and good trouble enough? It is fine to unfreeze one's community and to create disorder. We would ask: Who are the architects and buildings of the new order? We turn specifically to Richard Rohr's portrayal of three prophets to see if they assisted in the building of the New Jerusalem. Are Amos, Hosea, and Jeremiah order-ers as well as disorders-ers? Does their good trouble lead to good outcomes?

Richard Rohr believes that these three prophets are successful to at least some extent in moving their community beyond unfreezing (disorder) into new learning and change, followed by the establishment of a new order. We will briefly follow Richard Rohr as he portrays the troubling transition from order to disorder that is found in the work of these three prophets. We also follow Rohr as he portrays the move from disorder to resolution. This Hegelian mode of analysis yields many valuable insights into the building of a beautiful city amid our current political crisis and in the midst of our outrage regarding what is being done to our democracy.

Amos

The Fifth Century B. C. prophet Amos was one of the first of the major prophets in the Torah (Old Testament). He is also one of the most ignored. Rohr believes that Amos sets the stage for the other prophets that follow him. Three major themes from Amos's life and proclamations are offered by Rohr that seem relevant to the challenges we face in our current world.

Bias Toward the Bottom: The first theme arises from Amos's socioeconomic status. Much like many of the visionary leaders of contemporary times that we mentioned at the start of the chapter, Amos came from the "working class" and had no formal education or training in the fine art of prophecy. For Amos, information and understanding came from those laboring on

the land. He was viewing the world from what Rohr calls the "bias toward the bottom." As Rohr notes (Rohr, 2025, p. 17): "Those at the top tend to believe things are the way they are for good reasons, but the poor know in their bones that things are not as they should be." Conversely (Rohr, 2025, p. 18):

> . . . Amos saw their society for what it was. He preached against the people's transgressions, their complacency, their reliance on military might, their injustices in social dealing, their immorality, and their shallow piety. He was particularly harsh in criticizing those who squeezed lives of luxury out of an unjust system.

Does this sound familiar at all? What might Amos say if he were living in our mid-21st-century world of Trumpian Tyranny?

We might extract an important lesson from Amos. When assessing the conditions of our society, we should look beyond the perspectives of those at the top of the system. This reinforces what we proposed at the start of this chapter. We should assume a bottom bias, rather than rely on the predominant and overpowering bias at the top. As organizational consultants often conclude, the most important (and often most valid) information comes from those doing the actual work in the organization rather than from those in the C-Suite who usually receive information from inside (and outside) their organization second-hand and bent toward specific agendas.

From Anger to Appreciation: A second lesson gained from Amos' pronouncements concerns the transition in emotions that must occur if one is to effect societal change. Rohr documents how Amos transformed his rhetoric from deep (and justifiable) expressions of anger to expressions of disappointment. And, most importantly, the disappointment eventually is transformed into praise. Using contemporary terms, we could say that the shift from disappointment to praise occurs through engaging a process of appreciation.

While we may be angry and disappointed in the performance of our American leaders, we are likely to find an important leverage point for change and improvement by catching our leaders and other members of our society "when they are doing it right." Why Amos devotes considerable praise to Yahweh, we know that Jewish and Christian theologians often

pronounce that the virtues of God are reflected in the "blessed" behavior of humans when they are "doing it right."

As we have noted throughout this book, we believe that the pathway to true freedom will be paved with appreciation. Glimpses of the beautiful city, revealed in the positive behavior of our fellow human beings, suggest the full realization of this city. As Rohr (2025, p. 21) observes, "Amos grows into a mystic poet right before us, balancing out the initial anger of the pruner of trees [his initial occupation] with the reverence of a fully realized [and appreciative] prophet."

Collective Evil: Richard Rohr introduces another contribution made by Amos in our search for the beautiful city and a pathway to true freedom. This contribution concerns the framing of evils in our society as the result of collective action or inaction, rather than the outcome of individual performances. Rohr noted that Amos rarely criticized the individual perpetrator of an evil act. He was always criticizing the collective, whether this be organized religions (temples, priests), secular institutions, or entire societies. Furthermore, he extends his prophetic critique beyond the boundaries of Israel and Judah. Sin has a way of ignoring national boundaries.

Along with many of the later prophets, Amos focused on collective sin and the widespread, destructive impact of this sin (Rohr, 2025, p. 24):

> The prophets, far ahead of their time, learned that it is social sin that destroys civilization and humanity: global warming, war, idealization of immense wealth, celebrity worship, the pursuit of fame and fortune, immense and growing income inequality, a denial of common truth., and on and on. They attacked hidden cultural assumptions more than they did the people caught up in them.

Rohr (Rohr, 2025, p. 26) suggests that Amos might have offered the following words during his own era –and if living in our contemporary world:

> . . . make you think that God intended a very different meaning for society and divine worship than what we now have. Justice, most of us believe, is when we send bad guys to jail! We imagine that we can point out the few who get caught and that then we can think

> of ourselves as a fair society. But we don't dare convict the whole system of massive injustice and deceit. Maybe we are refusing to carry both guilt and responsibility? Taking responsibility for the common good is the more important moral mandate.

It is at this point that Rohr (Rohr, 2025, p. 26) reintroduces what we would call an appreciative perspective:

> When the common good is the focus, preaching is not about imposing guilt and shame on individuals, but about giving vision and encouragement to society. Perhaps that is why Jesus's most common metaphor for the end times was a wedding banquet, not threats of hellfire and punishment.

What history has needed is a positive and inspiring universal vision for the earth and the people of God. Harping about individual sin and criminal convictions might shame a few individuals into halfhearted obedience, but in terms of societal change it has been a notorious . . . failure. Such an emphasis has backfired because it was not founded in a positive love and appreciation of the good, the true, and the beautiful in the world or in creation. Our shaming of human beings has simply produced an ocean of blowback from folks who already think they are unworthy. Negative energy feeds on itself, but positive energy evokes a positive vision.

There are several different ways in which Amos's focus on the collective sin might be interpreted in contemporary times. We might view Amos's focus from a systems perspective. Throughout this book, systems theorists such as Scott Page and Donella Meadows have provided insight into many systemic dynamics, including delays, flocking, and dancing landscapes. It is in the portrayal of all elements of a complex system that we discover its inconsistencies, contradictions. and polarities (Johnson, 1996; Johson, 2020). For instance, Rohr (2025, p. 23) identifies such glaring, big-time systemic inconsistencies as:

Killing is wrong, but war is good.

Greed is wrong, but luxury and capitalism are ideals to be sought after.

He also identifies several inconsistencies that reside in our everyday life:

Envy is a capital sin, but advertising is our way of life.

Anger at our neighbor is wrong, but angry people get their way.

Murder is wrong, but easy access to guns is a right and duty.

A second viewpoint regarding collective sin is based on an appreciation of the power inherent in the culture of an organization or society. In quoting Peter Drucker, Rohr (Rohr, 2025, p. 19) notes that "culture eats strategy for lunch." Culture is critical not only because it "eats strategy" (and devours most of the strategic changes introduced in a system), but also because culture contains both what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in a society. Most importantly, it is in the culture of a society that we are likely to find glimpses of our beautiful city.

Culture includes both light and shadow. The shadow, in turn, may incorporate the social unconscious that we have introduced in this book. What is the history of a people, such as the Israelis (or contemporary Americans), that impacts what these people fear (angst) as well as the way they find Hope. We find glimpses of the beautiful city within this Hope. Much as in the case of conscious appreciative processes, the shadow provides images of a city that are idealistic ("impractical") or even forbidden ("too much like socialism or communism"). It is often only in the "bias toward the bottom" that we find alternatives to a dominant assumptive world in which "war is good," "luxury is ideal," and "advertising is our way of life." The beautiful city might initially be threatening to those now living in the penthouse of a troubled mid-21st-century city.

The shadow is also found in what Rohr identifies as the Remnants that reside in a society such as Israel. The prophets often represent this remnant. It is made up of a small group of people who are without power or fame. They often represent what is old and has been defeated—yet still represent something true and valuable in an organization or society (Bateson, 1972; Bergquist, 1993). Or members of the remnant represent that which is "surely wrong and at fault" because these people "belong to the wrong subgroup, have no wealth, do not work hard enough, or have not made it to the celebrity list." (Rohr, 2025, pp.34-35) It is often in the remnant that we find the first glimpse of the beautiful city. Much as Thomas Kuhn (1962/2012) observes that major scientific revolutions often arise amid the anomalies identified by marginalized members of a scientific community, so compelling images of the future based on the vision of a beautiful city are often first offered by marginalized remnants in society.

In conclusion, Rohr (Rohr, 2025, p. 21) states that:

> Culture and systems are what create the large-scale evils that threaten us—such as poverty, war, and ecological devastation. . . . Nothing will ever change if we merely convert, imprison, or judge "bad guys."

We must keep these important words in mind when focusing on the evils of our current government. Converting (unlikely), imprisoning (unlikely), or judging (likely) Donald Trump is not the answer. The toxicity goes much deeper and is much more widespread than that found in the mind, heart, and actions of Donald Trump. We must not rely on the usual "trusted" (and powerful) sources of information and advice to guide us toward the beautiful city. Much as Stephen Swartz's song about "the beautiful city" was voiced by rebellious hippies in a junk yard, we might find a glimpse of this city coming from the mouths of ragtag 21st-century prophets or from an often dismissed and rarely "influential" remnant.

Hosea

Like Amos, Hosea was a prophet of the Fifth Century B.C. They both dwelled in a troubled land and lived in turbulent times—much like the land and times we Americans are encountering in the mid-21st-century. Richard Rohr conveys a somewhat different message regarding Hosea than was the case with Amos. If Amos was the champion of social justice, Hosea was the champion of divine love. He declared the obligations of all who live in this troubled land and turbulent times to love unconditionally on behalf of a greater good and purpose. It is in the context of this abiding love that Rohr expands on the concept of remnants.

It is in his introduction of Hosea that Rohr (2025, p. 30) points to the remnant as not only the "outside group" that must be loved despite their differentness, but also often the source of a new, more expansive, and often quite challenging notion about love.

> This tradition of the remnant is central to the whole Bible. God's message and messengers—and often the hearers—all tend to be outliers to "the way everybody thinks." Thus, when we respect the loved and rejected outsider, the "little ones" become an indication (sign) that we are on a tangent of divine love and not just our inherited and natural love of family, sameness, greatness, and ego advantage.

Rohr proposes that it is vitally important that we listen to love-oriented prophets such as Hosea and that we support and protect them. They represent the deepest values in our society. They may be “the "Heroes" that CNN celebrates each year, or those who work tirelessly for women's rights, children's rights, and human rights without much notice or reward (Rohr, 2025, p. 42):

> Like the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, they:
>
> Do not cry out or shout aloud,
>
> Or make their voice heard in the streets,
>
> But faithfully they bring true justice
>
> Refusing to be wavered or crushed,
>
> Until true justice is established on earth.
>
> (Isaiah 42:2)

They are not just a critical minority, but a largely hidden critical minority. They are the remnant and a critical mass, which we are always invited to join and protect.

Of course, these prophets do cry out and shout aloud. They try to make their voices heard today, but it is always in the service of true justice and love, not the current popular, politically correct issue.

It is in Rohr’s description of divine love that we find an expansion on the concept of Agape and I/Thou relationships that we have frequently introduced in this book. As exemplified in the teachings and actions of Hosea, we find a quite challenging notion about what it means to be guided in love by a higher cause and lofty purposes. For some (including Hosea and Rohr), this guidance is related to “God’s Will.” For others, the guidance comes in the form of social justice or equality of opportunity. In this book, we suggest that the higher cause concerns the building of a beautiful city and finding a pathway to true freedom.

At one point in *The Tears of Things*, Richard Rohr (2015, pp. 49-51) offers his own list of prophetic characteristics that are aligned with a “divine love” that might be advocated by a present-day Hosea. We summarize the items on his list:

- The ability to honestly explain the problem within the solution (rather than denying or ignoring it, whatever it is) and thus move toward truly transcending it.
- Being humble enough to have some real detachment from their own opinion and status.
- They can still love and respect those who have a different opinion.
- They do not need to be right, first or best.
- They will pursue the history of wisdom within their own culture and other cultures. They will learn and live on the edge of the insider and concern themselves with right practice more than right belief.
- They have a capacity for some degree of objective thinking beyond their own agenda, ego, and grievances.
- They are team players and not just lone rangers. They are loyal to at least a couple of communities.
- The issue they are confronting is really the issue, and not merely a means for them to achieve power, importance or fame.
- All in all, they have purified motivations or, at a minimum, have a growing ability to recognize when their motives are mixed or their heart is not pure.
- They manifest the classic "fruits of the Spirit": love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control. These are fruits that will last, the surest measure that someone is speaking from solid ground.

This is a remarkable and quite ambitious list of characteristics. It would seem that we experience Agape and I/Thou in relationship with other people and with the world in which we live when we attend to (if not always achieve) all of these characteristics. Even more to the point, these characteristics might provide us with guidance in building a beautiful city and finding the pathway to true freedom.

Richard Rohr (2025, pp. 42-43) provides us with an excellent example of a dedicated prophet of our own times who exemplifies these characteristics—and aligns with an often-despised remnant:

> Dorothy Day is an outstanding example of someone who would not cooperate with public opinion. She opposed the U.S. entry into World War II and refused to participate in the anti-nuclear war drills of the 1950s, when resistance was illegal and almost unheard of. When the air-raid sirens sounded, she appeared quietly and publicly with other protesters in a public park, holding a sign that quoted Pope John XXIII: "Why should the resources of human genius and the riches of the people turn more often to preparing arms ...than to increasing the welfare of all classes of citizens and particularly of the poor?"

Civil disobedience is often the prophets' unique platform as unofficial speakers of the deeper truth of nonviolence. Dorothy Day refused to be rallied into a national state of sacralized violence. Such people don't want or need a pulpit, although they surely deserve one. And we need them to move us toward limiting and critiquing even "good" wars, such as World War II. Otherwise, war becomes massive violence and righteousness, destroying both sides.

While we can't all be like Dorothy Day and are unlikely to manifest all of Ruhr's characteristics, there are some critical steps that we can take (Rohr, 2025, p. 43):

> Like the people of ancient Israel, we must remove the obstacles that keep us from recognizing these truth-tellers, the critical masses that are speaking in our times. . . .They are not seeking fame or fortune, or they would not be prophets. They will never be mainstream; they will always be a remnant. But it is their message that they care about, not their reputation or their comfort.

We may never be Hosea and may never exemplify the kind of divine-love that is declared by Hosea and Richard Rohr; however, we can at least support those who do manifest this higher-order love and clear the path for their love to flow into the deep fabric of our society—much as the water of social justice will someday flow from our beautiful city and we will find the pathway to true freedom.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah is much more often featured in contemporary Jewish and Christian literature than either Amos or Hosea. He also led a life that in

many ways was much more dramatic than that of our two earlier prophets. First, he lived during the 3rd and 4th Centuries B.C. in a land that was in deep trouble (the Babylonian Exile and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple). His own life was no bed or roses. Notably, he was hated by many powerful people (especially in the religious establishment), leading to the casting of Jeremiah in a cistern, where he was left to starve to death. Fortunately, he was rescued and continued to be a thorn in the side of many people.

