A man who feels no pain or remorse when he kills a child places his humanity in doubt. A nation that listens in silence and inaction as its government causes the deaths of a million fellow human beings has placed its future on the auction block. “National interest also allows a member [of the nation] to disregard moral principles in defence of the nation. — it is permissible to lie, to steal and to murder” (Harris 1990, 16).

At its core, nationalism (and the political realism that supports it) is a profoundly pessimistic ideology: it holds that we have no choice but to continue killing each other. What is human life worth? That is in the eye of the beholder. And in the eye of an ardent nationalist, it cannot be worth much.

Nationalism always wears a humanitarian mask: democracy, socialism, the fatherland, Christianity, Islam, God and country, whatever. But deep down, the ideology of nationalism is connected with a profound doubt about whether life is worth living. And if human life is not worth living, then the human species is not
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worth saving. Joy in living, respect for human life, and the chances of human survival are interdependent. The personal is political.

It is essential to recognize not only the pathological nature of militant nationalism but also the pathological failure of the environment that gives rise to it. Militant nationalism is not the product of a healthy global community. Militant nationalism sprouts in the pathological void left by the failure of human beings to recognize and activate their humanity. In our time, this is a failure of responsible global citizenship.

If a North American politician were to promote a policy of slavery or of disenfranchising women, his political career would soon be terminated. But a politician who promotes nuclear weapons development, the use of nuclear weapons against adversaries, the militarization of space, and murderous violations of international law can become president of the United States or prime minister of Canada. He may have to use a rhetoric that obscures what he is promoting, but the rhetoric is not the reality. Such politicians are threatening our survival as a species, yet under the current set of political assumptions, that’s okay.

One of the urgent tasks facing our generation is to remove mass slaughter from the menu of political choices. If we are depressed and skeptical of the value of human life or if we decide that we have no responsibility to make the necessary change, then we will never rise to the challenge.

Most of the problem, then, is pervasive in our culture: a way of thinking in which mass slaughter is acceptable. The fundamental changes we need to make — steadily, relentlessly, and soon — are extremely unlikely to originate within or gain much momentum from the dominant political institutions. If the changes are to take place at all, they must be driven from outside the institutions, by a change in the way people think. If it remains acceptable in the minds of a critical mass of the public to continue down the road toward Option B, then we will continue down that road.

The future cannot be predicted in detail, but we conduct our lives
on the basis of reasonable assumptions. We should be approaching our collective future in the same way. It is a reasonable assumption that if we accept and effectively implement our responsibility to repudiate lawlessness as an acceptable political option, our future will be better than if we fail to accept that responsibility.

The same line of reasoning applies to each of us as individuals. Each of us is the final arbiter of how we think about the world and how we conduct our lives. We can decide that we have a responsibility to repudiate political lawlessness, or not. In either case, we unquestionably bear responsibility for the predictable consequences of our choice.

Stalin and Hitler were forceful personalities, but ignorant and incompetent in the terms set forth in this book. We have such personalities in our own culture — “people of the lie,” as Scott Peck calls them — self righteous, strong-willed, and destructive of human well-being. They may be Sunday school teachers or your neighbour or the local constable or a successful politician or a political appointee. In our culture, their pathological desire to dominate finds its complement in a pathological willingness to be dominated — the failure of responsible citizenship.

The current president of the United States, Barack Obama, seems relatively wise and mature, but that advantage will be for naught unless there is a quantum advance in well-informed, competent, engaged citizenship in the United States. Anyone occupying the office of president will be subjected to pressures from old-paradigm institutions (the military-industrial-ideological-political complex), and those will prevail unless we as citizens provide the countervailing force.

The navigational system provided by Martin Luther King Jr., Erich Fromm, and others — that is, the one presented in this book — is the most reliable we have. Had we used it consistently in the twentieth century, we would not be stumbling down this dark passage in the twenty-first. The principles provided in chapter 4 and those which follow here are intended as guides in
this navigational system — guides to personal growth, discovery of your potential, and development of your legacy. Your life is your gift to the world. Don’t waste it.

The principles in chapter 4 emphasized some of the pathologic conditions in the global community, the necessity of being aware of that pathology within ourselves, and some of the high costs of failing to do this. Carrying these concepts further, I have found the following principles useful in thinking about my own interactions with government and civil society, about the nature and uses of power, and about the challenges of practicing global citizenship.

PRINCIPLE 21

_Elected and appointed officials are limited by the paradigm of the political institutions they serve._

Those who serve established institutions are limited by the paradigms in which those institutions are rooted. Those who hold political office, whether elected or appointed, are limited by the paradigms on which the government is based. The limitations are particularly severe in (militarily) powerful states because governments of powerful states, and the related economic and cultural institutions, are locked into the paradigm of militant nationalism.

Elected and appointed officials in militant nationalist states, and in states allied with them, often have to behave as if they were out of touch with reality. In the case of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, for example, the absence of evidence was taken to be, for government officials of the United States and their allies, not only _not_ evidence of absence, but evidence that the weapons programs (which hypothetically existed) had been concealed. If you were in the government, you were obliged to maintain this delusion.

