

### 11 PM - 2010s On pivot points

“I’m concerned about the newspaper.”

“That’s good. So am I. But—and this may sound strange—I am less concerned about our newspaper than I am about everything else.”

“Like what.”

“Like the cataclysmic change in how communities bring dollars into households. Like a school system that produces people who think that everyone else owes them a living. Like teetering businesses that win special treatment simply because they are big and in favor. Like government manufactured to promote lottery by litigation. Like an international situation where it’s not that enemies believe that we have left the door unbarred, but rather that no doors exist.”

“That’s supposed to make me feel good?”

“No, it’s supposed to put your worry in context. We are comfortable with becoming an all-electronic newspaper. We are in better shape as a local newspaper than most regional and national newspapers. We have organized ourselves into flexible teams, enabled to recognize problems and solve them. We add value to information creating news at the local level that people are still willing to pay for. We are where we need to be. But what can be done for the rest of society? Today is less a pivot point than a rogue wave, when individual waves from different directions pile one on top of another at the same place and time. Politics, economics, journalism, education, morality, and more wash over us without respite.”

“Why do so many willingly embrace the implausible? Why is there such shallow and pretentious intellectualism where who says something matters more than what is said?”

“Comfortably familiar premises remain unexamined—including those about character, ethics and morality. Aristotle’s favorite practice was observation. He observed morality in operation, and offered propositions about it, but familiarity doesn’t assure validity or universality. History is littered with popular bad ideas. Separate but equal was once popular. Hundreds of millions of people still refuse women equal rights. It’s popular to believe Elvis is still alive and that UFOs regularly visit Earth, but such beliefs are not universal or necessarily true.”

“So how are we going to get unexamined premises examined? Calls for citizenship training seem to do little good.”

“Calls for citizenship tend to come from the American entertainment wing of dilantants, from British socialist roots, and from progressives that hijacked John Dewey and who are now represented by the American left.”

“But their intentions are good.”

“Not necessarily. Underneath their slogans lurks nationalism wrapped in sheep’s clothing that seems to promote docility and order for their own benefit. What they call altruism, gussied up in red, white, and blue bunting, presents the worst of collectivism, socialism, and progressivism as if it were the American way, which it never has been. America has always valued ‘we, the people,’ as individuals, not ‘we, the collective’ as directed by a privileged political class. Mature individualism is caring, considerate, and communal, armed with checks and balances against the tyranny of the majority.”

“What they work towards sounds good.”

“But they don’t work towards it. The political elite tug on emotions, framed as the need to help others, but that is bait to prey upon the concerned but unwary to further their quest to centralize power. The political class would steal your liberty for a cause they never serve.”

“Why would they do that?”

“It works for them.”

“No, really. Why would they do that?”

“Because it does work for them. They don’t think like you do and would take advantage of you for not recognizing that. Their morality never grew beyond Machiavelli. For them, politics is what you can get away with.”

“Why?”

“You let them. The ‘-isms’ that come to mind—Libertarianism, Conservatism, Classical Liberalism, or any of the political parties—have not inoculated individuals to defend themselves. Nor have they countered the political class with an alternative that values the individual and explains the tie between individuals and society. When people are ready to coalesce around such an alternative for their own safety, that’s the day we’ll celebrate the wave of the new century.”

“If I don’t see that now, how will I ever recognize it?”

“Relax. It’s a habit that will become as second nature as learning to ride a bike. Did you solve the puzzle I described this morning, with the three people trying to decide whether the hat each wore was black or white?”

“I never did figure the answer to that puzzle.”

“Look at the puzzle from the perspective of the other players. Look at the puzzle sighting from now and projecting into the future. If the other players in the puzzle did not solve the puzzle, it hints at the color of your own hat.”

“Why didn’t the other people solve the puzzle?”

“That’s critically important. They puzzled over the same details for a long time, making no progress. Without a flexible point of view or sense of time, they could not solve it.”

“If you can’t see the context, you can’t solve the problem.”

