

***The Writing on the Wall #1:
“Nothing Can Possibly Go Wrong,
Everything is Out of Control!”***

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1 A Conversation

“*Nothing Can Possibly Go Wrong, Everything is Out of Control!*” Now what in $\Phi\nu\rho\rho\delta$ is that supposed to mean?”

“It means that when ‘everything is under control,’ there are endless opportunities for ‘things to go wrong.’ But if the natural state of things is actually that ‘everything is out of control’—which I suggest is a fair description (in part) of how the universe really works—then there is no opportunity, anywhere, for anything to ‘go wrong,’ because everything that ‘goes’ is ‘right;’ and things that aren’t ‘right,’ don’t ‘go’—very far, or for very long.

“Another way to put it is, ‘*Lighten up!*’”

“‘Lighten up?’—‘*Lighten up!*?’ What do you mean, ‘Lighten up,’ after telling me that ‘Everything is out of control?’ If everything is *really* ‘out of control’—which it very well may be—why should I not be climbing the walls in alarm?”

“Ah, yes. I see what you mean. O.K., calm down, and let us examine this a little more carefully. Do you believe you have the ability to make choices, and act upon them?”

“Well, in general, yes.”

“If you have the ability to make choices, and act upon them, then I suppose others have similar abilities as well?”

“Other people, anyway. All humans have the ability to make choices, and act upon them.”

“Do you think it would be stretching things too far to suppose that non-humans too have the ability to make choices, and act upon them? Does a chicken, for instance, have the ability to choose to, or not to, cross the road? Or do chickens cross roads, or not, only because they are *under the control* of something besides their own volition?”

“Well, I guess the standard answer to the riddle suggests that chickens have their own reasons for crossing roads, such as ‘to get to the other side.’ They don’t seem to be under the control of anything outside themselves, as would a toy car, under the wireless control of a remote driver.”

“Very good! And wouldn’t you agree that this principle applies to everything capable of voluntary action of any kind—that is, that nothing is under the control of anything outside itself, at least to the extent it is able to make choices, and act upon them?”

“Well yes. That would amount to a definition of what voluntary action is; so it isn’t really saying anything more significant than that ‘A is equal to A.’”

“Very good again! So may we accept as valid the generalization that any entity with the ability to make choices, and act upon them, is to at least that extent, *not* under the control of any other entity, or source of control?”

“That sounds like a valid generalization to me.”

“Of course, we would also have to acknowledge that many imaginable possibilities lie outside the domain of choice for all entities as well. Birds, for example, are able to fly and leave their nest—as soon as they are fledged, and have learned how to use their wings—and fly wheresoever they wish. This is not a choice available to humans—until and unless we invent contraptions, such as hot-air balloons, hang-gliders, airplanes, rockets, etc., which give us the ability to fly too. Conversely, it seems to be beyond the choice of any bird to drive an automobile, or pilot an airplane. Is this not reasonable?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Then may we not say that the ability to make choices, and act upon them, is very widespread among living beings—although it is also circumscribed by the nature of the beings making choices?

“A swarm of honeybees, for instance, is at liberty to build their nest in any location suitable to themselves, and forage in the fields of their choice for the nectar and pollen from which they make their beeswax and honey.

“Similarly, spiders are at liberty to weave their webs anywhere that suits them. Yet it is not within the domain of choice for a spider to manufacture beeswax or honey; and it is not within the domain of choice for honeybees to weave spiderwebs. May we say this much, with validity?”

“Yes; it seems to be implied by the definition of what liberty and choice mean.”

“I believe you’re right. I take it then that you would equate *liberty* with *the ability to make choices, and act upon them*? Or in other words, that the ability to make and act upon one’s choices implies or requires the liberty to do so?”

“That’s a fair summing up.”

“Have we not agreed then that if ‘everything were under control,’ *liberty* could not exist; and that if there is such a thing as liberty, for humans or anyone or anything else, that our choices cannot be ‘under the control’ of anything outside ourselves, beyond the nature of what each one of us is, and is not?”

“Yes, I suppose we have. So what you’re saying is that if we have liberty, we cannot be ‘under external control,’ and that if we are ‘under control,’ by anyone else, we cannot have liberty—which seems to be so, simply by definition.”

“Exactly. So are you still alarmed by the idea that ‘everything is out of control’?”

“Not anymore. It seems to be necessary, and a good thing too, if there is such a thing as liberty at all. And there must be such a thing as liberty; otherwise how could we be having this conversation? You were about to say. . . ?”

2 The Human Condition

I was about to say that I have received the impression from items I frequently encounter, that *stress* has become a pandemic condition among contemporary humans; and I suspect that a broad statistical inquiry would disclose a great deal of “general dissatisfaction” among humans throughout the world. Yet if that inquiry were to delve deeper into details, it would find little in the way of consensus about *a)* “what is wrong,” and *b)* “what to do about it.” It is as if a raging torrent of tumultuous waters were to empty into a small, closed vessel. Nobody seems to “know” for sure, at least to anybody else’s satisfaction, “where we go from here,” yet endless multitudes are on their way “here” from “wherever we came from.” This is a tough situation for the residents of planet Earth.

To put it in more explicit terms: many of the people of North America and Western Europe achieved for themselves “the good life,” particularly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of the Common Era, by virtue of the Industrial Revolution, and the more recent technological revolutions that have followed on its heels. So naturally in the twenty-first century, the vast “Third World” populations are surging hell-bent-for-leather toward “the good life” too—and who can blame them?

Meanwhile, planet Earth is sagging under the weight, and the drain on available resources, and ecological sustainability, of just the “developed world” alone. How will things be with the added weight of the “developing world” living “the good life” too?

Pandemic stress among human populations everywhere is a not-so-early sign of where this trend is headed. It is a condition that can be helped, maybe, but not permanently solved, by techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, drugs, alcohol, or medicines, and/or various other means of restoration of one’s equanimity and poise in moments of particular stress. Yet by itself, that doesn’t seem to “solve the problem.” Chronic sources of stress persist, multiply, and intensify, requiring even more potent techniques for dealing with them. At some point, individual humans, or planet Earth as a whole, may reach “the breaking point.” What then? Does that thought help to alleviate the stress so many people are experiencing? Or is it more or less what the stress is all about?

“Everything is what it is because it got that way.”¹ You and I too are the way we are because of the sequence of choices we have made in the course of our lives, and in the context of “All That.” And so, here we are. How do you like it so far?

In fact, there probably are quite a few things we actually do like about “things as they are,” that we possibly have not taken the time to appreciate very often, because they do not draw attention to themselves as sources of stress. I really do like being able to breathe, for instance; and the fact that my life is so arranged that when I am hungry, I can eat; when I’m thirsty, I can drink; and when I am tired, I can sleep. I like how the Sun shines, and how it rains or snows in different seasons, and how the plants grow, and the flowers bloom. These things seem to be just about O.K. with me, and I can extend the list endlessly. Others seem to enjoy these things as much as I do.