Psychosis is a mental disorder in which symptoms such as delusions indicate an impaired contact with reality. The concept of an institutional psychosis is a useful one: an impaired contact
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with reality imposed by the policy or doctrinal requirements of an institution — in this case, a national government. Some part of reality must be ignored, or a figment of the imagination must be treated as if it were real. This kind of psychosis is pervasive in our political culture.

One of the challenges of responsible citizenship is to gain personal sanity, and then to restore sanity to the community. Presidents and prime ministers, even if they have achieved a level of psychosocial sanity themselves, remain under old-paradigm pressures. Only if citizens relentlessly push political institutions toward a healthy global community will we be able to abandon the self-destructive patterns of the past.

PRINCIPLE 22
Civil society has emerged as the Option A leader in world affairs.

Civil society is the non-governmental, non-profit sector of society that is dedicated to the public interest and the common good. Civil society organizations are variously concerned with environmental or social justice issues, or other challenges. Organizations and individuals in civil society have moved with an adaptive intelligence and speed that governments cannot match to identify problems and potential solutions for the challenges of life-and-death importance to our future. They are much less restricted by old-paradigm thinking. Much like a market economy, they gather information from countless sources and communicate it to others, enabling wise decisions about the use of resources.

In the twentieth century, while governments were designing and implementing policies that gave us World War I and World War II, nuclear weapons, and the Vietnam War, civil society gave us countless organizations that called for sanity and advanced the work of cleaning up the mess that governments had made. Over the past quarter century, government policies have given

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us the destruction of populations through economic sanctions and acts of aggression; implementing those policies has cost hundreds of billions of dollars. Civil society has relentlessly called for governments to abandon their assault on human rights and has had to bathe the wounds inflicted by the atrocities of covert operations, paramilitary operations, and overt military operations, as well as other direct and indirect damage inflicted by governments. It is civil society in Iraq that has had to cope with the rubble left by the arrogance and violence of governments. It is civil society in Latin America that has rejected the failed policies of neoliberalism and the governments and institutions that have promoted it.

Governments have given us global apartheid; civil society has given us microcredit organizations. Our “elected” governments hold the nuclear sword of Damocles above our heads; our civil society organizations tell them to take it down. Civil society organizations in North America are in touch with civil society organizations in Latin America, people to people, a direct form of communication that deals with the environmental and social justice issues that governments and their international bureaucracies, such as the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund, have exacerbated. Civil society has taken its financial power out to women in villages, to the poorest of the poor, in order to lend small sums that enable them to build the means of life with dignity.

Skeptics point out that civil society is not an elected body of people or organizations. Under present conditions in our society, however, elected governments do not represent the public interest as reliably as civil society, for reasons given in this book. Elected officials make decisions behind closed doors about hundreds of billions of dollars in public funds, decisions to finance things that are a threat to the public interest. Civil society does not spend public resources or conduct its affairs in that way.

Paul Hawken is among the many observers who have noticed the
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rising power of civil society. Surveying the increasing numbers of organizations in civil society, and its vitality and genius, he writes:

I believe this movement will prevail. I don’t mean it will defeat, conquer, or create harm to someone else. Quite the opposite. I don’t tender the claim in an oracular sense. I mean that the thinking that informs the movement’s goals will reign. It will soon suffuse most institutions, but before then, it will change a sufficient number of people so as to begin the reversal of centuries of frenzied self-destructive behavior. Some say it is too late, but people never change when they are comfortable. Helen Keller threw aside the gnawing fears of chronic bad news when she declared, “I rejoice to live in such a splendidly disturbing time!” In such a time, history is suspended and thus unfinished. It will be the stroke of midnight for the rest of our lives. (2007, 189)

PRINCIPLE 23

The Option A responsibilities of any national government include compliance with and promotion of international humanitarian and human rights law and the law of non-aggression, as well as promotion of mechanisms, structures, and competencies for effective democracy.

Claiming to be democratic, governments often become a fortress within which those in power wall themselves off from citizens. Fortresses reduce visibility. Bad visibility makes for bad decisions. Those in government are connected with other governments that are walled off from their citizens. And each government has its “intelligence” services, which gather information and interpret it through the lens of the old paradigm, us versus them. The information gathered in this way is used to compose the Big Picture that is very secret and special and leads those who have
“security clearance” to think that — far from being out of touch and largely blind — they are very well informed and can see with great clarity.

Like so many militant nationalist governments today, the National Socialist government of Germany in the 1930s claimed to be the great and necessary guardian of the best interests of its people. Because of their deference to that authority, Germans paid a rapidly escalating price, their country being reduced to ashes by 1945. The process can evolve much more slowly, as the reader will have had chances to observe.

A government that serves the best interests of its citizens can be recognized by its compliance with and promotion of international law, particularly humanitarian and human rights law, and the law of non-aggression; by its support for mechanisms, structures, and competencies for effective democracy; and by its responsiveness to civil society.

**PRINCIPLE 24**

*Power is essential to fostering a healthy global community under a rule of law.*

Power is essential to promote and maintain the health of any community, including the global community. Power has political, economic, and cultural dimensions. Underestimating the importance of power, including economic power, is a serious fallacy among some well-intentioned activists. To a very large extent, people will do what they are paid to do. If they are paid to promote revitalization of communities, they will promote revitalization of communities. If they are paid to work in the arms industry, they will work in the arms industry. If they are paid to kill people, they will kill people. If their job depends on their not being able to understand that their own government is violating international law, they will have trouble understanding it.