“You cannot value what you cannot see. If you can’t see why individuals need society, manufacturing society will remain unimportant. It’s not hard. It’s just not habit. A person keyed to search for a pattern in personal experience is more likely to recognize when that pattern shows a useful way to behave. The pattern gives you a tool, not a rule. It does not insist how you should behave. The puzzle exercised the notion that practice to

recognize patterns in personal experience is also useful with governance, thought, language, ethics, and culture. Practice and you’ll learn to project the consequences of actions into the future and learn to put yourself in the position of others.

“But there is more. People trust their own judgment, when they know it has failed in the past and will likely fail again. They trust thinking machinery that jumps to conclusions and that tries to justify those conclusions by the flimsiest of means. If one can’t trust oneself, how can one trust others equally likely to jump to their own conclusions? Conversely, how can they trust you?”

“It’s humbling on all counts, and for their mutual safety leads honest brokers to invest in society and the tools for clear thought.”

“You’re throwing a lot at me. Can you explain it simply?”

“Adam Smith says that we enter into society, but if you master why you as an individual need society, it is society that enters into you. Individuals create society—and journalism, too—out of sheer need. Journalism and society extend out from individuals like concentric circles, and sometimes those creations contain flaws that mirror the flaws of individuals. Why do those flaws seem to pass almost unnoticed?”

“People don’t see the behavior as flawed.”

“That’s observant. Footprints left by award-winning literature over the past century expose those underlying institutional weaknesses. Flaws mattered less in days gone by, but with the world more dangerous, creeping rust is increasingly risky. Fortunately, the means to detect, understand, and correct those problems lie within individuals themselves, and are more accessible and compelling than ever before.”

“What does the literature show about itself and culture?”

“Over a hundred years fiction has focused on style, cultural nuance, conflict, imagery, and ‘character development’ that usually means personality development short of substance. Meanwhile, today’s election is seen as a pivot point supposed to represent some ambiguous hope for the future. However, absent a sense of direction, that hope is unfounded and suggests

dangerous docility. If you can recognize that from your experience, what can you draw from patterns you see in governance, thought, language, ethics, and culture?”

“Sure! Ask the easy questions at 11 o’clock at night.”

“Take them one at a time. Look at society and what has not worked. Then look at the individual. Finally, pick up the pieces.”

“You want the short answer? A lot of governance has failed.”

“Across the better part of a millennium, the institutions of governance challenged to raise human society have instead sown the seeds of their own destruction. Look at what has not worked over the centuries:

- Politicized religions in the 16th century,
- Absolutism in the 17th century,
- Abstract rationalism in the 18th century,
- Industrialized nation states in the 19th century, or
- Media-manipulated central control in the 20th century.

“Each refinement of governance failed to clean up the mess left by the previous century and left a different mess for the succeeding century to deal with. In our time, and most unsettling of all, institutional subjects like history, philosophy, art, science, language—the subjects traditionally used to compose alternatives—have themselves become suspect.”

“Lily Tomlin once said, ‘Do you ever get the feeling that progress is not necessarily headed in the right direction.’ Is there hope?”

“If we eliminate what has never worked and never will, it leads us to conclude that, individuals alone, adrift on the storm-tossed sea of experience, are obliged to discover who else, also adrift and alone, might, by their actions and not by contract, participate in a social safety net strong enough and reliable enough that, while imperfect, can lift participants modestly above the rest of the animal kingdom.”

“Is that a practical goal?”

“The odds that fortune will bestow its gifts need to improve only slightly to give realistic advantage.”

“That’s too glib.”

“We seek reflective judgment, not compliance. We want to remain continuously open to new information to review that which we have learned regarding what has gone before in light of what we might better understand now. Since politics has become cutthroat competition, we want to develop the skill to test its claims. Philosophers say that all knowing comes from either authority, *a priori* understanding, or the contest of science, so we need to recognize the authority that underwrites the knowledge and value it accordingly. We may not be able to decide what is ‘true’ but we can consider what might be ‘workable.’ To draw on the canvas of the new century, all we have are recollections and patterns recognized from them, massaged by language within its limitations, we can use to project consequences of proposed actions into the future.”

“What if it doesn’t work?”

“As powerful weapons become more readily available, this becomes a race between civilization and Armageddon.”

“So now we live a real-life cliffhanger.”