There may also be a number of items related to “things as they are,” and/or ourselves, in which we may take less satisfaction. Some of these, if we wish, we may change: sometimes in incremental steps, by means of careful selection among the choices available to us. Each choice we actually make, and put into effect, will move us another pace “down the road” where, upon evaluation of where we stand then, we can make another carefully considered (or impulsive) choice, in the hope of arriving at a condition we like better than our condition before making the choice. That I am at liberty to make such choices is another element of “things as they are” that I treasure beyond my ability to express.

However, sometimes our choices don’t yield the results we anticipate; or in retrospect do not seem to have been the best choices we could have made under past circumstances. But a choice is a choice, and there doesn’t seem to be an eraser on the pencil with which we make them; so our only remedy is to endeavor to make better choices in future. And so, we learn about our choices, and their consequences; and here we are.

Taken altogether, it seems like a pretty satisfactory arrangement to me. The whole world is filled with beings in various ways similar and dissimilar to ourselves, and they are all making choices, and acting upon them, just like we are. And so, together we form one big planetary menagerie of beings who, if not entirely “happy,” are at least here, and able to make whatever we can of ourselves in the world as we find it. Is there anything “wrong” with that scheme of things? Myself, I cannot find much basis, anymore, for complaint.

¹D’Arcy Wentworth Thomson, *On Growth and Form*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1917; quoted by Mark Buchanan, *NEXUS: Small Worlds and the Groundbreaking Science of Networks*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 2002.

I have not always felt this way. It seems in retrospect that the greatest part of my life has been occupied with trying to understand what is “wrong” with the world, and how it might be put “right.” It appears I have not been alone in these strenuous and challenging endeavors; yet as already mentioned, there has to date emerged very little consensus among humans about *a)* “what is wrong,” and *b)* “what to do about it;” but only a vast turmoil of pulling and hauling with might and main, by teaming *billions* of people endeavoring to put “wrong” things “right,” according to an amazingly varied constellation of “lights.”

That’s not the whole story, however.

Contrary to appearances sometimes, the human world does not amount *only* to a vast maelstrom of chaotic “pulling and hauling.” Yes, there is a lot of that going on; yet in the midst of it all there are those who have set a deliberate course, and mastered the “seamanship” and the “navigational skills” necessary to hold their course, no matter which way the wind blows. Such individuals do not necessarily draw attention to themselves, or appear particularly “different” from anybody else; yet unlike most of those all around them, they know where they want to go, and they develop means of getting there, no matter what obstacles bar their way.

This has nothing to do with “overpowering force,” or “superhuman strength.” It has more in common with the way a tiny mountain stream wends its way by a meandering course, always down, out of the mountains, around immovable obstacles, and eventually to the sea. Although its path is never straight and direct, and it takes many unexpected turns along the way, it never makes a “mistake,” for all paths lead to the sea.²

The skills needed for living in this way can be learned by anybody. It seems, however, that relatively few actually learn them—perhaps because most people are “too busy” with other interests, such as keeping pace with the way “everybody else” is “supposed” to act, and think, and feel. There are those who are not intimidated, however, by unconventional, exploratory, experimental approaches to life, and are ready to “step into the unknown,” in quest of a “better way.” These are the people I seek as friends, and with whom I like to “compare notes,” to our mutual illumination.

²Well . . . that’s not the whole story either. Some paths, for a mountain stream, lead eventually to a basin with no outlet to the sea, such as the Great Salt Lake in North America, or the Aral Sea in western Asia. The only way to the sea for such waters is via evaporation, and falling as rain over a different watershed—which metaphorically suggests something akin to *reincarnation* for humans, a possibility for potential exploration in a subsequent essay. But not in this one.

In the course of my personal struggle to understand “what is wrong,” and how it could possibly be made “right,” I have encountered a number of insights—my own, and those of others—that have helped me in establishing a path that, although uncomplicated, and carefully reduced to a very few “essentials,” I have found to be richly satisfying, enabling me to maintain my own equanimity and poise most of the time; and which may prove helpful to others engaged in similar or parallel explorations. My treasured insights may even imaginably have an influence upon the ongoing evolution of the human race: because what one person desires, and is able to achieve, others may find appealing as well, and reproduce, with variations, among widening circles. One of my most highly valued insights has to do with *myths* and *superstitions*.

3 Myths and Superstitions

I believe one of the most helpful and far-reaching insights I have had so far is the realization that all human understanding is *partial*, and therefore that all human beliefs are *myths*. This does not mean that all human beliefs are “wrong,” but implies that they are at best only *partially* “right;” or in other words, are “not the whole story.” Nevertheless, our myths are essential “aids to navigation” in the conduct of your life and mine, because our myths embody our closest possible approach to understanding “how things really are.” This, of course, is also a myth, and “not the whole story” either.

In this sense, a *myth* may be described as a human belief that serves the interests of its believer, by aiding his³ navigation through an impenetrably mysterious world and universe; whereas a *superstition* is a belief potentially damaging to the interests of its believer, because its application leads its believer unerringly to unanticipated circumstances.⁴

One of the most widespread superstitions on Earth, shared alike by “civilized,” “pre-civilized,” and “uncivilized” people everywhere, is the almost universal belief that anybody’s belief about “reality” actually corresponds very closely at all to the *real reality* of how the universe really is. On the contrary, the *real reality* is a matter so profoundly shrouded in impenetrable mystery that nobody has ever had more than fleeting, partial glimpses of

³I have struggled long over the absence of a gender-neutral personal pronoun in the English language, and failing to find a satisfactory solution, have lately decided to treat masculine pronouns as gender-neutral in all instances, as here, where specification of gender is irrelevant. The essential balance between masculinity and femininity will be discussed at greater length in a subsequent essay.

⁴Myths, like superstitions, lead their believers, sooner or later, into unanticipated circumstances as well: for the reason that no myth can possibly illuminate “the whole story” about anything. Thus the distinction between myths and superstitions is dynamic, and not always obvious.

parts of it; from which humans have fashioned an endless succession of myths and superstitions, sometimes called “the edifice of human knowledge,” successively abandoned and replaced by others. At each iteration of this cycle, people have believed that now they *really* understand reality—only to have the cycle repeated again, and yet again . . . endlessly.

- It happened when Nicolas Copernicus (1473 to 1543) demonstrated that, contrary to the “infallibly revealed truth” that Earth was the center of the universe, with the Sun and all the known planets revolving around us in complicated, compound paths embedded within crystalline celestial spheres; Earth was after all one among several known planets revolving about the Sun.
- It happened again, when Sir Isaac Newton (1642 to 1727) demonstrated the principle of universal gravitation which held the Copernican system together; and provided the calculus for, in principle, plotting the past and future course of every particle in a rigidly mechanistic and determinist universe.
- It happened again, when Charles Darwin (1809 to 1882) demonstrated the principle of biological evolution through natural selection over vast stretches of geological time—at a period when “everybody knew” that the firmament, Earth, and all life, had been created during the course of an unimaginably busy week in the year 4004 BCE.
- It happened again, when the quantum physicists in the early part of the twentieth century demonstrated that the universe is not rigidly mechanistic and determinist after all, but is seamed and honeycombed with uncertainty and indeterminacy.
- It happened again, when James Watson (b. 1928) and Francis Crick (b. 1916) demonstrated the helical structure of deoxyribonucleic acid, and revealed the molecular basis for biological evolution.
- And it is happening again, and again, and again, even as we speak, as yet more recent discoveries are made, and insights are hatched, whose implications continue to rattle the rickety structure of “the edifice of human knowledge.”