Consider a second-year university student who is faced with
the need to find a summer job, and after that to find a career that will provide adequate financial resources not only for personal needs but to support a family and the future security of the family. Economic uncertainty is a powerful motivator. The student considers her or his options.

Under present circumstances, there are careers available in various professions and corporations, including those associated with the military establishment. There are far fewer and far less lucrative choices available in careers that promote the changes needed for a healthier global community. If young people are to make career choices of the latter kind, then the economic resources must be found to create those career tracks.

Dedicated activists have emphasized to me that they do a lot with very little. Some of them, through their parsimony and effectiveness, have contributed much more toward healthy communities than I have. But that does not solve the problem faced by the university student, nor is it enough to counter the economic forces driving the malignant transformation of power.

Cultural and political power is also essential. Historically, the peace movement in North America has impressive achievements to its credit. It helped bring the Vietnam War to a halt. In the past two decades, it has sometimes organized to persuade a member of Congress to vote against the warfare system on a particular bill before Congress. Other monumental achievements include the School of the Americas Watch, founded by Maryknoll Father Roy Bourgeois. Even the quiet work of meeting and communicating can lay the groundwork for the next advance toward political sanity.

Yet the North American peace movement has had much less impact than it should have had. Those who are dedicating so much time and energy to the peace movement can enhance the impact of their efforts by incorporating the conceptual framework of international law into their cultural and political work. That one step can produce a major strategic and tactical advantage. Other observers who have come to a similar conclusion include Scott...
Ritter, who added the UN Charter and the U.S. Constitution as appendices to his 2007 book *Waging Peace: The Art of War for the Anti-War Movement*. Public opinion is waking up to the need for a rule of international law, and the peace movement will lose a golden opportunity if it ignores that development.

To move toward health of the global community, an expansion of political, economic, and cultural power in the service of that vision is an inescapable necessity. The ideas that people hold about the world and their relation to it have a profound influence on their behavior. Economic necessities will heavily influence how they use their time and their creative energy. Their political choices, the political representatives they put in office, and the rigor with which they monitor those representatives will affect how public resources are spent: whether on developing the means of violence and threats, or the means of revitalizing and connecting communities worldwide. Our concepts of power must also undergo a paradigm shift, toward the power that comes with creative cooperation. As Frances Moore Lappé puts it, “To participate in power is to stop blaming and to become a problem solver…. The growth in one person’s power can enhance the power of others” (2007, 35).

Recently, tremors have run through global financial markets. Some are worried about the economy, about their own future, about the future of their children. Our own governments have imposed conditions on other countries that devastated the economies of those countries and the lives of millions of people. Now there is a growing fear that economic devastation might befall us. The policies that Western governments have imposed on the developing world are the antithesis of intelligent cooperation. Intelligent cooperation will become increasingly important for human security in the future.

Dramatic economic and resource changes could produce panic and a catastrophic increase in dysfunctional behavior, or it could produce a major step forward in adaptive intelligence. The word *power* has often had very negative connotations because of the
violence and stupidity with which it has been associated. Our thinking has too often been incredibly short-sighted and oblivious to the common good. Now it is up to us to change that. It’s a choice.

PRINCIPLE 25

The pathology of powerlessness sustains the pathology of power.

The tendency of power to degenerate into pathological forms can be averted only by effective democracy and a rule of law. Effective democracy and a rule of law are possible only if citizens accept the responsibility and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for global citizenship. The pathology of power is sustained by the pathology of powerlessness. If those who prefer Option A fail to support it effectively, or actively support Option B despite their preference, then Option B will prevail.

Stanley Milgram’s experiments at Yale in the early 1960s became famous for their finding that, despite their reluctance to harm fellow human beings, ordinary people would override their compunctions when instructed to do so by an authority figure. In an article about the experiments for Harper’s Magazine, Milgram wrote:

This is, perhaps, the most fundamental lesson of our study: ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority. (1973)
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Hannah Arendt eloquently developed this concept of the “banality of evil,” in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963a). She pointed out that political leaders cannot carry out large-scale policies in violation of human rights unless they have the willing support of large parts of the general population. Adolf Eichmann was a man who believed that silence and obedience to authority made him a good person, so he expedited the transfer of Jews to concentration camps for the Nazi government, and he did it with businesslike efficiency. Milgram’s study of Americans corroborates Hannah Arendt’s thesis. If we accept that it is evil to do hideous things to other human beings, evil is very much with us today. Timidity, vacillation, and deference to the ideology of nationalism lead basically decent people to support Option B.

Good is also very much with us today if we accept that it is good to repudiate violence, oppression, and illegitimate authority. One of the individuals in Milgram’s study who refused to comply with authority was a woman who, with composure and self-confidence, refused to continue when she heard the screams of the test subject. She had to confront power to do this, and she did it as if she were a professional in power confrontation. Any work of importance requires both strong masculine and strong feminine elements: empathy, a clear vision, a strong will, sensitivity to context and consequences, and courage and perseverance.