“Mother Nature doesn’t care if we succeed, but we do—we care for ourselves and for our children. Nor can we put off our work, now that isolation no longer offers protection. Science has put the power of knowledge in the hands of anyone who cares to learn, so that no longer will a strong box protect our wealth or barred door protect our families. We are in a race to inoculate ourselves to recognize and defend against others who would destroy rather than build society; a race to grow civilization if we can discover an accessible, compelling message others might decide to value and adopt as their own.”

“But haven’t we progressed in the 20th century.”

“During the 20th century, Machiavelli worked up to a point, but no more. If a culture cannot physically isolate itself from threats, it has to try to reduce those threats by creating a process of peaceful problem resolution sensible people can buy into.”

“What about the others?”

“Protect yourself and keep trying.”

“A hundred years and what do we have to show for the effort?”

“The 20th century was an incredible century advancing the sciences—chemistry, physics, biology, psychology, geology, and archeology, engineering, electronics, set and graph theory, gaming, and computation. But socially, we deal with each other much the same as we have for a hundred years: unable to explain that a different culture was destructive or explain why. In the 1990s, in a Post-colonial world, we failed to detect threats when challenged, answer objections to facing those threats, or frame our conclusions in a culturally independent fashion. Our forefathers tried to codify John Locke in the American Constitution, but, until now, the reasons why we ought to preserve those principles have remained elusive.

“When philosophy concluded in the 1940s that certainty was impossible and existentially threw up its hands, it led to the desolation of the 1950s or puritanical Sunday School rules that were quickly undermined by television and music in the 1960s and by a coddled generation convinced not to trust anyone over 30. The 1970s tried to ignore both free love and confrontation while the 1980s saw alternative socialistic empires collapse under the weight of a system that could destroy but not build. The 1990s refined the misplaced hope and luxury that style would triumph over substance. The 2000s forced them to face the reality of the societal vacuum that left us unarmed. And that is where we stand.

“The 20th century seemed to advance except where it mattered. Our literature, our thought, and the tools we use to think reeled under the shock of world wars. We lost our lift, stalled out like an airplane, and started spiraling down into chaos and despair from which we have yet to recover.

“Meanwhile, cultures like our own have been prematurely celebrating ‘success.’ They reward as excellent that which furthers their fantasy although it deflects attention from

whatever lies in the gutter. No less an organization than the committee for the Nobel Prize for Literature repeatedly rewards fantastic imagery in its selections. Horace Engdahl, permanent secretary to the Swedish Nobel committee, said the ‘U.S. is too isolated, too insular.’ He argues Americans don’t ‘participate in the big dialogue of literature’ while his own committee overlooks its 50 years of isolated, insular practice of rewarding style and typically repetitive topics at the expense of content. What happened to reality? Today there is more fantasy in real life than real life in real life. In the motion picture *The History Boys*, a teacher encouraged inventing history and selective recollection of facts, exactly as today’s politics builds fantasy to force itself on others. To cloak their practice, if you expose their fantasy, they are ‘offended,’ and prosecute ‘offense’ as a crime.”

“Many people don’t have a scope of interest that makes what they need to know accessible to them.”

“So, should it require a fantasy to bring people closer to reality? Do they have to be drawn by misdirection to face up to their self-interest in the way things are? Not at all. Set aside the past century of horror, wandering, and misuse. Reach for mastery of what is worth knowing and why. Embrace a process of continuous reflection. Then tie it all together without dogma or conviction. Do that and you may discover a wellspring of courage and purpose. Do that and it may be premature to apply the word failure to the 20th century since rust has not completely undermined the civility of those who grew up then.”

“Civility is what separates us from the rest of the animals”

“Civility *can* separate us, if people choose that path, but it does not necessarily separate us. What is civility? What makes it compelling?”

“Your suggesting we don’t know what we are talking about?”

“Moral relativism’s ambiguity more often leads to amorality than immorality. Immorality requires conscious opposition to what is moral and why. The only mechanism that has a chance to guide understanding for an individual is kept honest by conversation with other individuals in society. We have the models,

metaphors, and experience to succeed, but we don't seem to value such tools as highly as previous cultures have. It recalls the *Pax Romana*."

"The Roman peace?"