It is worth noting that Richard Rohr has become a thorn on the side of us as authors when he commences with his exegesis of Jeremiah's prophecy. Rohr notes that many people (such as the three of us) become enamored with metaphors. Richard challenges each of us: "Am I in love with the metaphors for their own sake? Or am I in love with the thing itself?" We will each seek an answer to this question. Our personal reflections on the impact of the Trump presidency on our own heart and head suggest that there is something more to our analysis than provocative metaphors. At the very least, our metaphors are "haunted" by the memories we hold of our own lives and the lives of our ancestors.

Keeping Rohr's challenge in mind, we turn to the perspectives (and metaphors) offered by Jeremiah during particularly troubled times. He offers us further reflections on the nature of collective evil, the nature of constructive disorder, and the role of unconditional love. Each of the insights this ancient prophet offers provides us with further guidance in building a beautiful city during these troubled times. We gain a glimpse of this city and the pathway to true freedom in the accounts of Jeremiah's life and the words he spoke as recorded in the Torah (Old Testament).

Collective Evil and Redemption: Moving beyond the emphasis placed by both Amos and Hosea on the collective, Jeremiah gave extended consideration to both the powerful, collective nature of evil and the potentially powerful force of collective forgiveness. Richard Rohr (Rohr, 2025, p. 70) takes note of this Jeremian emphasis on the collective:

> One of the notable aspects of prophecy that Jeremiah illustrates so well is that he calls on the people, not as individuals but as a collective, to repent and mend their ways, just as we saw in Amos. But Jeremiah does not stay there. He breaks the pattern, offering a

> vision of redemption that is far more potent than anything we would dare dream up for ourselves.

Throughout the account of Jeremiah in the Torah (Old Testament), there are multiple judgments made against entire nations rather than individuals (regardless of their role in this nation). Collective punishments are meted out. Wayward nations, rather than wayward members of the nations, are subject to divine wrath.

With regard to collective evil, Rohr updates the declarations made by Jeremiah and contrasts this formulation of evil with the individualistic evil conveyed by traditional Christianity (Rohr, 2025, p. 71):

> Collective evil—such as institutionalized racism, corporate greed, structural homophobia, and gun culture—is almost impossible to adjudicate and, sadly, almost always implicates us! So we just keep looking for obvious bad apples out there.

As we have noted throughout this book and our previous book (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024), we must identify those wrongdoers. We must blame them and punish them. They become the scapegoats for our frustration. We become aggressive, but then soon carry on living as we did. We hang and burn the black man on a nearby tree and then go to church or back to work in the fields. As Rohr observes, this aggression, preceded by frustration, unites society: ". . . making it a big payoff for politicians and "high priests," who blame and accuse others as a way of diverting attention from their own misdeeds".

At this point, Rohr provides a contrast. The Jewish covenant focuses on the collective rather than the individual. Frustration is transformed into broad-based societal action rather than the punishment of an individual. Unfortunately, this may mean that Black churches are burned rather than individual Black men. However, it can also mean that broad-based reform in social justice and equity becomes the focus rather than just defending the rights of one Black man. Rohr (2025, p. 71) puts it this way:

> [T]he entire covenant between Israel and Yahweh is stated in collective language: "I will give them a heart to acknowledge that I am Yahweh. They shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Jeremiah 24:7 . . .). This is the lasting formula throughout Jeremiah, and indeed the whole Old Testament. The punishments

> the prophets promised were overwhelmingly in this world (famine, drought, plague, war, etc.), not the personal hell that emerged later in Christian mythology. Bland, shadowy Sheol, or Hades, was neither reward nor punishment, but simply the place of the dead. But Christians projected the worst judgments and punishments on individuals, and into the next world with purgatory and hell. This decision left us focused there, instead of on this world, as we can see in the way we are still ignoring the climate crisis and in our easy toleration for war and racism.

Rohr also points frequently to Jeremiah's promise of collective rewards for those nations that obey Yahweh's laws and vision of justice. It is the collective that is rewarded in Israel with rain to promote the growth of verdant fields. Ultimately, it is Yahweh who will provide the guidance and resources that will enable the collective to build the beautiful city. Stated in secular terms, we are likely to find the resources necessary to build our beautiful city by working together rather than alone. This emulates Jeremiah's emphasis on the collective. Furthermore, we are likely to find the blueprints for this beautiful city by identifying and celebrating the positive actions already taken by our remnant (or perhaps our entire nation). This appreciative approach is a secular alternative to Yahweh when searching for higher-order guidance.

Edge of the Inside: Richard Rohr makes the concept of movement from order to disorder and reformation a quite personal journey when it comes to Jeremiah. Rohr describes how Jeremiah forcefully rebels against Yahweh's command that he enter into the business of creating dis-order. As Rohr suggests, Jeremiah's struggles "will resonate . . . with those of us who have struggled with life's purpose or fought through depression and doubt." (Rohr, 2025, p. 66).

As we noted early in this chapter, this struggle is noteworthy in the lives of many visionary leaders, ranging from Joan of Arc to Mother Teresa. We find a life filled with struggle (and "good trouble") in the personal narratives of many civil rights leaders, ranging from Frederick Douglass to John Lewis. Biblical accounts of improvement in the lives of Israelites required a prophet such as Jeremiah to create dis-order. There is then re-form-ation and a return to order.

In describing the challenging movement from order to disorder and eventually to some reformation, Rohr (Rohr, 2025, p. 73) introduces the metaphor of walking a plank: "We must first honor the plank of order, next walk the plank that is always disorder, and only then fall into the ocean of infinite everything." What we find interesting is the endpoint. This is falling off the plank into the "ocean of infinite everything." In many ways, Jeremiah joins Amos and Hosea (and perhaps Rohr) in leaving us with a very unclear resolution, let alone a desirable outcome, when initiating the move from order to disorder. By contrast, Kurt Lewin described a process that led not just from frozen to unfreezing and learning, but also to refreezing (Lippitt, Watson and Westley, 1958). Our prophets seem to be leaving us in a state of continuous learning and adjusting. What is the new order in which we are now living? What does the beautiful city look like that we have been struggling to build?

In all fairness to Rohr (and Jeremiah), there is some recognition of several specific characteristics of a new order (Rohr, 2025, p. 74):

> We can recognize this new order (reorder) when it is less violent and more universal than the previous arrangement. Jeremiah leaps toward such a reorder by introducing the unthinkable idea of a whole new covenant (31:31-34) to replace the old one. Hear Yahweh speaking to him, in a consummate but seldom-quoted passage from the Old Testament:
>
> I will not cease in my efforts for their good, and I will put respect for me into their hearts, so that they turn from me no more. It will be my pleasure to bring about their good, and I will plant them firmly in this land, with all my heart and soul. (Jeremiah 32:40-41, JB)

To balance the books, we should also note that Rohr (and Jeremiah) includes an important concept that Lewin tends to ignore. There must still be some order in place before disorder can take hold (Rohr, 2025, p. 74):

> There must be enough order to contain the disorder, enough authentic conservativism to hold together the scary advance of history, enough containment to hold a lot of variation. This very real tension is necessary to make us clarify our thinking, refine our laws, and stretch our humanity. Paul called this phenomenon "the

> folly of the cross," where God took the worst thing, the killing of the Christ-Man, and made it into the best thing, the very redemption of the world. When we can hold two such ideas in tension, it breaks down our dualistic mind and sets us free to move on to reorder.

This principle held true in Chicago during the early 1930s, when the gangster, Al Capone, was in charge. Furthermore, one of us [WB] witnessed the same phenomenon when working in Estonia during the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian Mafia was in charge during the collapse. It essentially provided the protection and stability during this unstable time (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994. It seems that lawlessness requires law and order if this lawlessness is to survive.

This principle also parallels that made by object relations theorists (Winnicott, 2005) who propose that we should always carry something of the old (order) with us as we enter a period of transition (disorder). We all need our transitional teddy bear to provide comfort as we leap with discomfort off the plank. A related principle is offered by Bill Bridges (Bridges, 1980; Bridges, 2001) in his description of the transformation process. As we have already noted in this book, there must be some recognition of the good in what we are leaving behind before we can fully accept the new world to which we have journeyed. We must always grieve some of what we have left behind before fully appreciating and enjoying what is about to enter our lives.

There is also the matter of the type of struggle being engaged and the nature of an unfreezing process. Rohr suggests that we often face issues related to the distinction he draws, and we have drawn in this book, between the secular realm and the sacred realm (Eliade, 1959). While much of what Richard Rohr proposes in his book regarding how to navigate “an age of outrage” is framed in sacred terms, the prophets of biblical times were dealing with important secular matters, ranging from the lack of rainfall to the destruction of a city.

Ultimately, these prophets had to intermingle their residency in a secular world of drought and politics with their ascendency into a world of sacred beliefs and visions. In some ways, this challenge can alternatively be characterized as a cognitive and affective struggle. We are being challenged to move to a higher order of consciousness (Kegan, 1982; Kegan, 1994). We

are invited (or forced) to move distally. Up to a larger and longer-term perspective. Rohr offers a term that we have introduced in this book. This concept is Grace. Perhaps we are seeking a "grace-filled" way to view our world from a higher vantage point when confronting the challenges of a VUCA-Plus world.

Rohr's own representation of Grace (Rohr, 2025, p. 75) seems to involve shifting from external signs of belonging to an internal sense of heart-felt alignment with a greater good. This movement often involves forgiveness, the journey to a new world, and some sacrifice on behalf of this greater good. It would appear that Grace for Rohr resides in both secular and sacred worlds. He (Rohr, 2025, p. 76) suggests that the highly secular "company man" might never appreciate a "graceful" comprehension of reality. This "man" is unlikely to forgive, journey far from their current loyalties, or give up anything that is important:

> [A] deeper, more compassionate grasp of the law seems impossible to the company man! The joiners and the belongers really have no need for grace or mercy; they imagine that they got to "the top" by their hard work, group loyalty, and good behavior ("by following the law"), so they tend not to understand the totally unreasonable and irresponsible concept of grace. . . .Loyalty is actually a form of co-dependency, giving us a warped sense of control and safety, while love is a dive into perfect freedom. Your loyalty could just as well be to General Motors.

On the one hand, Grade is a sacred word. It relates to a gift offered by some divine source. We may or may not be "worthy" of this gift. On the other hand, we would suggest that Grace might be considered a very human condition. Perhaps it is the moment when we feel worthy of the love offered by other people and when we, in turn, can love them. It is this second, secular meaning that seems closely related to another insight offered by Jeremiah. This insight concerns the nature of unconditional love.

Unconditional Love: Jeremiah (and Richard Ruhr) propose that love is given to us, rather than being earned. Is it possible that love can be transmitted through what we have noted in this book as the social unconscious? While those who have written about the social unconscious (Hopper and Weinberg, 2019 ; Lim, 2018) have considered it to be based on some negative societal event (such as invasion, exile, or extermination), it is

possible that aspects of a social unconscious might be based on some positive event or some positive human condition. Could the memory of a social system regarding the "good times" linger in the social unconscious? What about the heroics of some leader or martyr? When Martin Luther King declared that he "has a dream," could this dream have been inspired by stories shared about civil rights leaders such as Frederick Douglass or Harriet Tubman, leaders of reconciliation like Abraham Lincoln or Dag Hammarskjöld, or leaders of critical protest such as Mahatma Gandhi or Alexi Navalny?

We wish to take this speculative analysis one step further. George Klein's (1967) concept of peremptory ideation has been introduced in this book. We have suggested that powerful ideation might be coursing through our psyche at any point, influencing the ways in which we think and feel about our world at that point in time. Could the content of our social unconscious join these ideations, be this content laced with threat, insecurity (or nurturance and equity)? Might we find that positive social conscious ideations are particularly likely to be found among those who reside in a remnant seeking justice and freedom? Could there be collective peremptory ideation that is sustained (perhaps even created) in a remnant? May this remnant be the source of a societal revolution, much as isolated and often ignored scientific remnants (communities) have been fertile ground for scientific revolutions (Kuhn,1962/2012)?

There is also the matter of forgiveness and generosity. Love is not a contact sport in which a winner and a loser are declared. There is no reward for loving or being loved, nor is there a penalty for failing to love another. There is only the isolation that comes with a failure to love others. There is no race to build the most beautiful city or to arrive on the pathway to true freedom before anyone else. There is only regret in never trying to build the city or find the pathway. Rohr (2025, pp. 72-73) considers this mindset of love to be counter to our dominant present-day culture:

As we evolve gradually toward a capacity for unconditional love and gratuitous forgiveness (just as we do in any lasting friendship or marriage), a huge break must be made in our typical emotional and religious logic. In so many belief systems, and so many countries around the world, our notion of justice requires that all evil be commensurately punished, and all virtue be rewarded. This is our punishment-and-reward system.

Most of us grow up with "win-lose" logic passing for some kind of objective truth. We see this logic in the worlds of sports, debate, war, parenting young children, and even in capitalism, where scarcity and competition are accepted and even celebrated. The ecstatic, irrational cheering that takes place in a baseball stadium or on a trading floor should reveal that we are dealing with something more than the Boston Red Sox or the New York Stock Exchange. We are drawn, especially in the collective, to archetypal premonitions of final victories and final failures. Why else would these contests matter so much to so many, usually without obvious reasons?

Given that Rohr introduces the concept of collective "archetypical premonitions," we might return to the concept of the social unconscious and suggest that his premonitions of final victories and final failures may be part of the social unconscious agenda that directs us to a life of "win-lose" competition and imagined scarcity of resources. What if other items in our collective social unconscious agenda relate to the light of Agape and unconditional love? Is this possible? Could we find an initial glimpse of our beautiful city in a peremptory ideational train that contains this light and love? We suggest that it is worth pondering this possibility. Our pathway to true freedom might become apparent if we are "graced" with even a fleeting image of the beautiful city.

Coda: Angst, Courage, Hope and Grace

During what Richard Rohr calls our "age of outrage," can we find this Grace and our Pathway to True Freedom? There certainly are barriers to finding this Grace and Pathway. These barriers are often saturated with collective Angst. There are also the facilitating forces that are saturated with collective Hope. We close this chapter and this book by asking two fundamental questions that relate directly to the matter of Angst and Hope. The three of us often posed these questions in some form to the leaders we coach and with whom we consult:

(1) What is the nature of the (collective) anxiety we are experiencing?

(2) What is the nature of the (collective) hope we continue to hold?

In many ways, the answers to these two questions reside at the heart of the analyses and personal reflections that the three of us have offered in this book.

(Collective) Anxiety

We invite you, the reader, to join us on one final journey into a world of the past. This is the world of Greek mythology. Specifically, it is the myth of the labyrinth and the Minotaur that resides in this labyrinth. We journey to the island of Crete and enter a long and elaborately designed underground tunnel. The tunnel, designed by Daedalus, has many branches, some of which lead us to a central, final point, while others lead us astray. We are in a multicursal labyrinth (later called a maze) that is to be distinguished from a unicursal labyrinth that has only a single path to the center. The multicursal labyrinth possesses multiple challenges for us. Because it has been built underground, we are provided with no vantage point from which we can view where we have been or where we are going. There is only stumbling forward without the endpoint in sight.

