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Background

THE IMPETUS FOR THIS PROJECT

Like many other people of my generation, I was greatly inspired by the social change movements of the 1960s and disappointed when they fizzled out. My upbringing and temperament have compelled me to learn why these movements arose and what might have enabled them to continue. I am fortunate to have had a variety of experiences that suggest some possible answers to these questions. This book describes what I have found.

My Early Inspiration

Raised in the conservative Bible-belt city of Tyler, Texas, in the 1950s and 1960s, I was taught I should strive to be a good person. I did my best and assumed other people did too. Yet, when I looked around, I saw that adults did not treat each other very well (and they treated children worse). Moreover, I saw that my neighbors, teachers, and sometimes even my own family did not always promote virtue. Instead, they often accepted and tolerated pretense, servility, cruelty, oppression, exploitation, and violence. It both frightened and angered me when I realized my elders sometimes lied and the world was not as benevolent as I had been led to believe.

One day in elementary school, my teacher brought in a stack of old *Life* magazines. Leafing through these magazines, I came across a picture of an American soldier carrying a rifle in one hand. His other arm was bleeding and part of it had been shot off. As I stared at this savage war image boldly emblazoned in a popular magazine, I realized that something was very wrong with our entire society. I saw that humans sometimes deliberately inflicted horrible suffering on each other. I realized that the cruelty, fear, hatred, indifference, and hypocrisy I sometimes saw around me were not just family eccentricities or local aberrations, but were endemic to our whole society. I wanted to believe that our society condemned brutality and evil, but at that moment, I realized these things were actually accepted, tolerated, and even glorified.

I vowed to find a way to make the world better if I could. But what should I do? At first I accepted the popular idea that there were evil people who caused all our problems (Communists, homosexuals, and drug addicts were usually the designated monsters) and that to improve society required only locking them up or killing them. However, over time, I realized this simplistic notion was mistaken. I saw that other people were very much like me,

> *It is privilege that causes evil in the world, not wickedness, and not men.* — Lincoln Steffens

not innately good or evil but just human, convulsed by positive and negative forces that propel them one way or another. With this more mature understanding, I realized that creating a good society would require changing these forces so they blew in more positive directions for everyone. So I began to search for ways to shift the forceful winds of society.

The Encouraging Sixties

As I came of age during the late 1960s and early 1970s, I listened to songs of love and struggle on the radio and watched the many mass movements for political change on TV. The anti-Vietnam war movement, a variety of liberation movements, and the movement to develop cooperative alternatives flourished throughout the nation. Millions of people were passionately fighting for justice and equality. Despite the violence and tragedies of this period, it was a time of great optimism. Hope for the future seemed to encompass our entire society.

In high school, I let my hair grow long, attended memorials for alumni of my school who had died in Vietnam, and wore a black armband for the war dead. I spoke out against racism, wrote letters to the editor of my school paper, and tried to create a community of love and support with my friends. Social change and the potential for creating a better society excited me, but I was also confused and appalled by the violence, hatred, and reckless frenzy that seemed to be a part of progressive change efforts. Though much of what I saw disturbed me, I could also see the potential for remarkable positive change.

The Inspiring Seventies

As the '60s slid into the '70s, militant rhetoric and revolutionary/apocalyptic posturing grew stale and faded away. Across the country, progressive activists instead quietly implemented many of the ideals formulated and tentatively tested in the '60s.

I remained fascinated by progressive change. However, I was wary of the dishonest and coercive tactics I had seen practiced in electoral politics, and I was critical of the often foolish and misdirected attempts at change that I saw elsewhere. I diligently read books about socialism, feminism, pacifism, humanism, environmentalism, radical education, and anything else I could find that might provide insight into how the world functioned and how to make it better. Still, I stayed on the periphery of most political activity and pursued a conventional career as a mechanical engineer. The depression, anorexia, and suicide of a close friend in 1973 further confused and depressed me, even as it intensified my desire for sweeping change. I was poised for action, but leery of getting involved.

It was not until 1976, in my last year attending Stanford University, that I was drawn into working actively for social change. That year, I moved into a cooperative house with forty-two other students, including several experienced progressive activists with inspiring visions of a good society. These activists worked diligently to implement their ideas — both in the world and in our house. For the first time in my life, I directly experienced what a good society might be like — and I was thoroughly impressed. The goals of these activists were noble, and the work they did was admirable. They had a lot of fun too.

Soon I was working with them to end South African apartheid. I felt fortunate to work with experienced, dedicated activists who knew how to design effective and powerful change campaigns and also knew how to maintain a playful, loving attitude towards their friends and adversaries. It was inspiring and empowering to work with them.

After graduating, I worked with the Abalone Alliance to challenge the nuclear power industry and with the Center for Economic Conversion to shift military corporations to socially beneficial production. I lived in several cooperative households and learned to counsel people in emotional distress. These experiences further excited and tantalized me with the prospects for transforming society.