"From 27 B.C. to 180 A.D. the *Pax Romana* imposed the rule of law by force. Actually, it imposed the rule of authority that evolved into a rule of law never matched before or since. They kept the peace, in part, by training people to be good citizens. For Romans, a citizen was defined as a good person speaking well. A citizen who could speak effectively could influence others—armed, as Dorothy Sayers advised, and conscious, as Richard Mitchell demanded.

"If citizenship through education was the dominant institutional force of the Romans, formal religion became the dominant institutional force of the Middle Ages, with its own emphasis on the classic learning of the liberal arts *Trivium*—Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric. Classical Rhetoric consisted of invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Unfortunately, in the 1500s, invention and arrangement—the ordering and testing of evidence—were removed leaving Rhetoric absent its honesty, to focus on presentation alone.

"During these Middle Ages, what kind of socio-political frameworks evolved?"

"Feudal kingdoms became city-type communities."

"Fair enough. They were held together by geography and shared economic interest, but, in Europe, where cities developed, the church was part of the glue, since attendance at church was required every day. England's *Magna Carta* in 1215 put the brakes on the power of kings and elevated the subjects who organized themselves. Civil organization grew until Napoleon Bonaparte."

"He pursued an empire and didn't quite achieve it."

"From 1803 until his defeat at Waterloo in 1815, Napoleon represented the first major clash of nations. It was a cataclysmic event that reverberated through politics, philosophy, and literature. Napoleon's march past Hegel's bedroom window

profoundly affected Hegel's philosophy. Marx used Hegel's dialectic in 1848. Stendhal's *Charterhouse of Parma* reflects on that war. Tolstoy's *War and Peace* begins with the same conflict. Nation fought nation repeatedly through the century as empires grew more sophisticated and alliances became more entangled, leading up to World War I. Look at the political evolution over time, from the village, to the city, to the kingdom, to the state, to the nation, to the empire—a steady progression leading to what Samuel Huntington in the late 1990s called the clash of civilizations. But where does the progression lead? What might be the next step in evolution?"

"You can't get any bigger than a civilization. You can't get more powerful."

"If you can't get more powerful physically, the next evolution can't be physical. In nature, though, bigness isn't the only answer. How does Mother Nature compete?"

"She finds a weakness and competitively evolves to exploit it. Strengths do not protect from what finally undermines competitors."

"After the clash of progressively larger estates, states, nations, and civilizations, expect a shift toward the clash of core ideas because those ideas are viral. They can travel across geo-political boundaries with ease penetrating borders of nation-states that are porous to them. Viral ideas can use experience and history from within to temper one's wisdom and culture. That's why typewriters were registered in some pre-computer Balkan states and why later the Soviet state came to realize that a country with computers could not be restrained. Individuals motivated by strong ideas can move both people and great nations, not always constructively. Sorting out unsound ideas becomes every individual's responsibility, but citizens schooled today seem often unprepared to weigh what they think."

"Many ought not trust what they think."

"No, they shouldn't. Too many people with degrees have not the skill set, the attention span, or the interest to recognize everyday flaws in themselves, journalism, or society. People like to think

they are rational, but fresh evidence arrives every day to question that.”

“You dare to believe that people don’t think rationally?”

“Of course they don’t. Rationality isn’t how they think; rationality is how they can check the results of their thought.”

“Why would you say that?”

“Consider how electronic computers function. They may not be wired exactly the same as people, but a computer’s working memory acts like a string of buckets that contain programs and/or data. Computer instructions and data look like numbers to us. One set of numbers might instruct the computer to read data out of one bucket and add it to data stored in another bucket. While the program buckets contain instructions, the instructions don’t do the instructions. Execution of instructions occurs below the ‘consciousness’ of the computer program itself.

“Nobel Prize winner Roger Sperry and Michael Gazzaniga suggest the human computer comes up with a result and only then rationalizes an apparently logical way to get to that result. That would mean that people cannot be certain they are rational, but only believe that they are. If we are less than perfect, we’d better carefully check our work. Gut feelings may not come from the stomach, love may not come from the heart, and decisions may not come from rationality but, instead, come welling up into consciousness from elsewhere in the brain.”