We enter this multicursal labyrinth along with other readers of this book. We are all a bit confused and wonder why we have chosen to place ourselves in this "messy" situation. And then we hear the roar echoing through the tunnel. We are told that these are the terrifying sounds of a Minotaur, who is captured in this labyrinth along with us humans. We are all now profoundly anxious. And this anxiety is contagious. Angst now weighs heavily on all of us as we wander without purpose or direction through the labyrinth, fearing at any moment that we will encounter the Minotaur and perhaps be devoured by this grotesque being. Why are we in this labyrinth? And can we escape from this confusing and confining tunnel that a monstrous and existential threat calls home?

This Cretan labyrinth might represent what we are now collectively experiencing in mid-21st-century America. The VUCA-Plus conditions that we experience every day are just as confusing as the pathway of our labyrinth. We feel just as confined when facing the multiple VUCA-Plus conditions, for we know no viable escape from these conditions. The only option is to escape down a rabbit hole of distortion and denial so that we might live at least temporarily in a SC^2 land of serenity. Having escaped the labyrinth, we are no longer anxious; however, we are also no longer sane.

And then there is the matter of the Minotaur. In the tunnel, we hear the terrifying sounds of an American president who is out of control. While we have not yet directly encountered this monster, we know of other Americans (citizens and noncitizens) who have been victims of this grotesque authoritarian's Minotaurian appetite for abuse, injustice, and violence. We are collectively afraid of this monstrous and existential threat. We find that the confusing and confining presence of VUCA-Plus conditions makes it even more difficult to cope with the Trumpian Minotaur.

And here we are. Considering ways in which to build a beautiful city. Are we kidding ourselves? Is some form of the beautiful city only to be found in the wonderland of serenity? Perhaps, we should take the advice of Richard Rohr and distinguish between metaphor and reality. We are not really captured in a Cretan labyrinth, and our Minotaur is nothing more than a dysfunctional human being who will soon be out of office.

Yet something is captivating about the labyrinth and the story of a Minotaur (who is eventually destroyed by Daedalus). We are pulled toward this "strange attractor" much as we are pulled toward a traffic accident, horror story, or tales of heroes, villains, and monsters. Jungians and mythologists such as Joseph Campbell have written and spoken about archetypal pulls toward mystery, challenge, and eventual triumph. Animal behaviorists describe the aggressive predisposition of most primates, including human beings.

We have identified the social unconscious that might serve as a vehicle for remorse, fear, and even retributive violence. Is this what the lure of our labyrinth and our strange preoccupation with President Trump is actually all about? Under such conditions, can a beautiful city actually be built? As violent apes and creatures haunted by unconscious (and conscious) fears, are we capable of finding a pathway to true freedom? Will we always find ourselves trembling with fear in a VUC-Plus labyrinth that is populated not only by Us, as trembling citizens, but also by a succession of monsters to lead our country?

Hope and Grace

But then there is something called Hope. We human beings are actually living slightly in the future. Our mind and body are constantly adjusting to what we anticipate is about to happen in the environment surrounding us

at any moment (Bergquist, 2026). As the species that is uniquely leaning into the future (*homo futurus*), we can choose to live in fear, anticipating continuing life in the labyrinth, facing a monster-filled future. However, we can also Hope. We can anticipate small glimpses of the beautiful city in the benevolent actions taken by other people and by entire communities. There are moments when we can appreciate the ability of other people (and ourselves) to "do it right." It is possible to find guidance from our family, friends, and those possessing wisdom about the present and future, as we seek the appropriate personal and collective pathway to true freedom.

Perhaps this is the expression of Grace in our life—whatever its source. We are Graced with Collective Hope, while we are also burdened with collective Angst. In one of her remarkable poems ("Hope'), Lisel Mueller (Mueller, 1996) declares that hope "is the singular gift/we cannot destroy in ourselves/the argument that refutes death/the genius that invents the future/all we know of God. [17-21]" It is this Hope that has guided the three of us in writing this book. All three of us, in various ways and at various times, have lived in a labyrinth. We all fully recognize how six VUCA-Plus conditions impact our daily lives. And we have all experienced (and shared with you) our fears, anger, and despair regarding the re-election of Donald Trump and the construction of new gold-leafed ballrooms and tyrannical governmental operations. Yet we are still Hopeful.

Donald Trump and his minions have offered us important lessons regarding our vulnerabilities, our fears, and our authoritarian proclivities. Perhaps we can learn from these lessons. The coming decade may be the right time, and the United States may be the right place for establishing a new set of guiderails, enforceable norms, and directions for the future. Design and construction of a beautiful city (rather than a gold-leafed ballroom) might begin.

Has the flitter in Suzi's globe settled down? Can we find a spot on Kevin's Namibian sand dune to reflect on what next to do. May we find inspiration in Bill's legacy (James Garfield's commitment to enforcing post-Civil War rights for freed African Americans)?

We can Hope that this valid and vital construction of a beautiful city will take place.

Hopefully, we personally and collectively can begin to find true freedom while dwelling in this beautiful city.

There is one final Hope that resides deep in the hearts and minds of the three of us as authors of this book. We Hope that you find this book a source of new insights and inspiration, our treasured reader.

On to the beautiful city . . .

Are we beginning to view a pathway to True Freedom?

_____

Afterword

Throughout this book, we have shifted our perspectives on the pathways to true freedom, informed by further reading by the three of us, as well as the assumption-shattering experiences each of us has had over the past year of the Trump presidency. Virtually, all these influences are related to the domain of politics, or the behavioral science disciplines of psychology, sociology, and political science. Utilizing all these disciplines, we must ask several fundamental questions. First, is polarization simply a matter of human beings needing an enemy? Are we killer apes, who will inevitably spend our day shouting and threatening at the boundaries of our territory (Ardrey, 1966)?

Second, are our leaders "hooked on power?" Will they do anything to retain this power (Jacoby, 2026)? Is there any hope for humankind and our planet, given the new tools of destruction that humans have invented? Third, does the human capacity for prediction and the imagination of lions leave us always on alert and always ready to freeze in place? Are humans always ready to produce ulcers (Sapolsky, 2004)? Are there any options available that enable us to survive and perhaps even find the pathway to true freedom?

In seeking to answer these two existential questions, and before closing the door on our exploration of pathways to true freedom, we wish to open our minds and hearts to positive options. This requires that we become open to perspectives gained from other domains. The only viable options and pathways may be shown to us by those working in other disciplines or perhaps by our own internal voices. Perhaps there is something to learn from other living species or even from inanimate objects that provide us with insights regarding structures and deep history. The birds, fish, trees, and even rocks might be waiting to teach us about the nature of true collaborative freedom.

As we have noted throughout this book, there may also be accumulated wisdom embedded in the images and themes found in the social unconscious we share with other members of our society. This social unconscious reveals itself in our dreams, our myths, and even our religions.

We initiate this exploration of diverse approaches to true freedom by considering one of these potential sources of wisdom to be found in the social unconscious—and specifically, in this instance, a dream one of us had while preparing this book. This dream conveys a third view toward our current political conditions and potential future.

The Third View

The original version of this book documents the considerable amount of time one of us [WB] spent during the early 1990s working with the citizens of Estonia. This was time spent in the midst of Estonia's breakaway from the Russian-controlled Soviet Union. A dream about Russia was recently provoked by this decades-old experience:

> I was traveling to Russia. In real life, I had been in Estonia and briefly in Russia during the early 1990s, when the Soviet Union was collapsing. In the dream, I met with a woman who was hesitant to say much. I had been told that she offered a unique perspective on life in Russia and international politics. Just as I was beginning to ask her about her views, another Russian greeted us. The woman and man knew each other but seemed uncomfortable being together with me, an American. The man was very outgoing. He suggested immediately that we visit a second man who would be able to offer a very articulate view of contemporary Russian life under Putin.
>
> We went to this second man's home and the first man and I walked up his front stairs to the second man's home, knocked on the door and the second man immediately greeted us at the front door and invited us into his home (as was often really the case when I was working in Estonia—very warm reception of me as an American – everyone wanted to let me know what they really though and what was happening in the then-existing Soviet Union and what should happen in the relationship between the Soviet Union and USA).
>
> Before we entered the second man's home, I turned to find the woman standing just behind the side of the second man's home. I went over to her and encouraged her to join us in entering the second man's home. It was immediately clear to both the first and second men that I wouldn't enter the second man's home without

the woman. So, the first man also asked the woman to join us. Then, all three of us entered the second man's home.

We went into a large room where a large map of the world was painted on two walls. The right wall contained a map of Asia, Europe, and Africa (with Russia being at the center of this wall). The left wall contained a map of North and South America (with the USA at the center of this wall). The second man began immediately to discuss the economic conditions in Russia and the soon-to-be-resolved differences of opinion between Putin and Trump. He would point at the right wall (and specifically at Moscow) and then immediately point at the left wall (and specifically at Washington D.C.).

He proclaimed that these two world powers would both recognize the economic benefits of cooperation and would begin to work together. As a result, the warfare in both Ukraine and Gaza would end. He stood between the two walls and dramatically gestured by pointing his one arm toward one wall and then the other arm toward the other wall—and then brought his arms together.

I became immediately frustrated with this well-rehearsed spiel and interrupted the second man. I declared that the United States was in a messy state and that cooperation between Putin and Trump could not occur when the USA was in such a disturbed state. Both the First and second man stood there in something of an alarmed and startled state. It was not only the portrait of US life that I was sharing with them, but also the passion in my voice. I immediately noted the woman standing in the shadows of this "war room." She was gently smiling . . . I woke up.

When I was awake, I recognized that the first and second men represented one side of the "argument" in Russia. There were undoubtedly those who opposed what the second man was declaring. There would be as much polarization in Russia as there is in the United States. These two sides were in impassioned warfare with one another. And there was the woman standing at the side, smiling at me and her two blustering male compatriots.

The woman in this dream represents the third view. One that is not heard above the blustering noise of the two polarities in both the USA and Russia.

This third view must be heard, for it represents some new balance in both countries between individual rights and collective responsibilities (the new communitarian viewpoint). It is also a viewpoint that incorporates compassion with thoughtfulness. It represents movement to the last stage in the process of polarity management.

Secular and Sacred

From a Secular perspective, we might say that our Russian woman represents a feminist perspective, such as that taken by Carol Gilligan and women who worked at the now-closed Stone Center at Wellesley College. As WB found in Estonia during the early 1990s (and as noted in the original book), Estonian women quietly went about their work with care and competence as the Soviet Union was collapsing. Less talk and more action were evident among these women, contrasting with the bluster of Estonian men around them, who were all talk and no action.

A secular perspective on this dream might also be provided by those who promote collaborative, constructive Dialogue. Ken and Mary Gergen (Gergen and Gergen, 2004) might consider this dream a source of insight into the stance one might take in facilitating, or at least deeply engaging in, a dialogue across political boundaries, offering a third viewpoint concerning the struggles now faced by polarized communities throughout the mid-21st-century world.

From a sacred perspective, this dream could be considered a social unconsciousness that appears in the establishment of I/Thou relationships across political and ideological divides. While our Russian woman might not be religious, she manifests Agape—a love for something above and greater than herself or those with whom she was interacting. It is in this context of higher-order love, as portrayed in this dream, that we might find a compelling shared future.

Public Space

What about other expressions of this third view in postmodern cultures? Following the crushing defeat in 1945 of Nazi and Fascist dictatorships and strong antisemitic and racial polarizing ideology, as well as the fragmented and alienating postmodern perspectives and practices of postwar Europe, a noted German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, wrote about something he called the public sphere (Habermas, 1991). According

to Habermas, this is where private individuals come together to engage in public dialogue, replete with rational-critical debate and the potential for political action. It is a space in which citizens assemble freely to discuss matters of common concern, not as representatives of business or government, but as individuals acting collectively to influence political authority and societal norms.

As noted in an Internet article about public space (Internet, 2026): Habermas traces the emergence of the public sphere to 18th-century Europe, particularly in bourgeois coffeehouses, salons, and literary circles. These spaces allowed citizens to exchange ideas, read newspapers, and debate political and cultural issues independently of state control. This period marked the development of a bourgeois public sphere, where private individuals collectively monitored state authority and engaged in informed critique, laying the groundwork for modern democratic practices.

A list drawn up by Habermas, that is remarkably similar to that prepared by Alexis de Tocqueville regarding American democracy, includes: openness (all citizens hopefully participate) and an equality of status (enabling arguments to be evaluated on merit, not social rank. Mediation occurs between society and state, the public sphere serving as a space where public opinion can influence political decision-making. We see cultural manifestations of items on this list in the Rockwell paintings of Roosevelt's Four Freedoms and in the movies of Frank Capra portraying democracy in Washington D. C. (*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*) and marketing a public hero (*Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*).

More recently, we see a somewhat different portrait offered by Paddy Chayefsky in the movie, *Network*. As in the Capra movies, *Network* involves the struggles of one man against massive economic and political power. Similar struggles to be found in the American Social Unconscious regarding economic inequality and race might be on display in such powerful and highly influential novels and (later) movies as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Each of these widely viewed and read portrayals produced valuable dialogue in Habermas's public space.

There are several other items on Habermas's list. In keeping with Anonymous's focus on communality of interests, Habermas's list includes common concern (discussions focus on issues affecting society as a whole).

Much as de Tocqueville focused on nongovernmental entities and informal discourse in small-town American democracies, Habermas considered the public sphere to be not a physical institution but an institutionalized space of discourse, realized through media, meetings, and publications. We see portrayed in widely viewed and award-winning movies such as *Erin Brockovich* and *Philadelphia* the role played by individual heroes operating outside the political system, yet within the judicial system. Both movies addressed common concerns (water pollution and the spread of AIDS) and produced widespread social discourse in public space.

Another list might be considered as an agenda for dialogue engaged in the public space. This list was recently published by the National Urban League, in association with a coalition of civil and human rights organizations, civic engagement leaders, faith voices, business and economic institutions, media, academic leaders, and democracy partners (National Urban League, 2026).

From a roundtable convened by the National Urban League, the following set of themes was recommended as a starting point for "defending democracy":

- Upholding the Constitution
- Protecting civil rights and voting rights
- Rejecting discrimination and dehumanization
- Defending truth and the rule of law
- Expanding equal opportunity and fair access
- Strengthening democracy and public trust
- Serving the entire American community

A guide was prepared in conjunction with this list of seven themes. The Guide is: ". . . grounded in the Constitution, long-standing civil rights law, and democratic norms that apply to public officeholders regardless of party. They reflect responsibilities leaders routinely assume when they seek office and take an oath to serve". (National Urban League, 2026)

While a bit more legalistic and legislative than the list produced by Habermas, one could readily imagine this list (and accompanying Urban League guidebook) being interwoven with Habermas's "softer" list to establish an agenda for public space dialogues in the late 2020's. Perhaps it is in this public space that the social unconscious emerges. With deeply felt

concerns and hopes manifesting in the public space, the communality of interests can be established, individual rights and collective responsibilities can be balanced, and a compelling vision of the future can be collaboratively forged.

A Matter of Time

There is another non-political and non-behavioral perspective to be taken regarding the pathway to true freedom. This perspective concerns the most ephemeral condition in our world. It concerns time and the way we live with the unavoidable challenges associated with the pressures and priorities of time. The third view might also be directed at the matter of time.