One reason the world and universe in which we find ourselves are so impenetrably mysterious is that, relative to ourselves, they are so incomprehensibly *big*—particularly the universe, of which our planet and Solar System form infinitesimal parts.

If the extent of the universe, in time and space, is not actually *infinite*, as far as we are concerned it might as well be. For in every dimension we are able to see, envision, or think about, the farthest reaches of our universe vanish over our horizon of observation

and experience, leaving us occupying a *context* utterly beyond our comprehension. And of course, anything in an unknown or unknowable context cannot be completely known either. This applies not only to the incomprehensible vastness of the universe at large, but just as well to the incomprehensible minuteness of its finest parts, of which we also are made. Our local context vanishes into complementary mysteries of the incomprehensibly vast, and the incomprehensibly minute—and where and what *we* “really are” dissolves into profound mysteries as well.

The distinction between myths and superstitions is subtle and illusive, and is subject to controversy: because a belief somebody accepts as a plausible myth may be dismissed by somebody else as a transparent superstition; and vice versa. Because we all really do *believe* our myths (and superstitions) to be *true*, people are often threatened when confronted by contrary myths—to the extent throughout history of forming mobs and stoning to death, burning at the stake, or coercing under torture recantations from those adhering to unpopular or heterodox beliefs.⁵

I believe the tension of such controversies can be relieved only by the realization that *all* human beliefs—*my own included*—are myths (or superstitions); are never “the whole story,” about anything; and are subject to change without notice in the endless process of discovery, learning, and evolution, in the midst of an impenetrably mysterious universe.

I find this insight invaluable in many circumstances, because it opens the door for me to begin thinking, feeling, and believing in different ways than I have in the past; which seems to be an essential precondition for *acting* in different ways, and achieving different results, than I have in the past.

This relates to *the writing on the wall* seen in an anonymous Men’s Room by a friend of mine; and it bears uncanny relevance to the contemporary human condition. “*Do what you did, get what you got,*” somebody wrote, possibly while relieving himself at a urinal—illustrating how startling insights can sometimes appear in surprising places.

If people continue doing what we have been doing, then the human condition will continue essentially unchanged into the indefinite future. The contemporary human condition

⁵It was to avoid such a fate that Nicolas Copernicus kept his beliefs to himself until he was just “going out the door” from this world. Galileo Galilei (1564 to 1642) failed to take such precautions, and felt the hot breath of the Inquisition directly. If you think such practices are “medieval,” and are no longer in use, then have another look. With subtle, and not so subtle variations, many people today still live in “medieval” times, with “medieval” ideas about “OPM” (Other People’s Myths).

seems to be headed for a collision with a confluence of circumstances that are sources of mounting stress and dissatisfaction for growing numbers of people. This prompts the question, “*Can humanity on planet Earth fashion a survivable, sustainable, satisfactory future?*” If contemporary humans desire an outcome different from what we are now experiencing, or anticipating, then we must stop doing what we have been doing, and start doing “something else” instead.

If we are to begin doing something different than we have been doing, we are going to have to begin thinking, feeling, and believing in different ways as well: because thinking, feeling, and believing are cause; doing is effect. Thinking, feeling, and believing differently than we do is likely to be a formidable challenge for most people, yet may be within the scope of possibility for many.

On the other hand, if people find the contemporary course of human events entirely satisfactory, then naturally there exists no motivation to change anything.

And then, of course, there is the additional factor that none of this is “the whole story” either; but is only one of innumerable plausible myths, or ways of looking at things.

For example: in reply to the statement that “all human beliefs are myths (or superstitions),” one might observe that if I follow a certain recipe for guacamole, say, and combine all the specified ingredients in the proper proportions, and mix them per instructions, I may reliably expect to produce a batch of guacamole—which is proven by repeated experience, and is neither a myth nor a superstition. There are any number of human beliefs of this kind, that have been yielding satisfactory results for people, time out of mind; such as beliefs about the sequence of operations required for the assembly of a functional automobile engine, or a microprocessor, or a baby.

Q.E.D. (*Quod erat demonstrandum*. Latin, loosely translated: “That’s the point.”) I sometimes call these qualifying rejoinders “yabuts.” Anything that may be said about anything may be qualified by a “yabut.” “Ya, but my recipe for guacamole is neither a myth nor a superstition.” “Ya, but if you modify your recipe, you might improve it.” “Ya, but I like it the way it is.” “Ya, but. . . .” It’s called conversation, or dialog, and it is potentially unending. Unless, of course, what we keep on doing produces so much stress among us that we can eventually no longer cope with it, and wind up blowing our collective brains out.

Before that happens, however, individuals sooner or later are likely to yield to their stresses, and start acting differently than we have been—which means, one way or another, we’re going to begin thinking, feeling, and believing in different ways as well—simply because that is the effect mounting stress has on people. We change something, to relieve the stress; and if that doesn’t work, we change something else. It may be that our myths and superstitions are the last to go; and for some people—maybe even for many—closely held myths and superstitions may outlive their believers, who take them to their graves.

Nevertheless, *some people*, to save their lives, may be willing to let go of some of their myths; and I am suggesting that a prime candidate for heaving overboard is the superstition that we understand very much at all about how the world really works—even if we happen to know a mouth-watering recipe for guacamole.

If you stop and think about it, it isn’t really necessary to understand *everything*; or to harbor only “right,” or “correct,” or “accurate” convictions and beliefs, and “never, never, never” to be deluded by “wrong,” or “incorrect,” or “inaccurate misconceptions.” Or “hardly ever.”⁶ One does not need to understand the most subtle nuances of Quantum Mechanics, or the leading-edge cosmological theory, in order to produce an acceptable dish of guacamole; or to navigate the details of one’s own life with exquisite balance. One may thoroughly enjoy the luxury of being “wrong” in the eyes of those who harbor contrary myths—including the so-called “experts”—because *all* human beliefs—those of the “experts” included—are myths (or superstitions), and are never “the whole story,” about anything. Your myths, or mine, in other words, are qualified to stand beside *anybody’s* myths, because *nobody* knows “the whole story,” about anything. Can you believe that?

If so, recognition that all perceptions of reality are myths bestows the additional blessing of relieving many sources of stress among contemporary humans—which is an immediate gain, and may also be a step further along the human evolutionary path: because it allows the possibility of mutual accommodation among believers of contrary myths. It makes possible the mutual agreement among humans to the effect that “I’ll allow your myth to share space with mine, if you’ll allow my myth to share space with yours.” It is a form of mutual respect among people who view things in many different ways, none of whom claim priority for their myths over any others, because all understand that none have “the whole story” about anything. It is a long stride toward relieving the many stresses associated with contemporary living.