The pathology of powerlessness often takes the form of power avoidance. It is absolutely essential to distinguish non-violence from pacifism. The best-known proponent of non-violence, Gandhi, confronted illegitimate power and understood the need for power to make that confrontation successful. Christianity has sometimes been dismissed as a “slave morality,” but my understanding of the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth is that they are about empowerment: the power and the attendant risk of being fully human, of having a reverence for human life, and of confronting those who hold human life in contempt.

This affirmation of the sanctity of life is deeply threatening
to Option B leaders, for they depend utterly on that deference to power that Stanley Milgram identified in 65 percent of his subjects. Therefore, conflict is inevitable. The paradigm shift that must be made will lead inevitably to conflict. Those who persist in their new-paradigm thinking can expect hostility and violence to be directed against them. They can also expect to come into conflict with other members of their culture, even members of their own families. Jesus was crucified; Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi were assassinated. Option A is not a path for cowards, and the work of promoting Option A sometimes carries mortal risks. Anyone who knows the history of the civil rights movement in the United States will understand this instantly.

Taking power means taking responsibility. If those who prefer Option B avidly pursue power while those who prefer Option A avoid power, then Option B will prevail. The ease with which authority overrides conscience in ordinary people and the reluctance to take power (and the related responsibility), even among those who can clearly see the pathology of power, enables less scrupulous people to push all of us toward Option B. It is not a clash of civilizations that will be decisive in the future of human survival, but a clash of convictions about the value of human life.

**PRINCIPLE 26**

_Problems are there to be solved. Identifying and solving problems is essential to personal growth._

Pragmatic realism involves the ability to recognize a specific obstacle or problem, to define it in terms that evoke possible solutions, and to test the solutions. It is based on the desire to solve the problem, a realistic appraisal of the problem (and whether it needs to be broken down into smaller problems, to be addressed individually), a pragmatic optimism about the effort, and resilience in response to failure.

Identifying and solving problems is essential to personal
growth. The literature on the psychology of personal growth emphasizes this theme again and again. It’s an essential concept for any problem-oriented endeavor, including responsible citizenship.

In the field of global citizenship, the list of obstacles and problems is potentially endless: public ignorance about the basic principles and requirements of international law; overwork among those who would be most supportive of Option A; lack of financial resources to establish the paid positions needed to carry out the work; avoidance of serious discussion of public affairs among neighbors; walls of silence that divide ethnic communities; refusal of political leaders to engage in serious discussion of issues; lack of public awareness of any coherent approach to these issues; in particular, a lack of public awareness that Option A is even an option (the assumption that Option B is the only possibility); and more. These problems have solutions, and active, responsible, well-informed citizens are at work on some of them. Solving problems is the spice of life and the source of growth.

PRINCIPLE 27

*The conditions of human existence and the chances of human survival depend largely on respect for self and others. Emotional intelligence is essential at both personal and global levels.*

Respect for human rights is fundamental to contemporary international law, and the extent to which governments fulfill their responsibilities under that law will largely determine the future of human security. The behavior of governments reflects the respect — or lack of respect — that citizens have for themselves and for others. Hence the future of human security depends on self-esteem and respect for others in day-to-day personal interactions.

Nathaniel Branden has for many years emphasized the importance of self-esteem to every aspect of personal experience and effectiveness. His work can be applied as a powerful manual on
active, effective, responsible citizenship. His comparison of the obedient student versus the responsible student (Branden 1994, 223–224) lists traits for each that might have distinguished the subjects in Stanley Milgram’s study: the 65 percent that were obedient to authority from the 35 percent that were responsible, standing up to authority where their conscience demanded it. (See also Bluestein 1999.)

Life is difficult, and part of the challenge is to create the stability in the world around us that is necessary for meeting a hierarchy of needs. By meeting basic needs, we can move on toward self-actualization and self-transcendence in a progression outlined by another psychologist, Abraham Maslow. The experience can increase personal and collective self-esteem. And perhaps, as Richard Tarnas (1991) suggests, it will lead our civilization to transcend itself to something far, far better than what we have known.

In his survey of Western philosophy — the ideas that have shaped our view of the world — Tarnas finds that a large part of it has had a predominantly masculine orientation. He also finds that this imbalance may be coming to an end, an outcome he welcomes. Tarnas, like many other authors writing on the world today, is carefully optimistic. He suggests that some of the turmoil in our consciousness in these times may be related to this transition to something better than what we were capable of in the twentieth century:

I consider that much of the conflict and confusion of our own era reflects the fact that this evolutionary drama may now be reaching its climactic stages…. Each perspective, masculine and feminine, is here both affirmed and transcended, recognized as part of a larger whole; for each polarity requires the other for its fulfillment. And their synthesis leads to something beyond itself: it brings an unexpected opening to a larger reality that cannot be grasped before it arrives, because this new reality is itself a creative act. (1991, 444–45)
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What is your life worth? You are working out the answer to that question in the arduous process of living it. Far too many people live with the assumption that they are just consumers or careerists and that their life is not really worth much. That assumption can have a pervasive, negative feedback effect on their experience of life.