Still-Life Time

Perhaps, the struggles we are now experiencing have always been present; in essence, time is at a standstill concerning matters such as social justice, authoritarianism, and polarization. These are simply eternally existing, non-changing verities of the human condition. They are either the frailties bestowed on us by Jehovah in Eden, or the vicious and aggressive nature bestowed on us by Mother Nature. Amid this seeming insanity of nature and the human condition, we must sustain a rational and detached viewpoint.

This still-life view of time represents a "stoic" representation of history. Nothing ever really changes, so it is a "waste of time" to search for a pathway to true freedom – or to write a book about finding this pathway. It is also nonproductive to worry about things, since nothing ultimately changes.

It goes even further: we should not worry about worrying. Emulating the stoic perspective of Marcus Aurelius, Donald Robertson (2019, p. 210) suggests that we:

> . . . accept these [emotions of worry] as natural, view them with indifference, and accept them without a struggle rather than try to suppress them. On the other hand, we should learn to suspend the voluntary thoughts we have in response to these initial feelings and the situation that triggered them. In the case of worrying, perhaps surprisingly that's usually just a matter of noticing we're doing it and stopping.

For the three of us, as authors of this book, perhaps that means avoiding some of the upsetting news (as several of us have done). Or it might mean emulating the perspective of the Russian woman in the dream. She has seen everything and knows, deeply, that this is simply "the way of the world." The "intellectualization" we have engaged in writing this book might also be an effective defense against unnecessary worry. In writing this book, however, we may have simply been intensifying our concerns about the future of democracy and the potential increase in authoritarian perspectives and practices in contemporary American (and international) life.

It might be particularly challenging to accept the stoic status quo when considering the egregious behavior of many American leaders (and leaders of other countries). As Robertson (2019, p. 245) concludes, "to expect bad people not to do bad things is madness because that is wishing for the impossible. Moreover, to accept their wrongdoing toward others while expecting them never to wrong you is both inconsiderate and foolish."

From this point of view, we should not even expect and accept the wrongdoing of bad people but should also expect and accept that these wrongdoings will directly impact on us. Given that the three of us have specific reasons to be "wounded" by what is now being done in Washington D. C., the stoics would suggest that we need to particularly sensitive to the personal impact, and, as in the case of worry, learn to view the world "rationally" and dispassionately. We should "never be surprised by anything in life." (Donaldson, 2019, p. 245).

Finally, the perspective on life as ultimately being unchanging meets its greatest challenge when it is accompanied by the sense of an endpoint. What about the end of our personal life and the existential threat associated with the end of democracy as we know it? Donaldson (2019, p. 261) offers this final, powerful statement about stoicism in the face of death: ". . . I realize [the moment of death is] just the same as every other moment. I have the choice to die well or die badly." Does this mean that the three of us have the choice to "do well" in accepting the death or distortion of democracy in our country? Instead of marching in the streets, do we take time to monitor and control our own feelings about the existential loss of freedom? The three of us are not willing to be quite this stoic. We don't accept a still-life sense of time.

Cyclical Time

Alternatively, we might consider our current struggles to simply be those conditions that always seem to enter society every now and then: "for everything there is a season." That opportunity, as well as that challenge, will seasonally reappear. Our current forces of injustice, authoritarian rule, and polarized attitudes represent the next phase in a cyclical perspective on human history. Bad times might be present in mid-21st-century America, but good times will return at some time in the near (or far) future. Just wait. Be patient.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel provided a very influential model that drove this cyclical perspective on time. Hegel identified a perspective and/or practice that was dominant at any one point in time, then identified a counter perspective and/or practice, which he labeled an antithesis. Finally, integration of elements from both the thesis and antithesis yields a synthesis. This third element then became the established thesis, leading to the establishment of a new antithesis and an integrating synthesis. This Hegelian cycle would repeat itself many times in the history of humankind.

The Hegelian model has been applied to a wide range of topics. This model has addressed the interplay between reason and emotion, as well as the life cycles of married couples, musical forms, and sports teams. When applied to the matter of societal freedom, we can begin with the thesis. This would be the life of a democracy. In its prime, a democratic society provides its citizens with maximum opportunity to live freely (strong individual rights) and with appropriate agency (influence over the priorities and operation of its institutions) (sustained collective responsibility).

A communality of interests and a compelling image of the future guide their collective agency. However, as a democracy matures, there is a tendency for the balance of rights and responsibility to be abandoned (usually in favor of individual rights). Interests are no longer held in common, the future becomes cloudy and contentious, leading to a fumbling and frustrating decision-making process. Leadership is lacking, and crises in areas of health and human services can no longer be averted or resolved. The threat of war or cultural change may be imminent.

It is time for decisive action and a change in the way this society operates. Antithesis emerges. A society moves away from collective decision-making

(broad-based agency) to authoritarian rule. Both individual rights and a sense of collective responsibility are abandoned in favor of centralization of rights and responsibilities in the office of a single, primary leader. This person dictates the future, resulting in the establishment of a personal set of priorities that are imposed on all institutions in this society. Firm actions can be taken to confront societal crises, but at great cost. This state of antithesis seems to be emerging today in the United States and in many other mid-21st-century societies.

In the midst of political turmoil throughout the world during the 1960s, Edward Luttwak (1968) offered "a practice guidebook—a brilliant guide to taking over a nation". While Luttwak's *Coup d-Etat* was focused on third-world countries, it contained elements that were applicable at the time and are still applicable in so-called "developed" countries, such as the United States. Luttwak identified the key leverage that can be found in focusing on troubling factors (such as economic inequality and backwardness) operating in a specific sector of a nation. He also focused on the centralization of government control and informal power, contrasting this condition with the sectionalization or diffusion of power found in other nations. Under these conditions of a troubled sector and centralization of power, there is a strong motivation for the *Coup d'Etat* , as well as the relative ease with which total takeover can be accomplished with control of this one troubled sector.

Luttwak (1968, p. 40) proposed that it is when a nation is economically volatile and in the hands of a few people that it is most vulnerable to a Coup d-Etat:

> The essence of the coup is the seizure of power within the main decision-making center of the state and, through this, the acquisition of control over the state as a whole. We have seen that in some cases the decision-making process is too diffused through the entire state bureaucracy and the country at large; in other cases the supposed political center is controlled by another, foreign center or by sectional forces which are independent of the whole state machinery [such as the presence of large corporate entities.]

Are there times in the cyclical history of even a thriving, democratic nation, when political power and interests are centralized, when economic inequality is rampant, when the country becomes isolated from foreign influence, and when all sectors of the nation are under the control of the

central authority (usually held by one person or a small cadre of powerful men)? Could such conditions exist in the United States of the mid-21st-century? Are we vulnerable to our own unique coup d'Etat—coming from either the left or right wing?

Tom Nichols (2026) has recently written an essay in The Atlantic, called "The 1930 Feeling," in which he portrays the re-emergence of the "dark fringes" of Nazi Germany in the embrace of authoritarian and antisemitic rhetoric and appearance of Nazi paraphernalia among a disturbingly large population of Americans. This 1930s feeling seems to have been precipitated by many powerful forces, including a worldwide pandemic, massive migration of refugees from local societal disorder, and the introduction of new, easily manipulated sources of information. The cycle is repeating itself: authoritarian rule seems to be either firmly established in some countries or threatening the established social order.

And when does the synthesis emerge in the United States and elsewhere in the world? Some contemporary politicians advocate establishing a "new democracy" after the Fall 2026 election or the 2028 presidential election, with better safeguards in place to prevent future takeovers by one person or a small group of MAGA-like radicals. Some frustrated liberals and independents have even declared that an alternative to traditional models of representative government and centralized bureaucratic delivery of public services must be found. The Hegelians would strongly suggest that the Synthesis is never the same as the old Thesis. The experiences of a powerful and temporary success of an Antithesis make a return to the "old ways of doing things" difficult. To borrow a phrase from Thomas Wolfe, a society "can't go home again." The cycle keeps moving on. Around and around.

A recent neo-Hegelian model of cyclical time is offered by Peter Turchin (2023). He offers what he labels Cliodynamics (from Clio, the name of the Greek mythological muse of history, and dynamics, the science of change).

Turchin writes about the origins of this cyclical perspective (Turchin, 2023, p. x):

> We discovered that there are important recurring patterns, which can be observed throughout the sweep of human history over the past ten thousand years. Remarkably, despite the myriad of differences, complex human societies, at base and on some abstract

> level, are organized according to the same general principles. . . . From the beginning, my colleagues and I in this new field focused on cycles of political integration and disintegration, particularly on state formation and state collapse. This is the area where our field's findings are arguably the most robust—and arguably the most disturbing. It became clear to us through quantitative historical analysis that complex societies everywhere are affected by recurrent and, to a certain degree, predictable waves of political instability, brought about by the same basic set of forces, operating across the thousands of years of human history. It dawned on me some years ago that, assuming the pattern held, we were heading into the teeth of another storm.

Turchin (2023, p. xi) offers a summary description of the storm he is predicting and the cycle that he believes underlies the occurrence of this storm:

> . . . judging from the pattern of US history, we were due for another sharp instability spike by the early 2020s. Sadly, nothing about my model has been disproved in the intervening years. I make no claims of radical originality. . . . We should all take heart from the fact that societies have arrived at this same crossroads before, and though sometimes (even most of the time) the road has led to great loss of life and societal breakdown, sometimes it has led to a far happier resolution for most people involved.

Turchin (2023, p. xi) provides a brief description of the model he is deploying:

> . . . when a state, such as the United States, has stagnating or declining real wages (wages in inflation-adjusted dollars), a growing gap between rich and poor, overproduction of young graduates with advanced degrees, declining public trust, and exploding public debt, these seemingly disparate social indicators are actually related to each other dynamically. Historically, such developments have served as leading indicators of looming political instability. In the United States, all of these factors started to take an ominous turn in the 1970s. The data pointed to the years around 2020 when the confluence of these trends was expected to trigger a spike in political instability. And here we are.

While Turchin (2023, p. xii) admits that there are the powerful dynamics of conspiracy, alternative realities, and authoritarian perspectives that we have identified in this book and in our previous book (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024), he pushes to an even deeper level that produces the cycles of social unrest that he identifies:

> There are indeed "hidden forces" pushing America to the brink of civil war-and possibly beyond. But the truth lies not in conspiracies plotted by shadowy domestic groups or foreign agents. The explanation is both simpler and more complex. It is simpler because we don't need to build elaborate theoretical constructs that "connect the dots" and impute sinister motives to actors. In fact, the information we need to understand our predicament is openly available and not in dispute.

The bulk of what we need to know has nothing to do with the shenanigans of evil or corrupt individuals. Instead, we need to look to the widely agreed-upon Big Data about wages, taxes, gross domestic products, and sociological surveys churned out by government agencies and organizations like Gallup. These data feed into statistical analyses published by social scientists in academic journals. And herein lies the reason why the explanation that this book offers is also more complex. . . . We need complexity science to make sense of all the data and analyses.

It is here where the unique insights offered by Peter Turchin provide us with an expanded perspective on the crisis within which we find ourselves. While the three of us have relied on our own experiences, along with the wisdom offered by numerous psychologists, sociologists and political scientists, Turchin is relying on the massive accumulation of evidence regarding deeper, often unacknowledged forces.

Much as Jared Diamond (1997) looks to broad causal forces, such as the orientation of a continent or shifting environments, when suggesting how human societies differ from one another, Peter Turchin (2023, p. xii) relies on unconventional tools and sources of data in his identification of underground streams of cyclical causality—that have led us to our current societal crisis. Using Big Data, Turchin turns away from the typical psychological analysis of bad people and the psychological and sociological forces that propel these people into power. Instead, he attends to the complex interworking of social systems (Turchin, 2023, p. xii):

Cliodynamics is different. It uses the methods of data science, treating the historical record, compiled by generations of historians, as Big Data. It employs mathematical models to trace the intricate web of interactions between the different "moving parts" of the complex social systems that are our societies. Most importantly, cliodynamics uses a scientific method, by which alternative theories are subject to empirical tests with data.

At this point, Turchin (2023, p. xiii) becomes very Hegelian:

> So what does cliodynamics tell us about our current time of troubles? It turns out that ever since the first complex societies organized as states appeared—roughly five thousand years ago—no matter how successful they might be for a while, eventually they all run into problems. All complex societies go through cycles of alternating stretches of internal peace and harmony periodically interrupted by outbreaks of internal warfare and discord.

These interruptions are fundamentally about the loss of a social contract among citizens (Turchin, 2023, p. xiii). There is an "implicit pact" that concerns the equitable treatment of all who live in a society. Without this pact – what we would label a "psychological covenant (Bergquist, 1993; Bergquist, 2016) or, more broadly, a societal covenant (which is perhaps founded on the social unconscious)—there are no social power guardrails. Broad societal power structures dominate. These include the capacity to threaten with force, the accumulation of wealth, bureaucratic controls, and the "soft power" associated with the capacity to be persuasive (Turchin, 2023, p. 5). We would note that Turchin's emphasis on social power aligns with the behavioral economists' focus on participation in critical problem-solving and decision-making processes. The fundamental question becomes: who is sitting at the table?

At the heart of the matter is a set of assumptions ~ what Turchin identifies as The Road Map. According to Turchin (Turchin, 2023, p. 29):

> All complex human societies organized as states experience recurrent waves of political instability. The most common pattern is an alternation of integrative and disintegrative phases lasting for roughly a century. Integrative phases are characterized by internal peace, social stability, and relatively cooperative elites. Disintegrative phases are the opposite: social instability, breakdown

> of cooperation among the elites, and persistent outbreaks of political violence, such as rebellions, revolutions, and civil wars. There are variations on this common theme . . .Also, the crisis severity is variable. Despite this variability, the time of troubles always comes. So far, we haven't seen an exception to this rule. No society that my team has studied had an integrative phase lasting more than around two hundred years.

As implemented by Turchin and his colleague, this Road Map closely resembles (and in many instances relies on) systems-oriented, computer-based modeling tools, such as System Dynamics (Meadows, 2008). Like other computer-based modeling initiatives, Turchin's cliodynamics produces "mathematical chaos" which features "sensitive dependence on initial conditions" (Lorenz's butterfly effect) (Turchin, 2023, p. 251), as well as the production of enduring patterns and cycles (fractals).

Startling examples of these chaotic moments of societal disintegration are provided by Turchin (2023 pp. 187-188):

> What is the take-home message from this analysis of past instances of state collapse? The political authority governing complex human societies is much more fragile than it may appear at a cursory glance. State collapse, a sudden disintegration of the power network that rules a society, is a frequent occurrence, both in history and in the contemporary world. Often a ruling class is deposed (and, at times, even exterminated) . . . The Chilean president Salvador Allende died in a hail of bullets, assault rifle in hand, fighting to the death against the troops of General Pinochet that stormed the presidential palace. But the most frequent cause of state collapse (when it is not the result of an external invasion) is an implosion of the ruling network. . .
>
> In the cases of the Cuban Revolution and the 2021 collapse of Afghanistan, there was pressure from a rival power network, but the ruling network disintegrated before the insurgents even entered the capital. Incidentally, the 1917 October Revolution in Russia unfolded according to the same scenario. Soviet propaganda glorified the Storming of the Winter Palace as the decisive break point, but the provisional government had already been abandoned by most of its troops, and its head, Alexander Kerensky, had already

> run away before the Bolshevik forces entered the palace. Finally, a political regime can collapse under the pressure of massive public protests, as was the case in Ukraine in 2014.