⁶Apologies to Gilbert & Sullivan.

4 Four Useful Myths

Following are four myths that I have found particularly helpful in the evolution of my personal mythology:

4.1 The Myth of Complementarity

The *principle of complementarity* was first discovered, and rigorously demonstrated at the *quantum* scale, by Werner Heisenberg (1901 to 1976); yet it seems to be applicable not only to quantum events at the quantum scale, but to *all events and phenomena, at every scale*. Everything that is real seems to be composed of innumerable pairs of complementary properties, both of which are essential for a complete description of any “thing;” yet observation of either of which excludes observation of the other. An example at the quantum scale of such a complementary pair of properties is the mutually exclusive relation between the quantum and wave properties of a beam of light. Observation of one prohibits observation of the other, and the *whole beam of light* defies complete description. This has been challenged and tested from the time it was first pointed out in 1927, and turned every which way but loose by the most penetrating minds in theoretical physics, in efforts to overturn it; yet it has withstood every challenge, and has only been repeatedly confirmed.

For another example, at the human scale, everyone “knows” himself in intimate detail; and everyone “knows” others with whom he shares close personal relationships. However, just as the complementary quantum and wave properties of light cannot be simultaneously observed, or described, just as rigorously, no one can “know” himself as another “knows” him; and no one can “know” another as he “knows” himself. All such “knowledge” consists of *partial descriptions* of individuals who cannot possibly be *fully* described, either by themselves, or by anybody else. The Myth of Complementarity provides the basis for the statement that all human beliefs are myths.

4.2 The Myth of Repeating Patterns

Looking around the sliver of Cosmos available to our close examination, it is difficult to bring to mind an example of a *completely unique* specimen, or phenomenon. Even in instances of discovery of something no one had ever seen before, it seems virtually certain that other examples of the same kind eventually make their appearance. Are there any exceptions? For awhile, perhaps; but sooner or later, it may be relied upon that other examples of the same kind are bound to join the “unique” specimen.

One such unique specimen—so far—is our planet Earth: the only planet in all of Cosmos known (by us) to harbor biological life (and incidentally, humans). As far as we know, neither we nor our planet have any peer—but although we may have flattered ourselves for thousands of years that this is so, our vanity ignores the certainty that *as far as we know* has never after all been very far.

4.3 The Myth of Metaconsciousness

Metaconsciousness is the overarching phenomenon which is analogous to, yet less or greater than, what we humans experience as *consciousness*, *intelligence*, and *creativity*. It is an *emergent behavior*, and exhibits itself in complex information-sharing systems of all kinds, and at all scales, under conditions of sufficient *richness*, *diversity*, *variety*, *complexity*, and *liberty*, as a capacity for *learning from experience*, or its functional equivalent. That is why I sometimes speak of “*the metaconscious process of natural selection*.” This is one way of describing what natural selection is: a mechanism whereby entire biological species, and ecological systems, “learn from experience” what works, and what does not work, in the endlessly unfolding process of biological evolution.

On the basis of the Myth of Repeating Patterns, it seems plausible that metaconsciousness, experienced by humans as consciousness, intelligence, and creativity, may be ubiquitous throughout Cosmos, and not at all exclusive, as supposed by many, to the human residents of planet Earth.

4.4 The Myth of Universal Reciprocity

Every life—indeed every *existence* of any kind—simply by its presence in the universe, is in some sense in a collaborative, interrelated *relationship* with all other existences throughout Cosmos, or “All That Is.” This means that every *thing*, being in a constant state of dynamic change, through endless cascades of causes and effects, reciprocally affects *everything*. This may be called *the principle of universal reciprocity*. The Myth of Metaconsciousness, coupled with profound discoveries in quantum physics, may suggest far-reaching implications for the Myth of Universal Reciprocity; which will be explored at greater length in a subsequent essay.

5 Symbiosis and Predation

One application of the Myth of Universal Reciprocity is that no living organism can live for very long in the absence of other living organisms. There is no such thing as an entirely

self-sufficient organism. This means that we all live in relationship with others like, and unlike ourselves, and that we depend for our very lives upon the nature of our relationships with other organisms. Such relationships can take two possible forms:

1. *symbiotic*;
2. *predatory*.

Symbiotic relationships are those in which *all parties* to the relationship benefit by the relationship equally. Symbiotic relationships among beings are *social* relationships.

Predatory relationships are those in which some parties to the relationship profit at the expense of others. Predatory relationships are *antisocial*: predators and their prey cannot participate with each other in social relationships—although predators can have symbiotic and social relationships with each other, so long as they never prey upon each other.

Predators sometimes disguise their presence or predatory nature to their prey, for instance by not unambiguously slaughtering and devouring them, but surreptitiously “nibbling” at them, or “sucking their blood.” Such predators are called *parasites*, and their prey are called *hosts*. Parasites have the same relationship with their hosts that predators have with their prey. Neither are symbiotic or social; both are predatory and antisocial.

Although many contemporary mythologies emphasize the prevalence and importance of predation, and deemphasize, or largely ignore the importance of symbiosis, a persuasive argument might be made that in the overall scheme of things, symbiosis is vastly the more important and widespread form of relationship among beings and organisms. This is consistent with the Myth of Universal Reciprocity, and is corroborated by observation.

Old-growth forests, and the relationships among the populations of cells that form the organs of our own bodies, furnish innumerable examples of the ubiquity of symbiosis among vast diversities of organisms and species. Predation too, properly balanced, has an important place in this enormous scheme: for it functions as a mechanism for adjusting and refining the balance of the whole, by culling out the weak, infirm, diseased, crippled, and inattentive among prey species. Yet the overall scheme of things may be said to be overwhelmingly symbiotic in general nature; and even predation plays a symbiotic role in relation to the overarching whole.

However, mistaking a predatory or parasitic relationship for a symbiotic or social relationship is a grievous and usually fatal error for any organism—an error that has been kept to a minimum among virtually all biological species on Earth, by the processes of evolutionary selection; yet is pandemic and chronic among contemporary humans. That is, it is quite common, if not routine among “civilized” people (so called) to mistake their predators for friends, and their friends for prey. This observation is elaborated further in what follows.

6 Patterns

Another element that I have found extremely useful to my personal mythology is the concept of *patterns*, developed by architect Christopher Alexander,⁷ to describe architectural relationships common to beautiful buildings that have been built throughout the ages, in every part of the world, by ordinary people. As Alexander uses the term, patterns are what *everything is made of*. Even patterns are made of patterns: patterns of events, patterns in space, and patterns of relationship among patterns.

Patterns of events are repetitive activities that occur within patterns in space. Certain kinds of events occur repeatedly, for instance, within the space of a kitchen. Related but different kinds of events occur repeatedly within the space of a dining room. Similarly, a kitchen and a dining room are different but related patterns in space that may to varying degrees facilitate or obstruct the patterns of events that occur in them, and between them. Patterns of events, and the patterns in space in which their related events occur, are themselves related; and in Alexander’s vocabulary, they manifest in two alternative forms:

1. *patterns that live*;
2. *dead patterns*.