Each person carries the capacity to bring a unique gift to the world, or to withhold it. To see this unique potential within oneself and within others is a way of perceiving human beings. It can be used instead of social Darwinism and other mental maps, depending on your purpose. It’s a choice. If we place on human life the same value that the U.S. government has placed on lives in Iraq, or the Israeli government on lives in Gaza, or the Iraqi government on lives in Iran (1980–88), we become toxic to the world around us.

In a nationalist culture we have a recurrent dream that political leaders and experts will get us out of the cycles of self-destruction. That is a false lead. Institutions, with their leaders and experts, are locked in the old paradigm. The responsible citizen understands that she, and not the political leaders, is primarily responsible for the well-being of the global community. As that awareness grows, along with the knowledge and experience needed to implement it, it will bring with it, for millions of people, a growth in self-esteem and in optimism about the future. Think about whether that’s an outcome you prefer, and then act accordingly.

Daniel Goleman’s book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ* includes a list of key ingredients for children’s success in school, based on a report from the National Center for Clinical Infant Programs. “Almost all children who do poorly in school … lack one or more of these elements of emotional intelligence,” he writes (1997, 193–194).

As with so many other excellent works on personal well-being, Goleman’s book is a tremendously valuable source of insights for public life. The list of ingredients for children’s success in school
can be taken as skills essential for personal success throughout life, but also as essential elements of effective global citizenship: confidence, curiosity, intentionality (the wish and capacity to have an impact, and to act upon that with persistence, related to a sense of competence, of being effective), self-control, relatedness, capacity to communicate, and cooperativeness.

Individual citizens and civil society organizations can apply such insights in a way that militant nationalist institutions cannot. That is why, again and again, the vision and initiatives necessary for progress have come from civil society working outside the dominant political, cultural, and economic institutions. Democracy is necessary because it brings the emotional intelligence of citizens into the process of problem solving and changing the rigid assumptions of institutions. International law recognizes this necessity, and the conditions to make it decisive.

PRINCIPLE 28

*Citizenship is a field for innovation, achievement, and creative public life.*

Creativity has been studied from a number of different perspectives. The creative act is usually a revitalizing experience, producing enthusiasm, zest, and delight. Perhaps it has that effect on the creative person not only because of its association with discovery, self-actualization, and problem-solving, but also because the creative act is a gift that the creative person brings to others. There is an evolutionary advantage in the empathy and support that healthy human beings show one another, and perhaps that's why we find that something has evolved in human psychology that confers a strong positive feedback when we engage in giving to another person or to others.

The practice of medicine is one field in which the professional can devote himself or herself to the well-being of others. The practice of medicine can be taken as a model for the practice of
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citizenship. Challenging the pathology of power is essential to the health of the global community. The spice of life comes from around the world: we learn from other human beings and other cultures in art, mathematics, and literature; in everyday things such as good food and friendship; and in the myriad possibilities of the human spirit.

As in the field of medicine, our prospects for the future of human survival depend on innovation and discovery, and on sound principles and practice. Engagement in the practice of informed, responsible citizenship involves the solution of problems for the benefit of the community and the future of human security. Its rewards are comparable to those in the best research and practice in medicine.

A patient with a life-threatening disorder will be fortunate to have a physician who is optimistic, healthy, alert, well informed, competent, confident, focused on her work, and genuinely interested in the patient’s well-being. Conversely, a physician’s work will be compromised if she is depressed, apathetic, ignorant, isolated, doubtful that she can make a difference, and so distracted by personal problems of her own that she is indifferent to the patient’s well-being or is unable to bring her empathy to the level of effective action. The personal well-being of the physician is relevant to optimal outcomes for the patient.

The personal well-being of individuals and the health of local communities are relevant to outcomes for the global community and the future of human security. The global community is in imminent danger and desperately in need of responsible, well-informed, active citizens. The same pragmatic realism that informs the very best research and practice in medicine can inform progress in the practice of citizenship.

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PRINCIPLE 29

Awareness, support, and active engagement are three stages of responsible citizenship.

If this book is ever made into a movie, there will have to be a character who says something like this:

Listen, that’s nice but nobody has time or interest for all that stuff. I’ve got three kids, I work part time, my husband and I are so tired by the end of the day … The point is, it ain’t gonna happen if it depends on people like me. Even if I had time and interest, I wouldn’t know where to begin. And my impression is it’s all hopeless anyway. You can’t change the world.

This character is, I confess, a straw woman (could have been a straw man) who mouths the maps of our time. She alludes to four familiar problems: lack of time and energy, lack of working knowledge, lack of interest, and lack of hope.

Each person is court of last resort on how his or her life will be passed or spent. But let’s take a critical look at the problems. As so often happens with complex situations, an effective solution to one of the problems can contribute to the solution of the others.

Awareness of basic concepts is the beginning of working knowledge and does not take much time. It takes less than 90 seconds to understand that international law is designed to protect basic human rights; that the most powerful governments and their allies (and that includes your government) are violating international law and threatening basic human rights, including the future security of their own citizens; and that political leaders are unable to escape that historical maze. So your tax dollars are being used to promote Option B, to being lost in the maze.

That’s the beginning of a formal awareness. What if twenty million people on the continent where you live were to develop that
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awareness? How would that change prospects for survival? I don’t know. Neither do you. It sounds like an interesting experiment.