As I worked for change, my vision of a good society grew clearer. I read more books on cooperation, participatory democracy, self-esteem, nonviolence, education, socialism, anarchism, and feminism. I picked up ideas from utopian novels like ***News from Nowhere***, ***Ecotopia, Ecotopia Emerging, The Dispossessed***, and ***The Kin of Ata are Waiting for You***. None of these works presented a complete or entirely realistic vision. Still, combined with my positive living experiences, they sketched the outlines of a desirable and viable society.

Some Accomplishments

This was a very exciting time. The Abalone Alliance's powerful effort to stop the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant and other nukes in California — and to promote environmentally benign alternatives — was largely successful. We delayed Diablo for six years, stopped all the other nuclear plants on the drawing board, assisted the passage of legislation to encourage solar energy and conservation, and helped to launch an alternative energy industry. Our organization grew exponentially from just a handful of people to thousands.

Moreover, the Alliance was structured as an egalitarian and supportive community in which we encouraged each other to strive toward our best selves. We developed gentle, yet effective, processes for cooperatively making decisions and working together. We also developed and used powerful nonviolent tools for challenging injustice, inequality, oppression, and domination, both within our ranks and in the wider world. We created a prototype of a just and compassionate society.

As I stood with my colleagues singing songs of struggle and love at the gates of Diablo Canyon, Livermore Labs, and Fort Ord, I knew what it was like to really live — to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with other people, to boldly fight oppression and injustice, to courageously risk my career and my life for something truly important, to love people deeply, to cherish all of humanity.

What if everyone did this? What if the whole world were like this? What if our daily lives had this same camaraderie and loving spirit?

While we developed an outstanding campaign around safe energy, other progressive activists had done equally admirable work on other issues. The Freeze movement to stop and reverse the nuclear arms race was growing rapidly and garnering massive support. On June 12, 1982, one of the largest political demonstrations in the United States brought together a million people who marched through New York City and vigorously advocated disarmament. Polls at this time showed about three-quarters of the public supported a bilateral nuclear weapons freeze.

At this same time, the campaign to end U.S. military and economic domination of Central American countries began to take off, and campus activity against South African apartheid was spreading. Resistance to registering for the military draft was also strong. The campaigns to end environmental destruction, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and domestic violence were developing rapidly. Cooperative grocery stores and other alternative enterprises flourished. Therapy and support groups helped thousands of people work through emotional injuries and overcome their limitations. Internationally, nonviolent movements challenged governmental domination in Iran, the Philippines, and Poland. In West Germany, the Green Party secured a place in the government and promoted political and social ideas similar to those of the Abalone Alliance.

There were, of course, many problems with change groups — flakiness, inefficiency, foolish blunders, manipulation, infighting, naïveté, cynicism, and so on. Still, our problems seemed mostly petty and solvable if we just kept plugging away, learning from our mistakes, and improving. Admittedly, we made many mistakes. And overall there were not that many people working for real progressive change. Still, we seemed to be moving in the right direction. It felt to me that we were building — slowly but surely — what Martin Luther King, Jr. called "the beloved community."

A Promising Vision

By the early 1980s, I was expecting an even greater level of nonviolent political activity. I hoped it would lead directly to significant, fundamental change in the United States and to a much better society. I could easily imagine that our nonviolent change movements would continue to grow and involve an ever-larger number of people. I assumed our organizations would continuously develop, broaden, and mature until they were strong and wise enough to address all the important problems of society. I imagined that more and more people would have increasingly greater power to shape society, and they would be ever more sensible in exercising this power.

After watching activists employ a wide array of powerful methods to bring about change, and seeing them achieve incredible successes, transforming society seemed within reach. It appeared possible that we could eventually stop military saber rattling by the world's nations, halt destruction of the environment, and end the domination of people (and of other beings). It seemed within reach to restrain and then reform thieves, gang members, thugs, batterers, rapists, drug lords, pimps, mobsters, slumlords, corporate fat cats, power-hungry politicians, tyrannical authorities, and everyone else who made our society miserable. It seemed quite possible to end corruption, oppression, poverty, illiteracy, alcoholism, rape, battering, homelessness, racism, sexism, and all the rest.

One man with an idea in his head is in danger of being considered a madman: two men with the same idea in common may be foolish, but can hardly be mad; ten men sharing an idea begin to act, a hundred draw attention as fanatics, a thousand and society begins to tremble, a hundred thousand and there is war abroad, and the cause has victories tangible and real; and why only a hundred thousand? Why not a hundred million and peace upon the earth? You and I who agree together, it is we who have to answer that question. — William Morris[1]

Two Steps Forward, Two Steps Back — The Potential Unrealized

But it did not happen that way. Instead, at every level the power structure fought back and thwarted our efforts. For example, in 1981 the Reagan administration and the New Right came to power and systematically dismantled, overturned, or undermined the alternatives we had started to build. They distorted and ridiculed our best ideas, and the news media amplified their criticism. The resources we needed to develop our projects evaporated. The economy soured and those of us who had voluntarily labored for the common good were forced to take whatever jobs we could find. Under the weight of this assault, our communities of support were stretched so thin that they snapped, flinging people apart.