Patterns that live are patterns that balance all their constituent forces. Dead patterns do not. A well-designed kitchen, for example, is made of patterns in space that facilitate the patterns of events that occur within it; whereas a poorly designed kitchen is made of patterns that obstruct these events, or make some of them unnecessarily difficult. The former may be said to be made of patterns that live; the latter, of dead patterns.

⁷Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, Murray Silverstein, with Max Jacobson, Ingrid Fiksdahl-King, Shlomo Angel, *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1977; Christopher Alexander, *The Timeless Way of Building*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1979.

It is not easy to distinguish rationally, or analytically, between patterns that live and dead patterns; but the difference can be *felt* by virtually anyone—provided all other criteria, such as opinions about “style,” “cost-effectiveness,” “aesthetic appeal,” “moral,” or “legal” considerations, etc., are laid aside, and one focuses attention exclusively upon how a particular pattern actually makes one *feel*.

This may sound to many contemporary minds highly arbitrary and unreliable; yet there is remarkably consistent agreement among people sharing the same culture, about whether a given pattern feels “right,” or doesn’t; and according to Alexander, “people seem to agree 90, 95, even 99 percent of the time.”⁸

Initially, this may be surprising; but it makes sense if you stop and think about it. Patterns that live are those which balance all their constituent forces. One is likely to feel at ease within or in the presence of such balanced patterns, because there is no tension in them resulting from unbalanced forces due to “something missing,” or “something extra” that fails to contribute, or otherwise upsets the balance of the pattern.

In the presence of a dead pattern, however, there is always “something missing,” or *out of balance*, which creates an unresolved conflict one can sense, even if its cause cannot be immediately identified.

The contemporary human pattern, *ruling hierarchy*, for instance, which seems to be “the most natural thing in the world” to virtually everyone, is a prototypically dead pattern, because it fails to balance all its forces. This is so because all ruling hierarchies, top to bottom—while often represented to be benign, “social” organizations—are in fact antisocial chains of predation, whereby every constituent below the top of the hierarchy is prey to all those “above;” and every constituent above the bottom of the hierarchy is a predator upon all those “below.” That is, those placed “higher” in the hierarchy enjoy privileges denied to those “below;” and those placed “lower” in the hierarchy bear burdens that do not encumber those “above.”

Ruling hierarchies have evolved into highly refined and sophisticated systems most of us have come to accept without question or thought; in part because although each member of the hierarchy is required to submit to being plundered by those “above,” such plunder is in most cases not immediately fatal, but is seen as only “taxing,” and is regarded as “the price one has to pay” for the privilege of participating in the plunder of those “below.” Thus,

⁸Alexander, 1979, p. 294.

within the hierarchy, losses suffered by plunder from “above” are largely compensated by profits reaped through the plunder of those “below”—and, as is said in military hierarchies, “the shit rolls downhill.” (Pardon my French, but that’s what they say.)

Anyone finding this circumstance disagreeable is provided with a ready remedy: *elevate your position in the hierarchy*. That is all. Any who do not avail themselves of this straightforward remedy are universally held to be ambitionless sluggards, and fully deserving of their wretched “social” status. Or, as in the case of the Untouchable caste in India, their status is attributed, alike by themselves, and by those of all “higher” castes, to *karma*.

Such arrangements may create the illusion of a balanced pattern; but *ruling hierarchy* is not a balanced pattern. It is a “one-way street” in which ever mounting power and wealth accumulate at the hierarchical “high end,” and the endlessly increasing burdens of poverty and misery accumulate at the “low end”—with no mechanism in place, or even imagined, for “recharging the battery.” It is *unsustainable*; and therefore *will not be sustained* forever.

7 The Selection for Power

The emergence of ruling hierarchies is a quite recent development in the unfolding of human evolution, and may have been prompted by circumstances not of anyone’s free choice. Andrew Schmoekler⁹ suggests that the process was probably put in motion unwittingly, by the Neolithic (“pre-civilized”) invention or discovery of agriculture and animal husbandry, which enabled Neolithic humans to “break out” of the ecological balancing mechanisms that regulate the population levels of all other species.

When people learned how to produce their own food as needed, human populations were no longer ecologically regulated, and began to expand. This naturally brought even sparsely scattered human populations into eventual competition with one another over the finite and diminishing land and resources needed to produce their food. At that point, even beginning with the most benign of intentions, it was only a matter of time before *some* tribe, or human population, resorted to *power* to gain access to whatever they needed, at the expense of the competing needs of another tribe or population.

In this context, *power* may be defined as *the preemption by force of one’s will over that of another*. This decisive threshold, whereby humans became predatory in relation to other

⁹Andrew Bard Schmoekler, *The Parable of the Tribes: The Problem of Power in Social Evolution*, Second Edition, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1995.

humans—or in net effect, *cannibals*—set in motion an evolutionary *selection for power*: because those who developed the power to preempt the will of others prospered; whereas those who didn't were plundered, enslaved, or slaughtered.

In his book, Schموokler takes considerable pains to underline that the selection for power that has driven the course of human evolution since its inception, did not necessarily emerge in consequence of anybody's *free choice*; but was a response to a "necessity" imposed by the chain of causes and effects set in motion by the Neolithic "breakout" of ecological balancing mechanisms that regulate all other populations. Once the resort to power was established among humans, it naturally became a self-perpetuating evolutionary process: because the only way to avoid having one's will preempted by others was to preempt the will of others instead—bringing into play what might be called the "Mutant Golden Rule:" *Do unto others, before others do unto you.*

So emerged the new pattern of the *ruling hierarchy* among humans, with the most effective wielders of power occupying the hierarchical "high end," at complete liberty to do their will; and the "huddled masses" with little or no power crowded into the "low end," enjoying whatever "liberty," if any, happens to be convenient for the "high end" wielders of power to grant them. Under this pattern, the only *effective law* in final operation among humans has always been this: *Might makes right*; or in contemporary parlance, *realpolitik*—or in the form of another mutation of the Golden Rule: *Those who have the gold make the rules.*

8 The Selection for Symbiosis

Human evolution beyond the pattern of ruling hierarchies does not require resistance or opposition to ruling hierarchies: because *ruling hierarchy* is a pattern of dead, unbalanced patterns which are not sustainable. Changing these patterns, or replacing them with patterns that live, is the essence of the graduation into the next phase of human evolution—which does require the emergence of an evolutionary selection process *complementary*¹⁰ and *balancing* to the lopsided *selection for power* among contemporary humans. This emergent selection process—also in response to "necessity"—must be an evolutionary *selection for symbiosis* among humans who desire a long-term evolutionary future for humanity.

Just as *individuals* recognized the necessity for the acquisition, husbanding, and wielding of power when the "power game" first emerged, and ever after, I believe the evolutionary

¹⁰In this context, *complementary* does not mean *mutually exclusive of observation or description*, but is intended to convey the sense of balancing the otherwise lopsided properties of related patterns.

selection for symbiosis can similarly emerge among *individuals* who recognize its necessity; and consequently begin making choices that select for symbiosis in relation with their fellows who share the same recognition. Selection for symbiosis means not only “being nice” to one’s symbiotic peers, but also being open-eyed and aware of one’s predators, and developing and implementing means of evading or neutralizing their predations; and aiding one’s peers in doing likewise.