The concepts advanced in this book might take as much time to read and understand as it takes to watch the six o’clock news every night for five nights. And the six o’clock news isn’t really all that new anyway. What is new is a citizen who is as conscious of his responsibility to the global community as a surgeon entering the operating room is of her responsibility to the patient on the table.

There are individuals and organizations that have made the paradigm shift and are working toward Option A. The next stage of responsible citizenship is support for one or more of those individuals or organizations.

But it is in the stage of active engagement, the hands-on practice and thinking that go with full-fledged responsible citizenship, that the problems (lack of time, energy, working knowledge, interest, hope; and other obstacles) are reconfigured as something else, something potentially more intriguing than sudoku.

**PRINCIPLE 30**

*Optimism is essential; complacency is dangerous; pessimism is a waste of time.*

The human spirit is resilient. It dances in darkness, catches the light from stars, and rises like a phoenix from the embers of defeat. If you find out tomorrow that you have cancer and have less than two years to live, you will cope with it. If a century or a millennium from this moment humans are facing extinction, they will cope with it. There are always reasons for optimism.

There are also plenty of reasons for complacency. We live in an affluent society that fosters certain kinds of complacency. The dangers of complacency are famous, of course. Most disasters come as a shock. No one could have predicted that the *Titanic* would hit an iceberg and sink, but an alert person could have expressed scepticism about the idea that the ship was unsinkable,
or concern about the shortage of lifeboats or about the lack of attention to messages coming into the signal room that were warning of icebergs. Complacency takes various forms, one of them being a punctilious insistence on “proof” that a danger exists. How would you prove, at a point in time when it matters, that a shortage of lifeboats on the Titanic is potentially a danger to those making the voyage? Being alert to the destructive tendencies in human behavior and the toxic foreign policies of powerful states can lead to corrective measures with beneficial effects. Academic complacency and the inertia of old-paradigm thinking can paralyze the effort.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of our paradigm (our map or mindset). The future will be largely what we make it, and your own thoughts play a part in the shaping of it, every day.

Jared Diamond’s four phases for failed decision-making, leading to collapse of a society, have been noted previously in this book: failure to anticipate the problem before it arrives, failure to perceive the problem even after it has arrived, failure to make an effort to solve the problem even if it has been perceived, and failure to solve it despite an effort to do so. The problem has arrived. It has environmental, spiritual, political, and economic dimensions. Millions of voices are calling our attention to it. Hundreds of thousands of people are engaged as a global community to solve the problem. Whether we will solve it depends on whether we reach critical mass, the tipping point: whether enough of us wake up and assume our responsibility as citizens.

Diamond follows his outline of the four phases of failure with this:

While all this discussion of reasons for failure and societal collapses may seem depressing, the flip side is a heartening subject: namely, successful decision-making. Perhaps, if we understood the reasons why groups often make bad decisions, we could use that knowledge as
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a checklist to guide groups to make good decisions.  
(2005, 421)

I prefer optimism for pragmatic reasons. Optimism encourages action; pessimism leads to passivity. Nonetheless, it is essential to keep some of the reasons for pessimism in mind, both to avoid a false optimism and to identify problems that need to be solved.

In 1900 there was a world peace movement. The Peace Palace at the Hague, the establishment of the International Court of Justice, and other achievements led to a premature and false kind of optimism. An exhibit at the World’s Fair in St. Louis in 1904 suggested that war might soon become obsolete. It didn’t. The exhibit offered ideas for teachers, businessmen, and others to use in promoting peace. Ten years later came World War I. Later still, the efforts at achieving a rule of law for the international community through the League of Nations became a famous failure. Pessimists love to invoke this failure as they try to promote Option B: There’s no hope. Look at what happened to the League of Nations.

More recently the UN Security Council became an agent of militant nationalism, an accessory to the destruction of Iraq. This was a major blow to the credibility of the United Nations and to prospects for a rule of law. I have already indicated other reasons for pessimism. There is no end to them. The reasons for pessimism can be used to sustain the old paradigm and to push societies toward Option B, or they can be used for creative problem solving, to move societies toward Option A.

Pessimism is basically a waste of time. If you want to find a cure for cancer, you don’t spend a lot of time thinking about reasons why it can’t be found. The conditions that led to failure a hundred years ago have changed. The things that have been accomplished in other times and places — on meager resources, under conditions of oppression, and with hardly a wisp of the opportunity we have today — leave those of us in the West little excuse for defeatism.
Winds of change

Other authors have emphasized deteriorating environmental conditions, or demographics, or economic indices in trying to sense which way the wind is blowing. Obviously these things are important. In this book, however, I have emphasized our ways of thinking, our maps, because we have much more direct control over them than over other factors. Moreover, by changing how we think, we can better prepare ourselves for the economic, demographic, and environmental challenges ahead, and we can influence how severe those challenges will be. Our ways of thinking are winds of change. Not only can we set our sails to take advantage of them, but also to a significant extent we can actually control the wind.

Many writers who emphasize emerging dangers are optimists. For example, Jared Diamond (in *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*), Noam Chomsky (in *Hegemony or Survival*), and Ronald Wright (in *A Short History of Progress*) are clearly emphasizing the dangers because they believe that by being aware of dangers we can improve outcomes. I agree. I write this book from a similar perspective. It is also essential to emphasize opportunities and alternatives for the future, as do many of the authors I have cited in this book.