All these examples are disturbing in and of themselves; they are terrified when parallels are drawn to our current American situation. Is disintegration cyclically inevitable in the mid-21st-century United States? Are we racing down a rutted pathway not to true freedom, but instead to equally as true societal disintegration and democratic collapse?

However, in conclusion, there are moments of optimism to be found in the cliodynamic analysis offered by Peer Turchin. He observes (and concludes) that the powerful analytic tools and sources of Big Data to which he has access can produce valid and informative predictions regarding what will happen over time in any social system – be it Allende's Chile or Trump's United States. However, there are limits to the predictability and, according to Turchin (2023, p. 251):

> . . . this limitation on predictability is, paradoxically, a source of optimism. It means that human individuals are not as powerless as . . . imagined . . .. Exercising one's free will can have major consequences at the macro level, just like a butterfly fluttering its wings can affect the course of a hurricane. However, such optimism should be tempered by a large helping of realism. Although each of us affects the course of human history, most of us have a very slight effect, and any large effects are probably a result of a completely unforeseen concatenation of events. To make a big effect, an individual has to be at the right place at the right time, and it is very difficult, perhaps impossible, to predict such "cusp points." A more realistic way to achieve positive results is to cooperate with other people.

It is here, having left Peter Turchin's world of cliodynamics, that we turn yet again to a full nontechnical reliance on human interactions. Turchin has reiterated a message told by many of the "soft-sided" sources of wisdom in this book: our pathway to true freedom is dependent on "a little help from our friends." Collective support is essential if we are to provide a foundation for communality of interests, balancing individual rights and collective responsibility, and forging of an image of the future that is compelling and realistic. Cyclical conditions may come and go. However,

we have the collective capacity to temper the forces of both societal integration and disintegration.

Linear Time

Neither the stoic (time standing still) perspective nor the cyclical (time repeating itself) perspective lends itself to journeying on any new pathway to true freedom. There is a form of deep time that provides little motivation for change or a journey when nothing is going to change. Or everything exists for only a limited amount of time and will inevitably return at some point in the future. Consisting of a very rich, yet unchanging portrait of enduring reality, deep time points to nowhere other than where we are right now.

The version of deep time based on a cyclical model of time (everything comes back around) encouraged us to be patient: it will all come round again. Both of these perspectives on time are ultimately quite stoic—though the cyclical perspective might nudge us toward seeking out a pathway to true freedom, as long as we recognize that this true pathway leads us to only a temporary sense of true freedom and will itself be a viable pathway for only a short period of time. Then a new version of freedom will become attractive, and a new pathway will have to be found.

It is only a linear arrow of time traveling upward and onward that points us to a viable pathway to true freedom. It at least provides an incentive for us to seek out this pathway. We see this arrow of time being created and enforced in the Judaic (and later Christian) image of "the end of time" (apocalypse), along with the sense of potential progress in building a beautiful city on the hill. While most cultures embraced a cyclical perspective during the common era (BC/BCE), the Israelites revealed a deity who had created the universe (Genesis) and continued to intervene in human history, guiding his chosen people toward a better life via reward and punishment.

For instance, we can reflect on the dramatic clash between Moses and the Baalites. Coming off the mountain with tablets containing a list of ten commandments to guide the Israelites to a better society, Moses was greeted by his fellow Israelites in the throes of a Baalite ritual (sacrificing the calf) that celebrated the pastoral view of cyclical birth and death (of the calf). Moses was outraged with this desecration of the Israeli vision that birth and

death are not cyclical. There is one birth and one death, in an Israelis' personal life and in the collective life of all humankind.

Several fundamental implications reside in Moses's arrow of time. First, the arrow must be pointed forward and upward toward a better future. If we cannot return to where we are right now, then we must continue to improve—or we simply await death. Success is defined primarily by growth (Bergquist, 1993). Personal aspirations associated with self-actualization are the highest form of motivation (Maslow, 2014). Even a grand-scale account of history from the Big Bang to 21st-century human society is built on the assumption of progress.

The architects of "Big History" (e.g. Christian, 2019) write about the "emergence" of new, higher-order forms from the prominent forms residing and operating during a previous state in the life of our universe. While "Big Data" helped to dictate Turchin's perspective on cyclical time, "big history" leads us to a linear perspective and a sense that eventually progress and emergence will come to an end with the death of our universe. Rather than the dramatic, catastrophic apocalypse of Biblical imagery, we find the much less dramatic diminution of energy in our universe. This process is very slow and eternally long-term. Eons after human beings occupy the small chunk of matter called Earth, the lights will be slowly turned out. Progress comes to an end not with a bang, but with a whimper.

There is a second important implication. Time becomes a precious and scarce commodity when a linear perspective is embraced. We must not "waste time" for we have only so many days to live, and our society and world have only so much time to remain viable. Sebastian de Grazia (1962, p. 57) writes about the loss of leisure time with the growth of technology and the redefinition of leisure time as a claim on free time. We must fight for the time that is allocated to something unrelated to progress and achievement. There is only "productive" (work-related) time and "nonproductive" (leisure, play-filled) time. If this is the case, what should we make of the time devoted to working in the public space? Is "work" done on behalf of collective progress (such as the improvement of democratic institutions) to be considered a third allocation of precious time?

A Forest View

We have much to learn not just about the nature of history, but also about our intricate relationships with other people, especially when we are engaged in relationships with people who see and act in our mid-21 Century world that differs in significant ways from the way we see and act in the world. We try to learn about these relationships by looking back in history to those who have "pulled this off." Such as the Back family and Abraham Lincoln's team of rivals (Bergquist, 2023a; Bergquist, 2023b). We can also look at more recent examples of sustaining relationships amidst differences. We can turn to Carol Gilligan, who exemplifies her espoused "ethics of care" (Bergquist, 2023c).

Perhaps this is all we need—some exemplars and a few words of advice. However, this doesn't always "do the trick." As we have already noted, unconscious forces prod us to split and reinforce our "difference" from other people with whom we disagree. There is also the matter of socio-economic and political forces that set us apart from other people who reside on the "other side of the line."

We would suggest that this still doesn't "do the trick." Our tightly interwoven interdependence with other people suggests that we relate to and separate from other people in a manner that precludes independent judgment about these relationships. We are involved not just in many relationships—which make our interpersonal world quite complicated—but also in many relationships that are all interwoven with one another. This makes our interpersonal world complex.

Afterwards are often intended to provide an alternative perspective to that offered in the primary text of this book. We have tried to provide this alternative by exploring dreams, secular and sacred images, and even the fundamental nature of time. We push even further into the alternative ways in which we might seek to understand and address the challenges we are now facing in our society. This push is toward a neighboring sector of our existence as a living being. We are entering the world of forests and the powerful webs of wood that are created by trees and other living entities of the forests we often visit and appreciate.

We suggest that we can look beyond interpersonal relationships to gain insight into our complex (rather than just complicated) relationships with

one another, especially relationships that are contentious. We might want to look at other segments of our living world to see how complex relationships are nurtured and sustained. We could study the interdependence of bees and flowers, as many social biologists have done. The behavior of a lion pride hunting in Africa can provide us with clues. There is no leader among the lionesses who do all of the hunting. They circle their victim (usually an antelope) and slowly move closer, with one lioness suddenly launching the attack. The hunt is beautifully choreographed without a choreographer or lead "dancer." We could learn from the swarming fish or flocking birds, as we suggested earlier in this book. Perhaps, we could even learn from octopi—as portrayed in the movie, *My Octopus Teacher* (Bustamonte and Bergquist, 2021).

Our Forests Can Teach Us About Complex, Interdependent Relationships

Another source of insight into complex relationships has recently come into prominence. This source is the teaching being done by the forests of our world. There is much to learn from our forests, and we are becoming increasingly knowledgeable about them. While we dwelled in them for many years and have more recently done a pretty good job of destroying them, the forests of planet Earth are now being studied and appreciated for what they are: complex ecosystems that depend on diversity and interconnectedness for their survival. We may find a similar need for diversity and interconnection in our study of human systems.

One of the first accounts of the forest as a complex ecosystem to receive significant readership was provided by Robert Macfarlane, in *Underland: A Deep time* Journey (Macfarlane, 2019). However, a particularly powerful (almost poetic) account of this ecosystem was provided by Richard Powers in his best—selling novel called The Overstory (Powers, 2018). He features an activist called Patricia Westerford who becomes fully engulfed in a Pacific Coast forest (Powers, 2018, p. 134):

> She presses on fissures of bark and her fingers sink in knuckle-deep. A bit of bushwhacking reveals the extent of the prodigious rot. Crumbling, creature-riddled boles, decaying for centuries. Snags gothic and twisted, silvery as inverted icicles. She has never inhaled such fecund putrefaction. The sheer mass of ever-dying life packed

> into each single cubic foot, woven together with fungal filaments and dew-betrayed spiderweb leaves her woozy. Mushrooms ladder up the sides of trunks in terraced ledges. Dead salmon feed the trees. Soaked by fog all winter long, spongy green stuff she can't name covers every wooden pillar in thick baize reaching higher than her head. Death is everywhere, oppressive and beautiful.

Powers steps back and offers an even more detailed description of this extraordinary eco-system (Power, 2018, p. 141):

> Turns out that the temperate jungle's million invisible tangled loops need every kind of death-brokering intermediary to keep the circuits coursing. Clean up such a system, and the countless self-replenishing wells run dry. This gospel of new forestry is confirmed by the most wonderful findings: beards of lichen high in the air, that grow only on the oldest trees and inject essential nitrogen back into the living system. Subterranean voles that feed on truffles and spread the spores of angel fungi across the forest floor. Fungi that infuse into the roots of trees in partnerships so tight it's hard to say where one organism leaves off and the other begins. Hulking conifers that sprout adventitious roots high in the canopy that dip back down to feed on the mats of soil accumulating in the vees of their own branches.

We return to the enthralling experiences of Patricia Westerford (Powers, 2018, p. 142):

> The things she catches Doug-firs doing, over the course of these years, fill her with joy. When the lateral roots of two Douglas-firs run into each other underground, they fuse. Through those self-grafted knots, the two trees join their vascular systems together and become one. Networked together underground by countless thousands of miles of living fungal threads, her trees feed and heal each other, keep their young and sick alive, pool their resources and metabolites into community chests

It will take years for the picture to emerge. There will be findings, unbelievable truths confirmed by a spreading worldwide web of researchers in Canada, Europe, Asia, all happily swapping data through faster and better channels. Her trees are far more social than even Patricia suspected.

There are no individuals. There aren't even separate species. Everything in the forest is the forest. Competition is not separable from endless flavors of cooperation. Trees fight no more than do the leaves on a single tree. It seems most of nature isn't red in tooth and claw, after all. For one, those species at the base of the living pyramid have neither teeth nor talons. But if trees share their storehouses; then every drop of red must float on a sea of green.

Then, later in the book, comes a final, existential discovery by Patricia (2018, p. 221):

> Before it dies, a Douglas-fir, half a millennium old, will send its storehouse of chemicals back down into its roots and out through its fungal partners, donating its riches to the community pool in a last will and testament. We might well call these ancient benefactors giving trees.

There we are. In the midst of a world in which focus is directed toward what can be taken, stored, and consumed, we find a fir tree that gives of all its resources before it dies. We find the giving tree residing in a forest of proud complexity. It is a forest filled with diversity. This is a complementary rather than competing diversity: "every drop of red must float on a sea of green."

Diversity

What then can we learn from the forest about sharing and giving? What can we learn about constructive diversity? Specifically, what does it mean for a forest to be diverse? One need only spend some time wandering through an "old growth" forest (which are now rare) or at least a "second growth" forest. We will find trees and plants of many different kinds in these forests. We will also find some old trees and some new trees. Moss, mushrooms, and flowers litter the forest floor.

Perhaps of greatest importance are the trees that have fallen over. They are often covered in moss or lichens of many kinds. They provide nourishment as they are "dying" and returning to the soil from which they came. We encounter "giving trees" that now lie flat on the ground. These forests are also home to many animals—ranging from birds to small mammals and from squirrels scurrying up and down the trees to deer and bear, who are most likely to attract our attention.

By contrast, we can walk through a homogenous forest that we humans have created. There are many former Christmas tree plots in the states where we live. Trees of a specific type (e.g. spruce or pine) were planted many years ago at the same time and in straight lines. Today, these trees have grown tall and scraggly, competing with one another for sunlight. The bottom sections of these trees tend to be barren, with only a few branches with a few needles sticking out in need of light. The forest floor is without any life. There is just depleted soil with a few new trees seeking to survive under the canopy of the old, "worn-out" and unused Christmas trees. These "artificial" forests are easy to spot and leave one with a lingering sense of sterility and despair—they also teach us in dramatic fashion that diversity is critical if forests are to remain vital (and beautiful).

Interconnection

There is also the matter of interconnection among the living organisms to be found in a forest. As we have mentioned, multiple articles and books have recently been written about this interconnection, leading to the declaration that forests are intricate webs of interconnection. At the heart of this forest web are the fungi that serve as messengers and conveyers of resources. Robert Macfarlane (2019, pp. 90-91) was one of the first to introduce this remarkable fungi-based web:

> The fungi and the trees had 'forged their duality into a oneness, thereby making a forest, . . . Instead of seeing trees as individual agents competing for resources . . . the forest [is] a 'co-operative system' in which trees "talk" to one another, producing a collaborative intelligence . . .described as 'forest wisdom'. Some older trees even 'nurture' smaller trees that they recognize as their 'kin', acting as 'mothers'. . . . .[T]he whole vision of a forest ecology shimmered and shifted - from a fierce free market to something more like a community with a socialist system of resource redistribution.

This remarkable interconnected ecosystem was fully appreciated by many Aboriginal societies and was honored in their animistic religious traditions. For those of us who are living in "more advanced" societies, the wisdom of a web of wood has been lost on us. That is, recent studies of the forests in which we dwell have been published. Or, like Patricia Westerford, we are

trying to prevent the trees in an old-growth forest from being chopped down.

The Forest Web: Relationships and Empowerment

We propose that there is much to learn from the forests and other relationship-based webs. The stage for this journey through the forest has already been set by dwelling briefly on the more human forms of diversity we find in perspectives regarding such matters as the nature of viable societies and the nature of time itself. Fundamentally, diversity is typically embedded in the preferences shown by members of a society for one of three domains: information, intentions, and ideas.

We first introduced these three domains in Chapter One. We suggested that these three domains can be engaged when addressing challenges such as we are facing now in the sphere of American politics. Diversity is to be found in the preferences of some people for the realism to be found in the domain of information, for the vision to be found in the domain of intentions, or for the action to be found in the domain of ideas.

We reintroduce these domains in this Afterword because all three are to be found in the diverse ecosystem, not only of human discourse but also of an old-growth forest. We might better appreciate the web of wood by noting how fungi transmit information between trees and plants in the forest. Furthermore, there is a shared, inherent recognition by all living beings in the forest that they must collaborate to survive. Obviously, there are no town council meetings held in the forest to establish and maintain this shared intention (preservation of life and a viable ecosystem). But there are self-organizing processes that convey and maintain the intentions of the forest.