The motivation for all viable social organizations is the *self-interest* of its individual constituents. This is so because of the meaning of *symbiosis*, whereby all members of a symbiotic relationship benefit equally, and none profit at the expense of others within the relationship. Each constituent participates in the group in order to receive the benefits of participation; and is welcomed by the group because the group—as a whole, and each of its constituents individually—benefits by the contributions of every other constituent. Significant, although not the only benefits for all members of a symbiotic group, are its exclusion of predators, and mechanisms for collective defense against them. In sum, membership in a genuinely social, or mutually symbiotic organization, requires the voluntary effort of each constituent; and these efforts are motivated, and compensated, by the benefits of membership in the organization.

However, individual self-interests and group-interests are not always the same, and sometimes conflict; yet the advantages of symbiotic relationships among constituents can only be enjoyed by those able and willing to maintain an enduring balance between the interests of the group and the interests of the individual—one of which, common to every individual in the group, is maintenance of the network of symbiotic relationships itself. This implies the general necessity for *compromise* among all constituents of a group; such that nobody necessarily gets everything they would like, yet everybody gets what they can live with, and would prefer not to live without; and the group as a whole sustains its balance—something nobody in the group is willing to live without.

Now imagine a community of individuals, such as the inhabitants of a village, a town, or a city, all of whose interrelationships are by mutual agreement, and complementary self-interest, deliberately symbiotic, and *not* predatory. This implies that their society is structured *non-hierarchically*, and that each individual is *self-governing*, and individually responsible for their acts, and their acts’ consequences, to self and others.

Each individual also recognizes the social responsibility, and survival necessity, to respond appropriately to any act that violates the social contract that allows only symbiotic relationships within the community. That is, *cannibalism*, or profiting at the expense of a

peer, is prohibited by definition, and by mutual, self-interested agreement among all members of a mutually symbiotic community. Violators of this single prohibition make themselves the predatory enemies not only of the peer (or peers) at whose expense they profit, but of the entire community; for predation within a symbiotic community is antisocial, not social, and threatens the community itself, and therefore the vital interests of every member of the community.

9 The Global Scope of the Human Species

The progress of the evolutionary selection for power among humans demonstrates another factor of crucial importance to establishing the balancing process of selection for symbiosis; and that is that even when human populations were sparse, and consisted of widely scattered bands of hunter-gatherers, the human species was headed for *global*, not only local, relations amongst its members, and with Earth as a whole.

While human populations were small and scattered, human predatory bands were able to prey upon other humans successfully, so long as there were abundant “foreign” humans with whom symbiotic relationships were neither required nor desired. During earlier stages of the selection for power, it was possible to conquer and “domesticate” even relatively large human populations, and engage in the same kind of parasitic husbandry of conquered people as has been practiced by cattle ranchers and herdsmen since Neolithic times, in relation to their livestock.

From that time to this, however, the process has expanded to global scope, and there are no longer abundant “foreign” humans to conquer, “domesticate,” or upon whom to prey; because “they” are now “us.” Regardless of our individual ethnic or national affiliations, or status within existing hierarchical structures, we’re all in practical effect “Earth people” now. In order to advance into the next phase of human evolution, all Earth people are therefore challenged with the necessity of forming *genuine*, not pseudo-symbiotic relationships with one another, and with our planet; and this is virtually a “lost art” that went out of style thousands of years ago, with the emergence of the selection for power among humans.

Throughout the contemporary world, other humans are routinely viewed either as “resources,” “market,” or as “competitors”—which is to say, either as prey, host, or competitive predators, in a chaotic melee of warring hierarchies that together embrace *everybody*. We have become a planet of predators, with no prey except each other; and *it doesn't work*.

The lesson to be derived from all of this—or one lesson, anyway—is this: No matter how modest or tentative the beginnings of the evolutionary movement toward a selection for symbiosis may be, if it “succeeds,” it will eventually scale, like the selection for power before it, to *global scope*; because that is the minimal scope native to the human species. This means ultimately that there are no “foreign” humans inhabiting planet Earth, and actually, never have been; and no intrinsic “nobility,” or “commoners.” Like it or not, there are no “them.” There are only “us.” And if we wish to secure for ourselves, and the children of our children’s children, a survivable, sustainable, satisfactory future, we shall have to perfect the evolutionary art of *selecting for symbiosis*, such that it applies to all humans, and excludes no one of human kind—except, of course, intransigent predators upon other humans.

10 Balancing Inputs with Outputs

The human challenge is even steeper than that. Not only must the selection for symbiosis eventually include all humans, excluding no one; it must eventually include the entire planet, excluding nothing. For the survivability and sustainability of the human species requires the weaving of a seamless network of symbiotic relationships among all things, just as existed throughout this planet before the very recent appearance of humans, and the even more recent evolutionary selection for power—and exists still, where it has not yet been obliterated.

In a few words, the challenge facing humans today, who wish for a survivable, sustainable, satisfactory human presence on the planet into the indefinite future, is the integration of the human species into the seamless web of *life* throughout planet Earth. This our species have never achieved, because we haven’t known how; and only in the present era have we been challenged on a global scale by the uncompromising necessity of achieving it.

In the most general terms, this means that if we wish to continue living here, in striking contrast to current and historical practice, we must arrange our lives such that *inputs and outputs balance*. What we take from Earth to sustain ourselves and our projects must be compensated by investments in repairing the resulting imbalances to Earth’s interrelated patterns. In order to harvest, we must plant. In order to receive, we must give. In order to be nurtured, we must nurture. In short, we must establish a *symbiotic relationship*, not only with our fellow humans, but with our entire planet; for our current *predatory relationship* with Earth is fundamentally unsustainable, and consequently *will not be sustained* forever.

Balancing our harvesting with our planting, or our outputs with our inputs, has many dimensions, and we have much to learn in order to fulfill this vital requirement. Fortunately, we have many able and “knowledgeable teachers” close at hand, who can tutor us well, if we are willing to learn. For every living species on this planet (with the exception of contemporary, “industrial” humans) have “mastered the art” of living in reciprocal partnership with Earth. This may be the defining difference between the meaning of the terms, “natural,” and “unnatural.” If we pay attention, and observe how they do it, we too can master the art of partnership with our planet.

For instance: Nature provides the most exemplary prototype for *human industry*, and humans may follow, if we will, the example of Nature in all industrial, manufactory processes. The most salient feature of “natural industry” is the “universal law,” or practice, that *every byproduct of a natural process makes a positive contribution to some other natural process*. For examples:

- The metabolism of green plants produces the (to them) poisonous byproduct oxygen; which is essential to the metabolism of all animals.
- Animal metabolism produces carbon dioxide; which is essential to the metabolism of all green plants.
- Deciduous trees and forests every autumn discard billions of tons of leaves, which with the approach of winter are no longer useful to them, and may be injurious in the event of a heavy snowfall before they are discarded. Yet these discarded leaves serve as a nutritious mulch that nourishes the soil and supports the lives of innumerable beneficial organisms, which vitalize the following spring season.