Predictions of the future often tell us more about the person making the prediction than about the future: whether they are a new-paradigm or an old-paradigm thinker, for example. Human beings also differ significantly in their attitudes toward dependence and independence. There are individuals with a pathological desire to control others, and they can be remarkably strong-willed. There are also people who seem to want to be controlled. Dostoyevsky’s Grand Inquisitor was well aware of this; Erich Fromm wrote about their dilemma and why they choose to “escape from freedom.” The pathology of power and the pathology of powerlessness, the pathological desire to control others and the pathological willingness to be controlled — these are among the dangers that we face in the decades ahead.
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Others have chosen personal freedom and responsibility. No one knows how prevalent those free spirits are among us, but perhaps it’s about 35 percent — in Stanley Milgrams’s study, the prevalence of those who could repudiate unethical demands from an authority figure. Thirty-five percent isn’t bad. If our society could harness the power of that 35 percent, we could achieve takeoff.

We can face the challenges and take personal responsibility for the health of the local and the global community. It’s a choice. If we make that choice, the success is an indicator of our adaptive intelligence. If we fail to make that choice, the failure is our responsibility. We are the winds of change.

*The power of one*

Sociologists are familiar with a remarkable feature of groupthink, the tendency of individuals in a group to defer to a dominant opinion in the group (Shepard 1987, 151). In one version of the classic experiments that reveal this very human tendency, a small group of people are asked to pick which of a set of lines is the longest. Suppose the lines are labeled *a* through *e*, and suppose an independent observer would essentially always recognize line *a* as the longest. But the experiment is run as a groupthink experience. Before each member of the group is asked to make his or her own assessment and answer accordingly, the lines are examined and discussed as a group. Then each member of the group marks his or her choice on an individual answer sheet. Furthermore, the experiment is a set-up: all but one member of the group, without the knowledge of the real “test subject” member of the group, has been instructed to select line *b* as the correct answer. In this context, the naïve member of the group will often follow the group’s example and pick the wrong line (*b*) rather than believing his or her own eyes and own analysis, which tells him or her that line *a* is the correct choice.
In his own way, Henry David Thoreau noticed and commented on this tendency to groupthink, as it affected the practice of citizenship, in his essay, “Civil Disobedience”:

The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailers, constables, posse comitatus, &c. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well. (1849, 226)

Thoreau proposes that the true patriot serves the state with his conscience. This refers to exactly the concept of a positive, healthy nationalism, discussed earlier, of which Gandhi was an example and Erich Fromm so astute an observer. In fact, the works of Thoreau had an influence on Gandhi.

Under Principle 22 above, I alluded to the emerging power of civil society worldwide. But what if your own local culture is out of touch with this reality and sees the world through a distorting lens, perhaps that of a corporate news channel? What if everyone around you is supporting Option B? What difference does it make if you are the only one insisting on Option A? What is the use of resisting the majority’s support, for example, of the warfare system? Thoreau had a sharp answer to that question, reminiscent of the story of the emperor’s new clothes. The one voice that calls attention to the right answer shakes up the system that supports the wrong answer:

For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done forever. (1849, 397–398)
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Outrageously, Thoreau suggests that if you do or say or think consistently in the service of your conscience, you will create a situation that forces change. No one can erase what you have expressed. In our society today, you probably won’t face the dangers that Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, or Martin Luther King Jr. faced, but you will put your feet on the same road.

Action from principle, the perception and the performance of right, changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary, and does not consist wholly with anything which was. (Thoreau 1849, 395)

Each person’s life is part of the process of defining what the human spirit can endure and what it can attain. The power of one is what you make it.

Civil disobedience

Critical readers of this book may notice that I have placed little emphasis on civil disobedience and the practice of non-violence. My emphasis on the necessity of law may even seem to ignore the importance and necessity of civil disobedience in making progress toward Option A. For the record, I am well aware of that importance and that necessity. If I had engaged much in civil disobedience myself, I would have had much more to say about it in this book. In the absence of that personal experience, I have to refer the reader to works by others: Thoreau, Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Gene Sharp, and Per Herngren, for example. A PBS documentary series, Eyes on the Prize, provides a history of the civil rights movement in the United States.

Per Herngren provides a definition of civil disobedience:

• Civil disobedience is a public action.
• It is based on nonviolence.
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• The action is illegal or defies a command or decision.
• The direct intent of the action is to preserve or change a phenomenon in the society.
• The personal consequences of the action are an important part of the message. (1993, 8–9)

Thus the act of civil disobedience is characteristically illegal, but an even more essential characteristic is its non-violence. Herngren elaborates:

Civil disobedience is not putting oneself above the law. Even when a law is broken, it is not ignored. The participants in an action do not sneak away from the consequences of the action.