“If that is the case, what can be done about it?”

“We need a change of mind, fortunately, all it takes is one Proustian Madeleine to change a mind. Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past* used a whiff of Madeleine cookie to recall a lifetime of experience waiting below the surface to be dredged up by a present-day connection.

“Every moment is a potential pivot point—for you, for society, and even for geese on a lake poised to integrate their sentiments with those of the rest of the flock. Although today’s election has been painted as hoped for change, change will more likely turn around a different axis than the pundits expect. You may be touched as I was by Confucius whose insight telescoped across

unimaginable generations, ricocheting off other minds, into my own. We touch others with sound ideas. Let’s change minds.”

“Change how?”

“Once you discover that *you* matter, you can shoulder the responsibility to make sure you are up to the task. The resolve not to be taken in by ignorant, selfish game-players depends on you developing process, pattern recognition, defensive rhetorical skills, experience, and a will to work at it, to resolve. You matter and you need to discover how much you matter. Then you need to learn to defend yourself.

“The tools are simple, yours to discover, and yours to own. *You* plan decisions using a map of reality, not reality itself. That’s humbling, because you understand limitations leave the possibility of being wrong. *You* value reciprocity because you recognize others in a similar situation live their lives as acutely as you live yours. *You* have a sense of time and your place in it. You value critical judgment. You value constructive habits. You separate your ‘self’ from your ideas. You disdain facades as unfair to others as others’ facades would be unfair to you. You value what is possible. You value perspective that gives you balance, consistency, and simplicity. You value tools like recursion and continuous re-evaluation but recognize their limitations.”

“Limitations?”

“In 1976, psychologist Julian Jaynes suggested that there can be a new understanding of consciousness and symbolism to manage it. The evidence of writing is that humans acquired consciousness over time and not in a single cataclysmic event. Some acquired it, some did not, and, unbelievably, some cultures lost the skill. While there are a lot of things that consciousness is not, Jaynes holds consciousness to be a very simple thing that includes 1) the idea of self and the possibility of self-reflection with which we can create a concept of ourselves, and 2) a sense of time for the self we create.

“Douglas Hofstadter suggests that the emergent phenomena of the brain—those are ideas, hopes, images, analogies, and finally consciousness and free will—are based on a ‘strange loop’ that we

have learned to call recursion, an interaction between the top level reaching back into the bottom level and influencing the thought process for succeeding iterations.

“Thinking as we have been talking about it—conscious thought—is acquired. Self-reference is acquired. Narratization—the ‘I will do this, then I will do that’—is acquired, reinforcing the concept of time, one’s place in time, and the concept of recursion.”

“How can such tools be put to use?”

“We are adrift on a communal sea of individual ideas clawing at each other to grow and survive. Most ideas will be lost, and many should be. The way forward is to sift down not to the true, but to the useful. Everything is therapeutic, anti-therapeutic, or irrelevant. The purpose of logic and rhetoric, the way it used to be taught, is to serve as a sieve. The future of humanity does not depend on the success of one country but on the preservation of sound ideas and sound processes to think about them, until soil somewhere is ripe for germination. Some Confucian ideas engraved 3500 years ago in scraps of ivory projected good sense into the future. That can happen again.”

“I—we—have the advantage of a world of experience that those in the past did not have. That makes it easier to avoid the tar pits others in philosophy attempted to explore and got caught in. Those who have gone before did the heavy lifting. Above all, we have what others before did not have—the need to act before all society is undermined.”

“Who can lead us through this? We really don’t encourage leadership. We encourage folks to ‘play for the team.’”

“What constitutes leadership seems to slip away from time to time, as political footnote Dan Quayle, trying to become President, discovered to his embarrassment when he claimed to be a leader but failed to lead because he didn’t understand it. Leadership is not “Follow me!” Leaders help people discover for themselves what is important and why. Leaders act like scribes, crafting understanding and accessible explanations of legitimate hopes and desires. Leadership does not take people where they

would not wish to go. It treats politics not as a war to victory or death, but as a means to come to understanding. This country calls for leadership, not followership. George Washington wrote, ‘A people unused to restraint must be led; they will not be drove.’”

“How does one discover a wiser path to follow?”