These and any number of similar examples, illustrate at once the ubiquity of symbiosis throughout the biosphere, in relation to the supporting role played by predation; and the possibility of “industrial-strength manufacturing,” *without pollution or toxic byproducts whatsoever*. They supply us with the assurance that the manufacture of all humanly useful and desirable products can be accomplished, “on an industrial scale,” globally, without contaminating or poisoning our planet, even slightly. This is possible, for it is done, and may be witnessed by anyone, anywhere.

In this way, although human practice is surely unbalanced and unsustainable today, humanity could imaginably become sustainable in a way that is scalable to global scope, as we incrementally replace failing dead patterns with sustainable patterns that live, without necessarily coming into conflict with anybody.

Can you imagine a future time on planet Earth in which humans everywhere can breathe a sigh of relief, and profound gratitude, knowing that “We have finally figured it out, and now have the ability, and the know-how, to live in indefinitely sustainable balance with our planet, and with each other, on the same basis with all other living beings with whom we share our world.”? Can you imagine your children, or the children of your children’s children, someday saying something like this? And *feeling* the Cosmic confidence of *mastery*—not in the sense of victorious conquest, and domination over others, but of mastery of the techniques of living in sustainable harmony with all others, and all things, forever? Can you?

I think you will agree with me that we’re not “there” yet, and have “a long way to go” before any among us can experience such confidence—and freedom from chronic stress—when we or our descendants contemplate the human present and future on planet Earth. Yet I believe it is not an “impossible dream.” It can be achieved; and *you*, and *I*, and any who wish to join us, can begin moving in that intentional direction, from where we stand, right here, right now, if that is our choice.

11 So, How Do We Get “There,” From “Here?”

“O.K., wise guy,” I can hear somebody muttering, “so how do we get ‘there,’ from ‘here’?” How on Earth, standing wherever we happen to be, however we happen to be, right now, can we arrange things so that, no matter who we are, no matter what race, nationality, gender, ethnic heritage, cultural background, sexual orientation, favorite sports team, or preferred computer platform, we are able to live in peace and harmony with Earth, all its non-human inhabitants, and all other humans, with sound confidence that we can continue to do so into the indefinite future? If this isn’t an “impossible dream,” what is it?

The brief answer to that—or my answer, anyway—is that it is an *evolutionary*, not a *revolutionary* process, and it is already in progress; and furthermore that, although the outcome for all humans on planet Earth is not certain,¹¹ in the largest scheme of things, “*Nothing Can Possibly Go Wrong, Everything is Out of Control!*” However, it seems that further elaboration may be in order.

¹¹Well, that’s not the whole story either; for in a way, the outcome for all humans on planet Earth is quite certain. *We’re all going to die.* But that is not the question being considered here. The question being considered here is: *What will be the legacy inherited by those (if any) who survive us?*

Evolution is a process of continuous response to dynamic circumstances and constantly shifting conditions; and as implied by the Myth of Metaconsciousness (§ 4.3), may embody a species of “intelligence” analogous, or even vastly “superior” to individual human intelligence. However that may be, evolution is characterized by adaptation in a dynamic context, whereby “favorable” responses to circumstances are proliferated, and “disfavorable” responses become extinct. That is, those evolving entities that develop the ability to accommodate circumstances as they find them, prosper; whereas those that fail to accommodate existing circumstances perish. This process proliferates and further develops responses that work, and eventually eliminates responses that don’t work.

As discussed briefly in § 7, the Neolithic response to the needs of the time was the domestication of food production, which in its context was a “favorable” response to circumstances, and was proliferated among humans—with the unintended but unavoidable consequence that human populations began to expand.

Because “Spaceship Earth” was not, and is not expanding at a parallel pace, the follow-on consequence of this adaptation brought expanding human populations into competition and conflict with one another over the limited resources necessary for continued prosperity and expansion. The human response to this newly emergent circumstance was the resort to *power*, and the consequent *selection for power* that, like it or not, has dominated human affairs to the present time.

In the present time, however, unlike Neolithic times, the human residents of “Spaceship Earth” have encountered recently emergent circumstances that render continuance of the unbalanced selection for power impossible; making necessary a new human adaptation to circumstances. This newly emergent necessity makes itself felt as *pandemic stress* among human populations everywhere, which furnishes the motivation for ongoing human evolution.

Although the pressures of natural selection are in perpetual operation among living species, the evolutionary path is not a smooth, continuous, or straight line. Evolution takes place in infrequent “leaps,” interspersed typically with long periods of very little change during the span of many generations. The long periods of “evolutionary dormancy” are those in which the patterns that make a species what it is are essentially alive, balance all their constituent forces, and in a word, *work*. They may not be “perfect,” yet neither are they easily improved, and they are stable for extended periods of time.

“Evolutionary leaps” occur under circumstances in which patterns that had been working, for some reason work no longer, and the species experiences mounting stress; until at least some of its members are able to develop new patterns for living that actually do work under changed circumstances. These patterns are then proliferated, and the species makes an “evolutionary leap.” The stressful periods that precede evolutionary leaps are typically relatively sudden in onset, and relatively short in duration; yet can be the occasion of spectacular evolutionary leaps, and/or extinctions.

An example of both kinds, which has been discussed widely, and is well documented in the fossil record, occurred about 65½ million years ago at the juncture between the Cretaceous Period of the Mesozoic Era and the Tertiary Period of the Cenozoic Era, in which (Cenozoic) we are still living today. It has been called by geologists the “K-T Extinction,”¹² and is one of the most noteworthy major extinctions in Earth’s geological history. Beyond the K-T Extinction Event, the dinosaurs, which had dominated Earth’s biosphere, on land and at sea during the previous 185½ million years, had become extinct; and the Cenozoic, also called the Age of Mammals, blossomed. There now exists a consensus among scientists that the Chicxulub asteroid impact¹³ beneath the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico was probably the main cause of the K-T Extinction.

Mammals, meanwhile, had had a presence on Earth, possibly a hundred million years prior to the K-T Extinction that wiped out the dinosaurs. However, the Mesozoic mammals were small and obscure, and had no opportunity to evolve into the larger forms that appeared later: because all the ecological niches for large animals were already occupied by large reptiles.

If a major asteroid impact in Yucatán was indeed “the cause” of the extinction, or if it had multiple causes, in any case conditions suddenly emerged throughout the planet to which none of the dinosaurs were able to adapt. At least some of the Mesozoic mammals, however, were able to survive these same conditions; and with competition from dinosaurs no longer a factor, evolved during the ensuing 65½ million years into, among a great many other species, mastodons, saber-tooth tigers, cave bears, whales, and humans.