Civil disobedience is effective only if it functions as a moral challenge. That is why civil disobedience is ineffective for immoral purposes, or more exactly purposes that are generally perceived as being wrong. Of course, there are examples of bad civil disobedience. When resistance groups block the possibility of a dialogue they strengthen and confirm the opponent’s power. This can be perceived as a negative dialogue: the possibilities for citizens to understand and give their opinion are reduced with each action, and support for the opponent is increased. However, if the opponent for purely tactical reasons breaks off a dialogue, then this can increase the possibility for the resistance group to create a dialogue directly with other citizens. This development is, as a matter of fact, the most common. When the opponent sees that silence reduces its influence and power, then the chances for a fruitful dialogue increase again. Silence on the part of the opponent can therefore be viewed as an important element in the dialogue. This should, however, not be confused with a negative dialogue that
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arises when the resistance group blocks the possibility for dialogue.

We see here how the circle closes. Civil disobedience weaves together ethics and method; you cannot entirely separate one from the other. (1993, 15, 17)

Governments are under no circumstances in a position to equate the illegality of an act of civil disobedience with their own violations of the law of non-aggression. Under modern concepts of law, the legitimacy of any government is based in law, and the measure of justice of law is its service to human well-being. An act of aggression serves the interests of power and undermines human well-being, which is the reason for the law of non-aggression. Civil disobedience, as practiced for example in the American civil rights movement and as defined by Per Herngren (1983), must serve human well-being; it must represent a “moral challenge” as Herngren puts it. As such, civil disobedience is directed against unjust laws, as writers such as Henry Thoreau, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Herngren have emphasized. This difference is, literally, of life-and-death importance.

Civil disobedience is one method of advancing social justice, but the game can be played in other ways. One of the most gifted civil rights activists the United States has ever produced was Saul Alinsky. Out of his direct experience with poverty, he developed an approach to organizing for action that has had a lasting influence on civil society in North America. Feisty, iconoclastic, and witty, he honed his methods in the mean streets of Chicago. He was a gifted tactician when it came to seizing a specific beachhead, such as opening the hiring policies of a business to include non-White job applicants.

But Alinsky did not use civil disobedience as defined above. One of the features of his tactical approach was to keep the action legal, but highly effective. His tactics could catch the targeted business so off-balance that the response might be instant accession to
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the conditions set by the organizers. An excellent source on his approach is his book *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (1972).

Alinsky had long personal experience with ghettos. He saw the suburbs as “gilded ghettos” in which the middle class had isolated itself. Reflecting on his life and work not long before he died, he made this comment during a 1972 interview with *Playboy Magazine*:

One thing I’ve come to realize is that any positive action for radical social change will have to be focused on the white middle class, for the simple reason that this is where the real power lies.

This book, *The ABCs of Human Survival*, is based largely on my own experience and way of thinking at the time of writing. Responsible citizenship as I practice it can lead to ostracism and other dissonant encounters, but those I have experienced have never been particularly uncomfortable to me. As for active hostility, I recall no physical threats against me in response to my activism. Arguments and intellectual adversity are not something I feel I need to avoid, although my preference is to convert them into something more constructive. True, I have on occasion confronted legal authorities about issues related to law and human rights, but these efforts have never led to my imprisonment or physical injury. For the most part, I have stayed within in my comfort zone. I am not particularly holy. More bothersome to me is that I have not yet been sufficiently effective in moving history toward Option A.

I have quoted liberally from Henry Thoreau’s essay on civil disobedience, but that essay is putting *me* on the spot. I omitted, for example, the following passage:
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Those who, while they disapprove of the character and measures of a government, yield to it their allegiance and support, are undoubtedly its most conscientious supporters, and so frequently the most serious obstacles to reform. (1849, 394)

In “Civil Disobedience,” Thoreau came to the same conclusion about unjust laws as Martin Luther King Jr. later expressed in his “Letter from the Birmingham Jail”: unjust laws must be resisted. I agree with that conclusion, but I have failed to act accordingly. Throughout the 1990s, the government of the United States, with the collusion of other governments including Canada’s, imposed policies on Iraq that violated international human rights law and were largely responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of Iraqi children. Not once during those years did I refuse to pay taxes to the government of the United States or of Canada.

Of course, it is easy for me to rationalize my unqualified compliance with the tax laws. I have defined my own domain of responsible citizenship, which emphasizes the necessity of just laws and living democracy. I have connected that entire field with the concepts of self-actualization and innovation. Chapter 7 provides a further account of all this. My point is that I have not reached the standards set by Thoreau. Thoreau gives me a discomfort I cannot shake. I am no Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr. or Per Herngren. I have not passed the kinds of tests that Rosa Parks or, more recently, Kathy Kelly and countless others have passed. I have never engaged in civil disobedience.

What I present in this book is in some sense a story of my success in emerging from a darkness in which I found myself a long time ago, shadows of which persist inside me. Perhaps I could not have accomplished what I have had it not been necessary to find my way out of that darkness. The solution to that problem transformed me. Like almost everyone else, however, I know another version of my own story, a version in which my life has been a failure. The
part of that failure that took place in my personal life is inseparable from my shortcomings as a global citizen.

We cannot be part of the solution until we recognize that we are part of the problem. For many reasons, I am aware of my own part in the pathology that we human beings are inflicting on each other. Thoreau and Rosa Parks set higher standards than I have. By their standards I judge my own work. My self-transformation is not yet complete. I have miles to go before I sleep.