Self-Organization

Much as in the case of all other living systems, there is a strong tendency and capacity of forest systems to "self-organize." Much as our own brain operates without a central coordinating mechanism, so does the forest operate without this central coordination. Yet, in both the human brain and forest, there is a powerful guiding intention that is manifest in all the distributed functions of the brain and forest. The forest ecosystem is also filled with ideas and actions guided by these ideas (alongside the self-organizing intentions).

Macfarlane (2019, p. 98) offers the following description of the remarkable ways in which the forest ecosystem generates and makes use of "ideas":

> The possibilities of the wood wide web far exceed this basic exchange of goods between plant and fungi . . . . [T]he fungal network also allows plants to distribute resources between one another. Sugars, nitrogen and phosphorus can be shared between trees in a forest: a dying tree might divest its resources into the network to the benefit of the community, for example, or a struggling tree might be supported with extra resources by its neighbours.

Here is the first lesson to be learned from the forest. Fundamentally, like in our forests, we must dwell in the domain of information if we are to be "realistic", in the domain of intentions if we are to find purpose, and in the domain of ideas if we are to move from the current state (information) to the desired state (intentions). We find an interplay between information, intentions, and ideas in Macfarlane's (2019, p. 98) description of forests in operation:

> Even more remarkably, the network also allows plants to send immune-signaling compounds to one another. A plant under attack from aphids can indicate to a nearby plant via the network that it should up-regulate its defensive response before the aphids reach it. It has been known for some time that plants communicate above ground in comparable ways, by means of diffusible hormones. But such airborne warnings are imprecise in their destinations. When the compounds travel by fungal networks, both the source and recipient can be specified.

Without dismissing the fact that trees, fungi, and plants don't "think" and "coordinate" in ways that are uniquely human, we must acknowledge that something is occurring in the forest ecosystem that is indeed reminiscent of human behavior at its best. Macfarlane (2019, p. 98) concludes: "Our growing comprehension of the forest network asks profound questions: about where species begin and end, about whether a forest might best be imagined as a superorganism, and about what 'trading', 'sharing' or even 'friendship' might mean between plants and, indeed, between humans." Given its remarkable dynamics and outcomes, what else might we learn from the web of wood. How might we also find ways to be productive in

traversing the domains of information, intentions, and ideas—as forests do in building and maintaining their viability?

Webs and Empowerment

Human webs come in many different forms. Each form has something to learn from the web formed in forests. We propose specifically that there are three kinds of human webs. They exist within the structures, processes, and attitudes that exist in a team, organization, or community (Watson and Johnson, 1972). Furthermore, the webs associated with structures, processes, and attitudes are found in many human systems. We have our own interpersonal forests and must find or build all three of these forest-like webs before convening Habermas's public space, addressing the challenging issues of our mid-21st century, and finding or constructing a viable, collective pathway to true freedom.

These structural, process-oriented, and attitude-based webs are viable only if they empower those who operate within the web. This empowerment, in turn, is associated with communication, conflict-management, problem-solving, and decision-making processes operating within these systems (Bergquist, 2003). Empowerment requires a web. And webs require empowerment. They are interdependent. Like those who work together on the web.

We have just offered a condensed set of propositions regarding human webs and the tools of empowerment. We will unpack these propositions by describing each type of human web in more detail. We offer several examples of these webs operating in human society.

Structure: Webs of Interdependence

As with the complex structure of the forest web, there is great value in designing human webs that foster interdependence. Functions are distributed across different entities in forest webs and should also be distributed across different entities in human systems. Silos filled with protected information, intentions, and ideas should be dismantled and replaced with open, interlocking entities (people, groups, departments, divisions) that represent different viewpoints, competencies, and priorities.

Structures need not be "innovative" for an organization to operate like a forest web. It is only a matter of ensuring that the span of control,

accountability, responsibility, and support are properly adjusted so that interdependence among organizational units is reinforced. Robert Simons (2005) has specifically addressed the importance of adjusting spans in each of these four areas of functioning. Two of the spans measure the supply of resources the organization provides to project teams. The span of control relates to the level of direct control a team has over people, assets, and information. The span of support is its "softer" counterpart, reflecting the supply of resources in the form of help from people in the organization.

The other two spans—span of accountability (hard) and the span of influence (soft)—determine the team's demand for organizational resources. The level of a project team's accountability, as defined by the organization, directly affects the level of pressure on team members to make trade-offs; that pressure drives the team's need for organizational resources. The team's level of influence, as determined by the structure of the team and the broader system where the team is embedded, also reflects the extent to which team members require resources. We typically have substantial control (internal locus of control) of two elements (Control and Influence). However, we have very little direct control over the other two elements (Accountability and Support). An external locus of control is apparent.

Sources of Supply

The first two spans concern how we fuel the teams that are addressing a specific issue. As human forests, how do we transmit nutrients? As concerned citizen, how do we ensure that we have sufficient resources to embark on a sustained struggle to defend democracy?

Span of Control [Internal Locus of Control/Supply Element]: This first span defines the range of resources (people, physical assets, and infrastructure) for which an employee or team is given decision rights. The team is held accountable for performance resulting from the deployment of these resources. To narrow the Span, a leader reduces the resources allocated to specific positions or units, while to widen the Span, the leader allocates more people, assets, and infrastructure. Interdependence is increased when this span is narrowed.

Span of Accountability [External Locus of Control/Demand Element]: This second span concerns the range of trade-offs that impact measures used to evaluate a team's achievements. The setting of this span is determined by

the kind of behavior the team's supervisor wants to see. As Simons noted, the span of control and span of accountability are not independent. They must be considered together. The first defines the resources available to a team; the second defines the goals the team is expected to achieve.

By explicitly setting the span of accountability wider than the span of control, leaders can motivate team members to become more entrepreneurial. To narrow the Span, a leader standardizes work by using measures (either financial, such as time-item budget expenses, or non-financial, such as headcount) that allow few trade-offs. To widen the Span, a leader typically uses non-financial measures (such as customer satisfaction) or broad financial measures (such as profits) that allow many trade-offs and encourage interdependence.

Sources of Demand

The third and fourth spans concern how information is being conveyed via the networks of the human forest. Specifically, these two spans convey information about what is needed and what support can be expected among the various elements of this human forest.

Span of Influence [Internal Locus of Control/Demand Element]: The span of influence, according to Simons, corresponds to the width of the net that a team needs to cast in collecting data, probing for new information, and attempting to influence the work of others. Leaders can widen the span when they want to stimulate their teams to think outside the box to develop new ways of serving customers, increasing internal efficiencies, or adapting to changes in external markets. Leaders can widen a team's span of influence by redesigning the task assigned to this employee or project team. For instance, the team can be encouraged to enter into a cross-functional relationship with another team. In this way, interdependence is increased.

Leaders can also adjust a team's span of influence through the level of goals they set. Although the nature of a team's goals drives its span of accountability (by determining the trade-offs team members can make), the level of difficulty drives their sphere of influence. As Simons observed, a team that is given a stretch goal will often be forced to seek out and interact with more people and other teams than a team or person whose goal is set at a much lower level. Interdependence is more likely to take place when aspirations are high.

Leaders can narrow the Span by requiring members of their organization to attend exclusively to their own jobs. Silos are constructed. "Do not allocate costs across units." "Use single reporting lines." "Only reward individual performance". Conversely, they can widen the Span by injecting creative tension through structures, systems, and goals. For example, the leader can form cross-unit teams, matrix structures, and cross-unit cost allocations. These all encourage (or even require) interdependent perspectives and practices.

Span of Support [External Locus of Control/Supply Element]: This fourth span concerns the amount of help a project team can expect from other sources – how much commitment from others does the team need to implement strategy, and how much interdependence is required (or at least requested). This matter of support is particularly important for teams seeking to change public structures, policies, or priorities.

Teams cannot adjust their span of support in isolation —for these teams reside in an interpersonal forest. This span is largely determined by people's sense of shared responsibilities, which in turn stems from an organization or society's culture and values. For a leader to narrow the Span of Support, they can use leveraged, highly individualized rewards. They can also clearly identify winners and losers. For them to widen the Span, leaders must build shared responsibilities through purpose and mission, group identification, trust, and equity-based incentive plans. The "softer" sides of a span are critical. This is where empowerment comes to the foreground.

True and enduring support in an organization comes not just from connecting with and receiving tangible or intangible support from other people, or another project, initiative, or organizational unit. It is a matter of Triangulation, wherein entities link with a third entity (a shared mission, a shared vision, a shared commitment to and capacity to enable a more general and critical project in the organization). It is with the presence of a third entity that we find a form of love and shared commitment. As we have noted, this third entity relates to what the Greeks called Agape and Martin Buber (2000) identified as an I/Thou relationship. A triangulated structure is always stronger (able to withstand powerful external forces) than a structure with only two anchor points (or two sets of anchor points: a four-sided structure).

Job and Team Design: Three notable crises are associated with poorly designed jobs and teams. A *crisis of resources* is most likely to occur when leaders who oversee the work of specific employees or teams spend too much time focused on control, influence, and accountability. They don't spend enough time thinking about support.

A *crisis of control* is likely to occur in highly decentralized organizations and in organizations where separate operational divisions are created to be close to specific customers (or types of customers). Supply of resources (span of control plus span of support) exceeds a leader's ability to effectively monitor job or team trade-offs (span of accountability) and to ensure coordination of knowledge sharing among employees and teams (span of influence). Silos of craft and artistry prevail.

A *crisis of red tape* can occur in any organization where powerful staff members or staff groups overseeing key internal processes (such as strategic planning and resource allocation) are inclined to design performance management systems that are too complex for the organization. Spans of accountability and influence are very high, but resources are insufficient and misdirected. The demand for resources exceeds supply. Genuine interdependence is likely to be nonexistent under each of these crisis conditions.

Alternative Designs: Instead of altering the existing spans in a traditional organization (first-order change), one can redesign an organization or specific action team to encourage (or even require) interdependence (second-order change). Simon identified two alternative designs: cross-unit teams and matrix structures. In both designs, organizational members are required to embrace diverse priorities, perspectives, and practices even while working in a specialized organizational unit. They might be part of a functional unit (such as finance or marketing) while also working on a specific project or in a specific geographic region. The trees need fungi, and fungi need the trees. An advocacy team bent on reforming a democratic institution must rely on broad-based public support. Public support, in turn, is based on the presence of an actionable advocacy team.

The alternative design might instead consist of temporary and collateral operations that enable members of a system to engage in a variety of tasks and relate to other members of the organization in varying (agile) ways. We will have more to say about these alternative organizational designs when

addressing the need for webs of collaboration. All of this enhances the capacity of any system to embrace diversity of perspective and practice while sustaining the collaborative spirit of those working in the system. The old-growth human forest can exist—and may have to exist if mid-21st-century democracy is to be preserved.

Process: Webs of Collaboration

The forest web is not only a structure. It is also a process. Information and nutrients must flow through the existing forest web. Otherwise, this web serves no purpose. Similarly, human webs must not only reinforce interdependence. They must also promote effective collaboration. It is in this promotion that we find empowerment. Specifically, empowerment derives from the training of those operating within the web and from the introduction of facilitation tools that enhance collaboration. We briefly consider each of these promotional strategies.

Training

While the design of an action team or human organization can enable collaboration and effective engagement in diversity, this team or organization can only operate effectively with this design if it also provides the empowering capacity and willingness of its members to engage in Interdependent communication, conflict management, problem-solving, and decision-making. This, in turn, requires that the team or organization provide training in these four areas of empowerment, as well as incentives that align with the consistent and effective provision of these four areas. For instance, an organization might provide all employees with a training program on effective communication that includes active listening tools and appreciative strategies. Similarly, strategies for dealing with differences of viewpoint (such as those identified earlier in this book) might be offered to members of an action team as a way to improve conflict management, problem-solving and decision-making.

We find it particularly important for individual employees or members of an action team to identify their own preferred styles of communication, conflict-management, problem-solving and decision-making. We have created several self-assessment tools to help employees identify their preferred styles (Bergquist, 2023d). One factor makes training in these four areas a bit easier. In designing these instruments and applying them in many

training programs, we have discovered that there are certain common features in the way certain people communicate, address conflicts, solve problems, and make decisions. Five categories of interpersonal relationships capture these different stylistic differences (Bergquist, Sandstrom and Mura, 2023).

First, there are those who tend to push back against other people. They are assertive in their communication, confrontative when engaging in conflict, focus on the domain of ideas when solving problems, and push for immediate action when making decisions. We use the color "Ruby Red" and emphasize the Firey orientation of this first group. A second group consists of people who are likely to be highly nurturing in their interpersonal communication, conflict-avoidant, focused on intentions when solving problems, and inclined toward visionary thinking when involved in decision-making activities. The term "Azure Blue" is assigned to these people. They are often portrayed as residing "up in the sky/clouds."

A third general style is found among those who are highly analytic in their communication with other people. They tend to confront conflict as rational disagreement, focus on the information domain in addressing problems, and look to formal procedures when involved in decision-making processes. The term "Golden Yellow" is assigned to these people. They are often portrayed as a bit "distant from the Frey." They might provide "illumination" but are not themselves fully engaged.

Finally, there is a fourth group of people who are oriented toward interpersonal engagements. They are tolerant (even welcoming) of differing viewpoints when communicating with other people. Conflicts are viewed as important sources of new perspectives and practices. Problem-solving processes tend to be "free-willing" with shifts between the domains of information, intentions, and ideas being common. Decision-making is often guided by a search for consensus. The assignment of "Rainbow" to this group seems appropriate and they might be best portrayed as fully engaged in the interpersonal Frey.

Perhaps the most important lesson to be conveyed in any training that involves differing styles is that no one style is always the most useful and appropriate. In some instances, our strengths and reliance on a specific style get us in trouble. We either need to be flexible in our engagement of specific styles or look to other people for leadership and facilitation of important

interpersonal or group relationships. in some circumstances. This is a particularly critical area in which differences of perspective and practice should be respected, fully appreciated, and engaged when appropriate.

Collaborative Communication

Even without training in the effective engagement of Empowerment strategies, there are important ways in which individuals and (especially) a team can form a web of collaboration. All it takes is a skillful facilitator and processes that stimulate effective communication, conflict-management, problem-solving, and decision-making. We suggest several process-based tools that can be of assistance.

One of the tools is readily available and helpful in virtually any team setting, especially those where there are differential levels of power, experience, and inclination toward contributing to the team's deliberations. This tool is the *Talking Stick*. Each person who is speaking selects the next person to speak and hands them the stick. This simple facilitation tool encourages people to listen to one another rather than plan their own (often interrupting) command of the conversation. The stick also nurtures a more equitable distribution of speaking time. The talking stick can also facilitate the generation of diverse viewpoints if a person holding the stick is asked to pass it on to someone they believe holds a viewpoint that is different from their own

At a more challenging level is the combination of a talking stick with an appreciative perspective. As used with Spectrum Analysis (Gordon, 1961) (there is the "seed" of a good idea in everything that is contributed), the person who is handed the stick must first identify three strengths or contributions inherent in the idea presented by the previous speaker (the person who handed them the stick). They can then offer their own idea, though often they are distracted by their appreciation of the previous contribution and find themselves building on this idea rather than their own.