Now we humans are in the “hot seat” (along with many other species), and are challenged by conditions under which many of our operational patterns, in place for the past several thousand years, no longer work. This too, like the Chicxulub asteroid impact, is a sudden

¹²http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cretaceous-Tertiary_extinction_event

¹³http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicxulub_crater

emergency, although it might have been anticipated considerably earlier, and has been “a long time coming.” Now it is in our midst, and it is up to we humans either to adapt, or to become extinct.

In these circumstances, which although infrequent are not unusual in the evolutionary course of a species, the “standard operating procedure” seems to be for various members of the species to cast about for alternatives to the patterns that no longer work. Individuals vary their habitual behaviors, and try things that would never have been attempted during the “good old days” when “all was well.” Under emergent circumstances, “all is not well,” which produces mounting stress, which motivates increasingly radical exploration and experimentation.

In the case of contemporary humans, radical exploration and experimentation requires radical shifts in the way we think, feel, and believe—which may give to those who are able to embrace the realization that *all* human beliefs, *my own*, and “experts” *included*, are myths (or superstitions)—advantages over those who are not.

So the way we get “there,” from “here,” is the same way we got “here,” from “wherever we came from:” one experimental, exploratory step at a time, by as many individual humans as wish to participate intentionally in the ongoing experiment.

Actually, everybody is a participant anyway, intentionally or not, because every choice made by anybody is a venture into *terra incognita*, unknown ground. Some—perhaps many—may choose to do what they have always done, and get what they have always gotten—or maybe get what they don’t expect, because of swiftly changing circumstances. Others—perhaps relatively few—may choose to make cautious experiments designed to minimize risk, yet incrementally advance partial comprehension of the surrounding mystery, and take advantage of fortuitously favorable discoveries.

There will surely be casualties, for some experiments and explorations will reach dead-ends, or other unfavorable conclusions, and there are no guarantees for any experimental outcome. It may even be that large numbers of people perish along the way—but then that is everybody’s eventual outcome anyway, no matter what anybody does, and is therefore “nothing to worry about.” “*Nobody gets out of here alive!*”—“here” being *alive*. Yet *some individuals*, maybe, will find their way to more favorable patterns, and hook up with others who have found or invented other favorable patterns, and combine their efforts at further exploration and experimentation in symbiotic relationships.

Meanwhile, unsustainable contemporary patterns will incrementally cease being sustained, and disappear, creating formerly unavailable space for the sustainable patterns being invented and discovered by the explorers; just as the extinction of the dinosaurs made formerly unavailable space for the evolution of the mammals.

It won't all unfold in a single human generation—unless humans begin living a lot longer than we have been, which is not unimaginable. Chronic stress takes a fearful toll, and we have all been under mounting stress for many generations. As we find patterns that live, and substitute them for the dead patterns of our heritage, who knows how long we might live in health and vitality?

In any event, this is a process that does not require resistance, or conflict with anybody or anything, and is a matter of the free and unfettered choice of self-elected individuals, no one excluded. Even those at the hierarchical “high end,” who are no less trapped in the labyrinth of unsustainable patterns than those at the “low end,” may participate in the exploration for alternative patterns that actually work, if this is their choice.

Because “everything is out of control,” *anyone* who is willing to take responsibility for the consequences of their own experiments and explorations is at *liberty* to make whatever experiments and explorations as seem likely to them to yield favorable results—a liberty granted to themselves, by themselves, and not subject to anybody else's *yea* or *nay*. Of these, some will actually achieve favorable results, and point the way to further experiments and explorations, by their discoverers, and by others.

12 Be the Change You Would Like to See

The key to the whole process is simply this: *Be the change you would like to see*. That is all. Anybody who believes the world can be improved in any specific way is at unfettered liberty to put that specific way into effect within their own lives, “try it on for size,” and find out directly how well it actually works. If it works well, or even if it works only somewhat, the result will be evident to oneself and others, and prompt further improvements and experimentation.

If this seems to you like an “insignificant” contribution to the human evolutionary process, in the midst of the vast turmoil of pulling and hauling with might and main, by teaming billions of people endeavoring to put “wrong” things “right” by their various “lights,” then consider this:

It appears to me as though a major fraction of the human population act largely at random, or in impulsive reaction to immediate circumstances, without a carefully developed plan or purpose aimed at a long-term objective. Even the “movers and shakers” at the “high end” seem increasingly to be operating their *power* agendas in “panic mode,” from week to week, instead of from generation to generation, century to century, or millennium to millennium—which on the time scale of evolution is still almost “instantaneous.” This results in a kind of “white noise” that, whatever its detailed content, has a tendency to neutralize itself, rendering it effectively “silent.” The minority who do have a long-term objective, or vision, and conduct their lives accordingly, are therefore likely to have a disproportionate effect upon the eventual course of human events: because they are moving purposefully in deliberately chosen directions, in the midst of an ocean of people moving at random. To *be the change you would like to see* may therefore be a surprisingly potent strategy; and “*Nothing Can Possibly Go Wrong, Everything is Out of Control!*”

13 Invitation to the Dance

If you have sustained your interest to this point, and have read this essay from its beginning, I take it as an indication that the matters under discussion here are of more than casual interest to you; and that the possibility exists that you might like to participate in further exploration and/or experimentation, with others who share these interests. If so, I would like to invite you to join our list of correspondents, by providing your name (or “handle”), and e-mail address; and if you wish, your response to the ideas expressed in this essay.

Sequels to this essay—not all necessarily by the author of this one—are planned, intended to develop the discussion further, and broaden its scope. How would you like to write and submit a follow-on essay, expressing, for instance, your take on the question, “*Can humanity on planet Earth fashion a survivable, sustainable, satisfactory future?*” I believe the “short answer” to that question is, “Yes.” A longer answer—many longer answers—would also address the question, “*How?*” and would necessarily bear the fruit of many diverse points of view, and if you will, mythologies. Yet this is not even the beginning of “the whole story.”

You see, we’re talking about the evolution of the human species here, and that’s no small thing. It is not something I, or any other single human can “pull off,” or “bestow” upon his fellow humans. It requires the combined efforts of many, or at least a few to begin, holding a variety of mythologies, and points of view, who are willing and able to form symbiotic, cooperative, voluntary, intentional relationships with one another. It doesn’t require the participation of everyone, or even a majority. It can begin with a very few self-selected

individuals, who may have surprisingly little in common, beyond a shared commitment to form symbiotic, not predatory relationships. Beyond that, the richer the diversity of views, perceptions, and myths, the better.

Thus the essay you have just read represents only the most modest beginning of a human project that has no foreseeable end—and actually, no discernible beginning either. It expresses, in part, the vision of a single individual, at a particular crossroads in spacetime, and is therefore unavoidably lopsided and partial. It requires the balancing myths, visions, and participatory experiments and explorations of others, in order to “straighten up and fly right.” Would you like to participate in the further evolution of visions for a survivable, sustainable, satisfactory human future on planet Earth—and help bring them into actuality, by *being the change you would like to see*? Would you like to join the dance, with like-minded others? If so, . . . [Send an e-mail to harmon@harmonhouse.net. . . .
(Fri 24 Sep 2010 16:15:00)]