“Don’t take my advice. Find useful processes and experience from what has gone before. Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) was a great Muslim polymath, a sociologist, historian, and author of *Muqaddimah*, one of six volumes on the universal history of the world. He described government as ‘an institution which prevents injustice other than such as it commits itself.’ Khaldun warned that the bonds of community, called *asabiyyah*, could warp society at any level from small to large. Mohammed described *asabiyyah* as valuing the unworthy of your people more than the worthy of others.”

“Thanks for the warnings, but, again, which path is wiser to follow?”

“Khaldun wrote on historiography, discovering in the flaws of earlier historians the need for humility. He emphasized Hegelian or Marxian dialectic—feedback loops—a process of continuous re-evaluation necessary because—and this is the keystone of wisdom—sometimes we think we are right simply because we think we are right.

“Negotiating our way through life, we are interested in the simple daily problems of living such as dealing with people and dealing with the loops that we get into in our own minds. Loops that we have described happen every day in thought. We’ve learned not to blindly trust what we think simply because we are the ones who think the thought.

“Seneca, writing about 50 AD admitted he read the opposition because he presumed he had no lock on truth. To disagree with one’s opposition, one has to know why and to have reasons that stand up to scrutiny for the positions one takes. Rationality was a standard during Voltaire’s Enlightenment. It proved insufficient. We need to be more than rational. Rationality is a tool to

encourage consistency in what we think. Simple wisdoms from experience encourage process and perspective to help make the simple daily problems of living more manageable.

“Our goal is to lift ourselves just that much above the rest of the animal kingdom and the law of the jungle, to manufacture an umbrella to protect us using a process of peaceful problem resolution that others learn to trust and embrace in their self-interest as their own.”

“How do you tell constructive ideas from destructive ones? And then how do you inoculate people to defend themselves sensibly?”

“First, call on Karl Popper, the philosopher of science, who reminded people that science is not about truth, but about doubt. Science is a test for falsity that helps prune ideas that don’t stand up to experience. Otherwise, in one kind of arrogance, people become convinced that their own ambitions are worth the suffering of others.”

“What is true one cannot know, but science helps one understand what is not true.”

“Recursion, a useful feedback technique demonstrated in art by Escher, in history by Khaldun, and in literature by Laing and Hofstadter, is a slippery process by which you can think about thinking about thinking, but it’s a double-edged sword that must be used carefully.”

“Hofstadter delved into the organization of thought processes and Jaynes did other research on historical foundations of religions. Both suggest traditional foundations of ethics and morality need not be found in religion or natural law, and that they may get in the way. The foundations of religion and the so-called eternal truths are the business of cultures that operate on top of the framework of society.

“Cultures are like the pile of a carpet, varying in color, shape, texture, length, thickness, and material, while the minimum requirements for society are like the warp and weft of the carpet beneath the pile that hold cultures together.

“The warp and weft provide the structure for stitching together

society. Without the warp and weft threads supporting the carpet, all that exists is a pile of pile. Nothing holds the carpet together. Warp and weft are worth defending because absent society’s supporting threads citizens risk either serfdom or slavery.

“Many seem recognize that ethical bases are challenged, but nobody seems to say so. Look at society. Society doesn’t know why it should be decent. All of my generation is asking why? Why should I do this? Why should I believe in that?”

“Individuals create society. Individuals are society. Regard for individuals is the basis for societal ethics. Society offers individuals knowledge and trade. That carries extra weight today now that individuals can no longer retreat to the frontier to avoid society the way our forefathers could.

“Good reasons for being decent and honorable can be built from a foundation of the few ideas that we have deduced from personal experience. The warp and weft that hold the carpet of cultures together are few—the minimums required for social interaction are few:

- The possibility that one just might be wrong, and, the humility that falls out of that doubt,
- The possibility that communication with others who are equally involved can help.

“Ethics are derived from those understandings. There is nothing more to ethics than that individuals matter.

“From the two minimums of society, simple wisdoms can be deduced. Simple wisdoms, although common and everyday, are not currently central to curricula and catechisms. While they have been written about for millennia, they may not be universally taught. Perhaps that’s because teachers are themselves only former students from the same schools.