There is also the possibility of creating a temporary system, such as World Café, that provides an opportunity for collaborative communication. Usually, the World Café is engaged with a large team or with a cluster of people interested in (often stakeholders associated with) a specific issue. Specifically, World Café is a collaborative multi-round process that involves

the open sharing of ideas and perspectives. It is a collaborative communication tool rather than being specifically designed for solving the convening issue. Four to eight participants sit at tables that come with a "host", a flip chart, and an ample supply of markers. Each table is also assigned a specific question related to the overall issue being addressed at the café.

The process begins with the first of three or more rounds for those seated around each table. At the end of each round, all members of each group move to another table. Sometimes they all transfer to the same table; at other times, they go to different tables. Only the table hosts stay at a specific table for all rounds. The table host welcomes new guests at the start of each round, briefly summarizes the previous conversation(s), and facilitates further discourse.

After all rounds are completed, participants at each table work with the host to produce a summary of their table's contributions. Each host then shares this summary with all café participants. The facilitator seeks to bring together the diverse findings by offering their own integration as well as inviting café participants to contribute their own integrative insights. As in the case of a "real" café, collaborative communication is intended to be free-flowing and non-competitive. The verbal conversation is sometimes supplemented with drawings on flipchart paper and/or the telling of stories or offering of analogies and metaphors.

We find world cafes to be particularly valuable in addressing the political challenges of our times. We might even find that Habermas's public space can be created through effective use of this design.

Collaborative Conflict-Management

The real challenge of staying connected amid differences is posed when these differences result in conflict between the two parties that champion the differences. The nature of this challenge (and one specific solution) is portrayed in an animated short documentary called. "Is it Always Right to Be Right?" (Schmidt, 1970). This was a cartoon in which it took only one person on one side of the chasm to ask if it is possible that those on the other side of an ideological chasm might be offering a valid perspective. As the narrator, Orson Welles declared: "They might be right!" This didn't

mean that those on the other side were right about everything; however, they might be right about at least one thing. With this declaration, the chasm collapsed. And the two sides shared perspectives and solved problems.

Perhaps it doesn't take Spectrum Analysis, a World Cafe, or even a talking stick to close the chasm. Maybe the only thing needed to bring about the resolution of a conflict is a moment of appreciative inquiry. An appreciative culture might be based on nothing more than one person's inquiry regarding the validity of an alternative perspective or practice: "You might be right." Or "Perhaps, we are both right, depending on the perspective to be taken."

At other times, a more elaborate conflict-management process might be required, especially if the conflict involves groups rather than individuals. Modified from a process first described by two noted organizational consultants, Robert Blake and Jane Mouton, the Intergroup Mediation Process is founded on an appreciative perspective and exemplifies the creation of a temporary system that encourages collaboration (Blake. Shepard and Mouton, 1964). Two groups in conflict are brought together in a safe and supportive setting where three skilled facilitators manage this process. One facilitator is assigned to each group. The third facilitator manages the overall process. The three facilitators approach this meeting from an appreciative perspective by focusing on the moments when each group "is doing it right" and by leaning into the future in encouraging the constructive work to be done by each group after this meeting. [Note: just the creation of this setting is a step toward the resolution of a conflict].

Each group is given the task of preparing six flip-chart documents:

(1) our own group's perspectives on the contentious issue (or one of several contentious issues) that is keeping our two groups apart,
(2) a list of the strengths and competencies that make our group invaluable in their organization or community,
(3) what we anticipate will be the other group's perspective regarding the contentious issue that is keeping us apart,
(4) what our group predicts regarding the other group's list of the strengths and competencies that make them invaluable in their organization or community,

(5) what our group thinks the other group will predict regarding the perspective our group will take concerning the contentious issue that is keeping our two groups apart, and
(6) what our group thinks the other group will predict regarding what is on our group's list of strengths and competencies that we bring to our organization or community,

These six lists require complex thinking and analysis by both groups. Thinking must slow down when both groups are given the task of identifying their own perspective on the differences that exist between the two groups and the resources they bring to their organization or community. Both assumptions and biases surface when asked to make predictions about the other group's perspectives regarding the convening disagreements and their own contributions to the organization or community. Perhaps of greatest importance are the two lists to be prepared that ask each group to consider what the other group is seeking when they look across the table at "our" group.

It takes a while for each group to prepare all six lists. Disagreements are often found among members of each group regarding what to put on one or more of the lists. In some cases, a list will contain multiple responses and several alternative perspectives. Important insights and rich learning often emerge from this first phase of the exercise, especially if the group facilitators are skillful and engage an appreciative perspective when helping their group identify their "best" and "most insightful" perspectives.

The next phase of this collaborative conflict management process involves attaching the six lists prepared by each group to the wall. All members of both groups are invited to view and fully appreciate the six lists prepared by members of the other group. It is as if those viewing the lists were connoisseurs at an art museum, pausing at each painting to determine what this work of art is seeking to convey. Informal conversations among members of both groups may occur; however, debate regarding the merits of a specific list is discouraged at this point, in lieu of the third phase.

This third phase consists of convening all members of both groups. The facilitator of each group spends a few minutes reporting (from a neutral, external perspective) on the deliberations that took place in their group regarding the preparation of each list. Typically, the two group facilitators each report on the comparable lists prepared by their group. For instance,

the two perspectives (list one) on the primary point of contention are presented consecutively. The general facilitator often takes notes on a flip chart regarding themes that seem to overarch the two groups. The two facilitators then move on to the second list and so on.

The general facilitator leads the fourth phase, reporting on what they see as the overarching themes. Of particular importance are:

> (1) the areas of agreement and disagreement regarding the contentious issues,
> (2) assumptions and biases that might be questioned, and
> (3) the potential for self-fulfilling prophecy (where actions taken by own group based on a false assumption produces the assumed reaction by the other group).

An open conversation then occurs. The general facilitator poses such questions as:

> (1) what is surprising on one or more of these lists,
> (2) where do you see points of leverage where conflict might best be addressed,
> (3) where do we go from here?
> Group members are encouraged to ask questions of the general facilitator, the two group facilitators, or members of the other group.

During the fifth phase, the general facilitator suggests steps that both groups can take to resolve or manage their conflict. This distinction is important. Some elements of disagreement between the two groups may be resolved successfully. The conflict "goes away." Through this appreciative process, the two groups have found a way they can collaborate that leads to the accomplishment of both groups' goals. For instance, rather than the two groups fighting over the portion of the "pie" that each of them can claim, they work together on increasing the size of the pie (finding more resources). The span analysis I introduced earlier in this essay can be of value in this regard.

Alternatively, conflict can be resolved by inviting each group to readjust its assumptions regarding the other group. The flipchart lists can guide each group's future actions regarding the other group (especially if these actions break up old self-fulfilling patterns). An appreciative approach can also be

taken to identify ways to make fuller use of the resources brought by the other group to one's organization or community.

The two groups might even engage complementary resources on behalf of a joint project. The conflict can also be resolved by finding ways in which members of the two groups can continue learning from one another. They can entertain the other group's perspectives and practices to become even more creative in their own planning and problem-solving ventures. This process builds on the theory of mind we identified earlier in this book. A much richer (and more accurate and constructive) theory of mind can be built collectively using this process—especially if it is engaged early in the life of a collateral organization. This tool is of particular value when the organization is composed of polarized participants from two different "camps." "Diversity is a good thing" might be the new motto for both groups!

This is all well and good. However, frequently the conflict will not disappear. This occurs when the conflict is based on fundamental (and appropriate) differences in priorities, values, and contributions made by each group to their organization or community. This often is the case when working with the polarizing and contentious conditions of today's political arena. When this is the case, then there should be a focus on the "management" of the conflict rather than on "resolution." This means discovering or creating ways in which to work with the conflict when it inevitably arises. There might be a sequencing of actions (each based on a high priority for one of the groups). It might instead be a facilitated process of finding a compromise.

At an even deeper and more appreciative level, the reemergence of conflict might be viewed as a repeated opportunity to gain new insights regarding the work to be done by the organization or the community in which both groups operate. As Ken and Mary Gergen (2004) have 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. Truth is to be found in the interdependent, highly diverse old-growth forests and in the Gergen's effectively constructed human forests.

Ken and Mary Gergen insist that someone in conflict respect and learn from those with whom they are in conflict: "one is invited into a posture of curiosity and respect for others." Of greatest importance is the respect we show for the distinctive perspectives (and sources of insight) which people from all backgrounds bring to a conflict. Collaborative conflict-management is filled with differing and even contentious priorities, perspectives, and practices. However, we can sustain a relationship amidst these conflictual differences. It only takes appreciation and the willingness to say, "You might be right!"

Collaborative Problem-Solving

While the Word Café is primarily intended for sharing perspectives and ideas, and the Intergroup Mediation process focuses on conflict management, there are other temporary systems convened specifically to solve a convening issue. One of these collaborative systems is called Future Search. Another temporary system is called Open Space.

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 (as a temporary system) 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. The public space of Jürgen Habermas is being at least temporarily created.

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. Reports 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 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 only 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) to reach a shared positive future. Connections have been created during the Future Search process that nurture ongoing collaboration among participants in working toward the 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. The Future Search process can become a collateral organization that is convened on a regular basis by an organization or community.

A quite different collaborative problem-solving model is to be found in the more recent enactment of a temporary system called Open Space. Originally offered by Harrison Owens (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 required 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 temporary 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, some "container" must be present throughout the meeting, as with the World Café. This Open Space container is a set of assumptions that provide a foundation for

this distinctive temporary system. These assumptions represent (and enforce) the “spirit” of Open Space.

The 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 temporary system. They are "holding a space" for participants to self-organize. Habermas lives! 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 becomes 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 temporary system—precisely because of the self-organizing and evolving nature of any specific Open Space meeting. That is why I previously mentioned that any requirement is controversial if the conveners of an Open Space system are 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 will happen or which issues will 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.

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 concern 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, realizing these process-oriented outcomes.

Open Space meetings are usually held for several hours or for a few days. As in the case of Future Search, World Café, and the Intergroup Mediation process, much of the work in Open Space is done in small groups, with occasional reports to the entire group. Unlike in the Intergroup Mediation and Future Search systems, the small group discussions are often quite fluid in an Open Space meeting (and in World Cafes). Participants easily leave one group and join another—or start a new group that addresses a new topic or engages 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 another structure 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 listed above is accurate—that passion is inherent in the topics being addressed—then this passion (shared by World Café, Intergroup Mediation, and 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 temporary system.

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 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. Ambiguity and contradiction abound—as does diffuse anxiety. These conditions can't be avoided in any setting that resembles Habermas's public space. The VUCA-Plus that exists today (especially in the world of Donald Trump) can't be ignored if a viable outcome is to emerge from the Future Search or Open Space.

Furthermore, one wonders if Future Search and Open Space are always free from the distorting influences of groupthink and the collusion that exists when people "like one another" and become enmeshed (even temporarily) in a "warm hug" of false reality. As Cass Sunstein (Sunstein, 2011, p. 314) notes:

> For multiple reasons, deliberating groups often converge on falsehood rather than truth. Individual errors may be amplified rather than cured. Group members may fall victim to a bad cascade, either informational or reputational. Deliberators may emphasize shared information at the expense of uniquely held information.

We have found that participants in many collaborative problem-solving engagements (like Future Search and Open Space) don't always avoid the polarization identified by Barry Johnson. Under such contentious conditions, it is tempting (as Johnson observes) for "rational people" to be led to "unjustified extremism." (Sunstein, 2011, p. 314). Furthermore, participants in liberating, "feel good" events like Future Search and Open Space often 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 temporary system will linger. They are prepared for 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 passive attendance at traditional conferences or training programs, the participants in collaborative problem-solving events are actively involved in creating new ideas. They are engaged in co-active problem-solving with other participants.

Collaborative Decision-Making

The special settings and limited times for intense planning and visioning of the future that we have just described are wonderful gifts to be bestowed on an action team. These temporary settings benefit teams that wish to clarify and expand shared intentions, collect valid and useful information, and generate ideas that bridge the gap between reality and ideal. However, these temporary settings must complement sustained webs of collaboration that exist "back home" (and back in daily reality).

The domain of information must be visited repeatedly during the daily routine of examining the numbers and observing the ongoing operations.

Regular revisiting of the team's intentions must also occur. The specific purpose of each convened meeting is articulated at the start of the meeting. An assessment of the meeting's outcomes is identified at the end of the meeting. Tactically based (short-term) Ideas must be generated and plans modified and monitored each day—often addressed at the start of each workday ("Morning Huddle"). Strategically based (long-term) ideas should also be generated at regular, extended meetings that build on and integrate tactical ideas. Generative collaboration requires a repeated tour through the three domains.

There is one other critical matter to be considered. Just as the forest must be diverse, it is important that the sources of information, the range of intentions, and the variety of ideas represent multiple perspectives and practices. This diversity must be honored not just in words, but also in the representation of people who offer differing information, intentions, and ideas when problems are being solved and (in particular) when decisions are being made. As we have already noted, behavioral economists such as

Kahneman (2011/2013) and Ariely (2008) strongly suggest, the first question to be asked of every team is: "who is at the table" These economists and those studying complex adaptive systems find that diversity is likely to yield creative solutions and the capacity of a team to be agile and adaptive in addressing challenges associated with an environment that is saturated with VUCA-Plus.

An important addition needs to be made alongside the commitment to diversity and an expanded invitation to the table. Diverse perspectives and practices are to be honored. They are also to be appreciated. It is not enough to listen to and respect views that differ from our own. We must also articulate our appreciation for these views, noting how the information, intentions, and ideas being conveyed by those who differ from us contribute to a generative dialogue. It is for those of us who offer differing viewpoints to point out (as is done in Spectrum Analysis) how the views offered by "the other side" contain at least "the seed" of a good idea, valid information, and appropriate intentions.

Attitude/Culture: Webs of Appreciation

In essence, an appreciative perspective reflects a willingness to engage others from the assumption of mutual respect, in a mutual search for discovery of distinctive competencies, strengths, and areas of expertise, with a view to helping them fulfill their aspirations and potential. This simple statement may at first seem naive and idealistic. However, at its core, this statement holds the promise of encouraging collective expertise (Weitz and Bergquist, xxx). Furthermore, this perspective is engaged in several forms and has different meanings that build on one another.

Appreciative Communication

We are searching for, acknowledging, and leveraging strength through dialogue and questioning within an appreciative culture. As noted in Chapter Fifteen, we recognize distinctive sources of expertise regarding the collection and interpretation of information, the clarification and building of commitment for specific intentions, and the facilitation and generation of valuable ideas to bridge the gap.

Appreciation is exhibited constructively through ongoing interaction among those engaged in building collective expertise. It involves mutual respect and active engagement, accompanied by a natural flow of feedback.

Appreciation is embedded in an exchange of ideas. More specifically, appreciation is evident not only in the processes being engaged but also in the attitudes accompanying these appreciative tools. These attitudes concern the nature and intention-aligned purpose of work done while building collective expertise.

Appreciative Conflict-Management

Under conditions of disagreement and conflict, it is tempting to abandon any appreciation of the person with whom one disagrees or with whom one is in conflict. Yet, as we have seen throughout this book, it is possible to remain in a relationship with another person even in the midst of disagreement. An understanding and appreciation of another person is at the heart of the matter when engaging an appreciative perspective in resolving or at least managing a conflict. Furthermore, as we have noted regarding the Window of Strength (Chapter Sixteen), this appreciation opens new vistas for their growth and further maturation of the collaborative venture.