“Processes are the type of thought that matters. Processes help prune what does not work and reinforce what does. If drops of water in a river represent that which is understood, then boulders along the shores that guide the flow of knowledge represent the dynamic processes of thought. Half a dozen simple wisdoms



accessible to anybody channel the flow constructively, but we don't habitually teach them. They include:

- 1) A sense of time;
- 2) A sense of self;
- 3) A sense of others—that other people live as acutely as we do, that the pain another person feels is no different than the pain that I feel;
- 4) That we are mortal—that just as surely as close as nightfall is we shall be that close to our own deaths;
- 5) That each person's fundamental purpose is to negotiate his way through life with decent quality of life;
- 6) That since I can recall having been painfully mistaken in the past, I can be wary of being mistaken now or in the future;
- 7) That because I might be in error, I must constantly solicit information and constantly re-evaluate my decisions;
- 8) That while there may be no such thing as absolute truth, there are likely consistent truths for each pass through the process although subject to revision on the basis of better information;
- 9) That the difference between fantasy and reality is a boundary that must be understood. When you deny what is, you are possessed by what is not. That our planning requires us to look at things the way they honestly are rather than the way we would like them to be.

“What's more, these concepts are scalable. They apply to individuals, small groups, large groups, states, and nations.

“Simple, practical, common wisdoms have been with us for all of our written history. They are found in the works of great thinkers like Confucius, Seneca, Mohammed, Jesus, Locke, Marx, and others. Simple wisdoms are concepts that help us understand where great thinkers made mistakes and why, within the limits of their time, they might have done so.

“These process metaphors apply to our simple daily living. Confucius taught the sense that other people exist, “Don't do to anybody else what you wouldn't have them do to you” in the form of the Golden Rule phrased as a negative, and much more practical way of expressing the idea. Karl Marx followed Hegel's notion that we must constantly evaluate where we are. He

fostered a process by which we can examine the way things are; the way we can use time. Unfortunately, and to the pain of millions, after he developed the tool his successors mistook a single iteration, rather than continuous review, to be process.

“When Richard Nixon says, ‘I am not a crook’, can you trust it? When Jim Jones in Guyana claims to know the righteous path, can you trust it? When Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran claims his is the one true way, can you trust it? When some claim ‘America, right or wrong’, can you trust it? My generation asked ‘Why?’ and overlooked good answers. Don't let popular talk about morality confuse you. When televangelists talk about morality or even former presidents like Jimmy Carter talk about morality, their morality is a static thing learned by rote and, if not unfounded, is selfishly contrived for them. Morality is a process of thoughtfulness and using perspective. It is dynamic. It changes, but it is not relative because it follows from understanding able to be deduced independently.

“We may be approaching a watershed in societal thought, both outside, in society, and inside, how we think. Look at previous watersheds: transition from wandering tribes to an agrarian society, the invention of a horse-driven plow to get beyond subsistence farming, invention of numbers in geometry and trigonometry, development of writing, invention of moveable type, the first industrial revolution that specialized function for people's jobs and harnessed external power, the current second industrial revolution of robotics.

“Couple that with a new appreciation how to enable people to become self-actualized learners, responsible for their own growth as individuals and *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia* are at hand. *Anagnorisis* is a moment in literature when a character makes a critical discovery, and *peripeteia* is a sudden reversal, a turning point dependent on intellect and logic. That opportunity is upon us and happening none to soon.”

“Why do you think so?”

“Once you figure why society matters, you can advocate for it. Once you learn why society matters, you become armed to defend it. The next 10 or 20 years are going to be socially

devastating. Consider the city of Rome, N.Y. which was substantially a mill town at one time. People who worked in mills did repetitive tasks with minimal decision-making. Such jobs have evaporated for the substantial part of our working population who traditionally did complex mechanical non-decision-making projects.

“That’s cataclysmic but no different from the agrarian-urban migration happened a hundred years ago. Change is upon us, yet we have little wealth to draw upon to cushion the transition. We need to marshal the tools to cope while we preserve the society that allows people to keep their liberty and individuality.

“We have ourselves and not much else but community. But that is okay. We can bootstrap ourselves into a better future. Any other alternative would be crushing.”