Appreciative Problem-Solving

Another 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.

In this way, appreciation centers on acknowledging the value of diversity in the problem-solving enterprise (Page, 2011).

This appreciative strategy requires not only the recognition of diverse perspectives and differing backgrounds but also engagement in processes that guide a search for common understanding, non-judgmental acceptance, and potential integration of diverse perspectives and practices. Bohmian dialogue (Bohm, 2004) can be of great value. Dialogue is engaged that has no predefined purpose. There is no structured sequence of conversations.

As in the case of the open space structure described earlier, this form of dialogue is intended as an inquiry into and reflections on the way both parties are thinking and on ways in which they might "think together." This dialogue can allow people with divergent ideas to examine their own

preconceptions and prejudices, as well as to explore the potential intersection of their thoughts and ideas. We would also refer back to the process of Spectrum Analysis provided by the Synectics Group (Gordon, 1961). As mentioned earlie, at the heart of this analysis was the search for the "seed" or "kernel" of validity and usefulness in any idea being proposed in a problem-solving group.

Appreciative Decision-Making

The description and analysis provided by Robert Macfarlane regarding the workings of a forest is but one of the analyses he offered in Underland. He explored many phenomena that tend to appear over time and are continually present for many years and centuries. He offers all these analyses on behalf of what he called Deep Time. It is when we extend our observations and analyses over long stretches of time that we are likely to gain some important and often startling insights—such as the complex network found in a forest.

Macfarlane (2019, p. 15) makes the following case:

> We should resist . . . inertial thinking; indeed, we should urge its opposite - deep time as a radical perspective, provoking us to action not apathy. For to think in deep time can be a means not of escaping our troubled present, but rather of re-imagining it; countermanding its quick creeds and furies with older, slower stories of making and unmaking. At its best, a deep time awareness might help us see ourselves as part of a web of gift, inheritance and legacy stretching over millions of years past and millions to come, bringing us to consider what we are leaving behind for the epochs and beings that will follow us.

Macfarlane (2019, pp. 15-16) portrays the positive outcomes to be generated by one's assumptions of a long-ranging deep time perspective:

> When viewed in deep time, things come alive that seemed inert. New responsibilities declare themselves. A conviviality of being leaps to mind and eye. The world becomes eerily various and vibrant again. Ice breathes, Rock has tides. Mountains ebb and flow. Stone pulses. We live on a restless Earth.

It is in Macfarlane's deep time perspective that we find the power ("vibrance") of appreciation ("conviviality of being"). Diversity ("eerily various") is alive and well. The world is seen as a system of dynamic complexity. The deep time perspective also calls for a "learning into the future" (Scharmer, 2009). The dynamic complexity is only fully seen and appreciated from a distance and in a slow and thoughtful manner (as Kahneman suggests). All of this speaks to the need and capacity of those engaged in appreciative decision-making to engage in planning that is long-term and agile. Contingency planning takes priority over either short-term tactical planning or long-term strategic planning processes set in stone (even though, as Macfarlane notes, stone itself "pulses" when viewed over time!).

By establishing a deep-time perspective, we discover the critical elements of a positive collective image of the future. An appreciative perspective is not just referring to successes in the past. It is also pointing forward to a vision of success in the future. It is in the enduring patterns of life that we find an image of the future that is both viable and compelling. The past is engaged so that it can be brought into the future. That which is positive and has endured in the past can become the foundation for our future. Deep Time holds the potential of leading us to the still-life perspective on time that we introduced earlier in this Afterword: "Nothing has really changed over a long period of time." However, the arrow of linear, progressive time is always present when successes of the past are brought into the future.

In essence, appreciation refers to the establishment of a positive image of the future based on our appreciation of the past. the present and that which endures over time. We grow to appreciate our collective effort at finding and enforcing an enduring image of our world. We invest this effort with optimism and Macfarlane's "vibrance". Our own institutions, like the mountains, ebb and flow when viewed from a deep time perspective. We invest our world with a sense of hope about its own future and the valuable role it potentially plays in our organization or society. Effective appreciative participation in a collaborative decision-making 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 participate as related to the contributions we make jointly in helping to realize these images, purposes, and values.

Put somewhat differently, 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 a reconstructed narrative of the past, the conversations are directed toward a new narrative concerning the future that builds on the deep time analyses of enduring patterns. While we appreciate what has been successful in the past, we don't dwell on the past. Instead of nostalgia, we continually identify implications of sustained and shared expertise, acquired wisdom, and past successes regarding our vision of the future.

Shift in Mindset

Clearly, it is not easy to be appreciative when faced with differing perspectives and practices, especially when we view the person with whom we disagree as a worthy opponent. As one of our socially activist colleagues has noted, "I don't want to appreciate the perspectives or practices of the people against whom I am struggling. I want to block them, not understand them!" It takes heavy lifting to sustain a relationship laced with minor or profound differences. A fundamental shift in mindset is required. It takes an effort to learn from the interconnected forest.

Robert Macfarlane (2019, pp. 103-104) puts it this way:

> Certainly, orthodox 'Western' understandings of nature feel inadequate to the kinds of world-making that fungi perform. As our historical narratives of progress have come to be questioned, so the notion of history itself has become remodeled. History no longer feels figurable as a forward-flinging arrow or a self-intersecting spiral; better, perhaps, seen as a network branching and conjoining in many directions. Nature, too, seems increasingly better understood in fungal terms: not as a single gleaming snow-peak or tumbling river in which we might find redemption, nor as a diorama that we deplore or adore from a distance - but rather as an assemblage of entanglements of which we are messily part. We are coming to understand our bodies as habitats for hundreds of species of which Homo sapiens is only one, our guts as jungles of bacterial flora, our skins as blooming fantastically with fungi.

Macfarlane (2019, p. 104) borrows a term from Lynn Margulis to define an outcome of shifting mindset:

> Yes, we are beginning to encounter ourselves - not always comfortably or pleasantly- as multi-species beings already partaking in timescales that are fabulously more complex than the onwards-driving version of history many of us still imagine ourselves to inhabit. The work of the radical biologist Lynn Margulis and others has shown humans to be not solitary beings, but what Margulis memorably calls 'holobionts' - collaborative compound organisms, ecological units consisting of trillions of bacteria, viruses and fungi that coordinate the task of living together and sharing a common life, in the philosopher Glenn Albrecht's phrase.

In our mid-21st-century world, it seems that we are entangled inevitably with people with whom we disagree as well as those with whom we agree. As members of a Holobiont (or perhaps several holobionts), it is incumbent on us to find or invent structures, processes, and attitudes that enhance interdependence, collaboration, and appreciation.

Conclusions

Robert Rosenthal, a young psychologist at Harvard, decided to study how one change in behavior (grade reports from a schoolteacher) can influence the overall impression (and performance) of a student during the following year of school. When positive and negative reports on performance were given to a student's teacher for the following year, students' work during the following year improved or declined as a result of the report of their previous year's performance. Rosenthal labeled this the Pygmalion Effect (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 2003). This set the stage for many other studies of Self-Fulfilling Prophecy. These studies included one conducted by Rosenthal himself in which one group of lab assistants was told that their rats were Maze bright while another group of assistants was informed that their rats were Maze dull. Though these labels had been arbitrarily assigned, the Maze Bright rats actually performed better on mazes than their Maze dull compatriots.

Often called the Rosenthal Effect by other psychologists, this powerful (and controversial) dynamic has been found to influence many interpersonal relationships. We propose that it plays a major role in the interactions that

take place between two people or two groups that strongly disagree regarding special perspectives and practices. While the disagreement may initially be about one specific viewpoint or action, it can easily expand into a major chasm between the two people or groups, in large part because self-fulfilling prophecies are influential.

For example, imagine that you and someone we will call "Jim" hold different views about the funding of childcare in your community. When you and Jim meet one another at a town meeting, Jim is very guarded, not wanting to offend you because the two of you have been friends in the past. You sense Jim's guardedness and easily interpret this as "defensiveness." You wonder what Jim is hiding. Jim then notices your own guardedness and becomes even more guarded himself. Jim wonders what you are hiding.

Self-fulfilling prophecy kicks in for both parties. We perceived another person being defensive, and in our own protection against this perceived defensiveness, we are encouraging the other person to become more defensive. Pretty soon, the two people decide to avoid each other in the future. This further increases their own fear-based assumptions about the other person's motives. Images of self begin to change, including assumptions about how they see us and why they are annoyed with us. A disagreement about childcare policies has morphed into suspicion and even hatred of our former friend. The relationship has not been sustained amidst differences. A former friend has become the "Other."

In this book, we have introduced several strategies for countering and closing the chasm that can be fostered by self-fulfilling prophecy. We have encouraged an appreciative perspective and slow, reflective thinking (cf. Schön, 1983; Kahneman, 2011/2013). We have suggested that we need to consider how another person not only sees the world but also sees us and our own perspectives and practices. It is when testing our own assumptions that we are likely to finally listen to the differing views of another person and learn from their perspective.

Perhaps, as we did earlier in this book, we might look to Barry Oshry (2018) as our teacher and guide regarding sustaining relationships amidst differences:

Purity is one solution to encountering the "other,"
and Tolerance another.

Both are grounded in varying degrees of Power over Love.
. . . there is a third possibility,
one that requires a fundamental transformation in
how we see and experience one another,
a transformation based on the understanding that:
the interaction patterns we fall into
shape how we see and experience one another.
What seems to be a real and solid picture of the "other"
is merely the consequence of the pattern we have fallen into.
Change the pattern of interaction
and our experiences of one another will change.
The possibility of Power and Love will emerge.

There is also the matter of creating and maintaining a web of interdependence, collaboration, and appreciation. Once again, Robert Macfarlane (2019, p. 113) can be our teacher:

> If there is human meaning to be made of the wood wide web, it is surely that what might save us as we move forwards into the precarious, unsettled centuries ahead is collaboration: mutualism, symbiosis, the inclusive human work of collective decision-making extended to more-than-human communities. You look at the network, and then it starts to look back at you. Writing of mycorrhizal fungi, Albrecht proposes that we rechristen the Anthropocene, naming it instead the Symbiocene - an epoch characterized in terms of social organization by human intelligence that replicates the symbiotic and mutually reinforcing life¬reproducing forms and processes found in living systems ... such as the wood wide web.

As noted in the title of an Ursula LeGuin (1984) novel, the word for world is forest. Perhaps, we are living in this forested world of human interdependence and collaboration. And the name of the Symbiocene in which we humans, as social animals, dwell might be called the Forest of Mutualism (Macfarlane, 2019, p. 97). In this forest, there are no kings or authoritarian despots. Rather, at a short distance, we view a beautiful city emerging from the densely intertwined trees, underbrush, and verdant floor

of the forest. And in this forest, we gain the first glimpse of a pathway to true freedom.

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While the three of us, as authors, have shared many stories in this book regarding the origins of our ideas, beliefs and passions, we wish to formally acknowledge and express our gratitude for people in our life who have taught us, inspired us, and in many instances challenged us to think and act beyond our own personal scope of knowledge and concern.

Kevin indicates that his journey to this book began long before I arrived in the United States. I grew up under Apartheid in South Africa as a young white boy viewing the Apartheid racism from the outside in, beginning early in my life where the daily reality of black and brown people suffered under state-sanctioned racism. These early observations shaped my understanding of freedom, dignity, and resistance. As a young teenager, I watched Tommie Smith and John Carlos raise their fists at the 1968 Olympic Games. Their courage in that moment - defiant, principled, and deeply human - helped inspire my decision to emigrate to the United States in 1973 in search of a society that aspired to greater justice.

I owe profound gratitude to the leaders and citizens who fought to dismantle the Apartheid oppression in South Africa. Nelson Mandela's moral clarity and unwavering commitment to freedom and equality remain a central theme in my life. I also acknowledge the countless activists, known and unknown, whose sacrifices made liberation in Soth Africa possible. I also want to recognize the many individuals and movements in the United States who are working to defend democratic freedoms and norms and resist authoritarian tendencies. Groups such as NO KINGS, along with journalists, organizers, legal advocates, and community leaders across the country, remind us that freedom requires vigilance and collective action.

Suzi would like to acknowledge her beloved grandparents Dr. Leon and Tania Shmukler, who fought the Nazis in the Partisan Movement. Without their bravery, survival instincts, fight for freedom, and the kindness of righteous strangers who helped them, I would not be here today. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to all those who fought Hitler and his cronies, and those who continue to fight oppression, ignorance and hatred every day. In our currently polarized ideological society, families and even households are divided - not along political party lines, but along lines of

racism, cult behavior, stubborn adherence to falsehoods and disinformation, and the Dunning-Kruger effect. I also wish to thank the optimists who believe democracy will overcome and recover from this administration. For all our sake, and for the sake of future generations, I hope you are proven right. Profound gratitude to Jeff & Ellen Smith, Lori Marshall, and Shawn Adler who guided, supported, stood up for me, and freed me from the oppression of my abusive situation.

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Unlike Kevin and Suzi, Bill offers acknowledgements that relate exclusively to the lives of my ancestors in America. However, there are two quite different stories to tell, each displaying differing aspects of American freedom. On my mother's side, there is a long history of early Pilgrim-era migration to Massachusetts, successful entrepreneurship (Williams of Sherwin-Williams Paint, after whom I was named), religious devotion (many pastors, both traditional and free-lancing), and exceptional leadership (James Garfield, the assassinated President who spoke forcibly for the honoring of the liberated African-Americans following the Civil War). Freedom for these ancestors came in the form of starting an innovative business (first canned paint), preaching freely from the pulpit, and speaking courageously about the evils of slavery and post-slavery indifference. Freedom and courage were also exhibited in my mother's decision to spend a year as a young woman in her mid-20s, traveling around the world.

On my father's side, there is a quite different story of immigration to the United States by both grandparents. There was a harrowing trek by foot in the middle of the winter by my grandfather from Red Wing to Morehead, Minnesota, where he met his previously immigrated brother living in a log cabin on the Red River; from there, he established one of the first grocery stores in Fargo, North Dakota, and married a widowed woman who had also immigrated from Scandinavia. Freedom for these ancestors concerned the quest for a more liberated life that led my grandfather and grandmother to migrate from Sweden and Norway. Freedom and courage were also expressed in my grandfather's establishment of an early grocery store in a still undeveloped Fargo, and in my father's decision after many years of working in the store to go back to high school, and then to Northwestern University, where he received a Bachelor's Degree and then a Master's Degree in Accounting and Business Administration.

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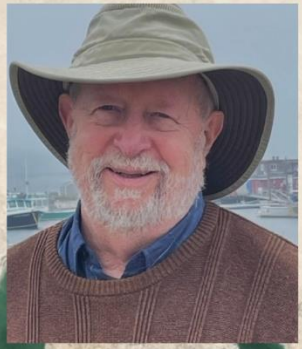
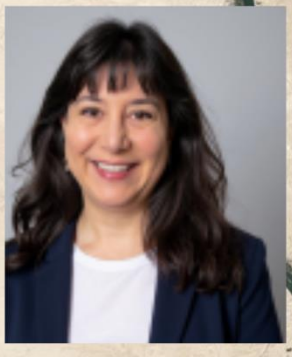
William Bergquist :
Social and Organizational
Psychologist



Kevin Weitz: :
Organizational Culture
Consultant

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Executive
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