Meanwhile, those who promoted and best exploited individualism, greed, militarism, racism, sexism, classism,

homophobia, and hatred (people such as Dan Quayle, Patrick Buchanan, Rush Limbaugh, and Newt Gingrich) were lauded and abundantly rewarded. Those politicians who best groveled before wealthy donors were able to stay in office while those of conscience were challenged and many were turned out. Many positive accomplishments were reversed, eroded, co-opted, or forgotten, including such important, hard-fought victories as progressive income tax rates, anti-discrimination laws, access to safe abortion, pollution abatement laws, and lowered military budgets. Progressives continued to fight for positive change, but we had only limited success.

Now, at the dawn of a new century, we are still in a situation where a tiny minority of people makes most of the important decisions of society, and they generally make decisions that primarily benefit favored groups. In this era, the public passively accedes to preposterous, Far Right solutions: missile defense to solve the danger of nuclear annihilation; tax cuts for the rich and cutbacks of anti-poverty programs to solve the problem of government interference in our lives; finger-wagging moralism to solve the problems of teenage pregnancy, poverty, drug abuse, and AIDS; tougher laws and more prisons to address the problem of crime; and a massive military budget, xenophobic rhetoric, and support of murderous foreign armies to solve the "problem" of Third World countries' rejection of U.S. control. Great sums have been squandered on sordid savings and loan deals and wasted on superfluous military equipment. The rich are richer, the poor are poorer, and the crazy are crazier. Weapons abound, and our fragile world environment is more polluted and battered — natural resources consumed, the ozone layer breached, fertile topsoil washed away, groundwater depleted, and numerous species decimated.

At this time, progressives have little influence in Congress. Peace groups, social justice organizations, environmental groups, and social service agencies all scramble for limited funds. Some progressive activists who once struggled against injustice with every ounce of their being now just struggle to get by. Many who once reached for the stars now just reach for a beer. For many, hopefulness has disintegrated into bitter hopelessness.

The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. — World War II General Omar Bradley

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Even more disheartening is that this is not the first time this has happened. Looking back through history, we find similar movements for progressive change — the populist movement of the late 1800s, the socialist movement of the early 1900s, the labor struggle of the 1930s and '40s, the civil rights and antiwar movements of the '60s — faltered just when they began to have some impact.

After tallying up our limited accomplishments and many setbacks, skeptics suggest we may be engaged in a futile struggle — the issues and scenery change, but we never really get any closer to the beloved community. These skeptics suggest that creating a good society is just a hopeless pipe dream.

In analyzing history, there appears to be a cyclic pattern: we begin each new political endeavor full of hope and inspiration and struggle gallantly for several years. Then, at some point, our efforts are overturned by the established powers, subverted by competing aspirants, wrecked by our dumb mistakes, or gutted by our own infighting. Sometimes we achieve victories, but for every struggle we win, it seems we lose another. Moreover, we must zealously defend our few victories forevermore or they are snatched away from us.

Just because everything is different doesn't mean anything has changed.
— Irene Peter

Why does it happen this way? What can we do about it? How can we create a good society conclusively — in a way that is not soon undone and in which those who oppose and undermine it today would instead cherish and support it?

These are crucial questions — ones that we must answer if we are to bring about fundamental positive transformation of society.

Sit down before fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever abysses Nature leads, or you shall learn nothing.
— Thomas Huxley

PERHAPS THE TIMES JUST AREN'T RIPE FOR CHANGE

Many theorists postulate that massive change can only take place when the times are right: when conditions are so horrible that almost everyone demands change and society's traditional institutions can no longer offer viable solutions. They argue that only at these times of crisis can truly revolutionary change occur and that change will *inevitably* occur at these times.

Certainly, widespread misery creates a climate for change, and critical events can then trigger a revolution. However, centuries of misery and innumerable revolutions have still not led to fundamental progressive transformation. Misery often leads only to more misery. Revolutions usually just disrupt and destroy the existing society; from the ashes, it is difficult to rebuild and establish a new, positive society.

Instead, militarists and opportunists typically rush in to restore order and seize power for themselves.

The United States seems especially adept at weathering change without transforming in any basic way. For example, successful struggles for democracy in the past now mean that fewer groups of people are excluded from voting than before, but still a privileged minority control most of society. Slavery is now illegal and women can escape the confines of their households, but poverty and wage slavery are still widespread and restrain people in many of the same ways. Roads and cars have lessened many hardships but have ravaged the environment. European powers no longer maintain colonial domination over the world, but now the United States military imposes a "sphere of influence" and multinational corporations wield economic dominance over most people of the world.

The times are never particularly fortuitous for fundamental change. Historical events induce change, but they do not necessarily lead to positive change. If we want transformation, we must take the initiative and *create* it ourselves. When historical events produce openings for change, we must be ready with positive policy measures and strong organizations that can push for their enactment.

IS IT EVEN POSSIBLE?

Is it even possible to create a good society? Maybe it is an impossible task — like building a perpetual motion machine or remaining forever young. Perhaps human nature is so innately vile or the circumstances of reality are so austere that a good society is unachievable.

Most of the things worth doing in the world had been declared impossible before they were done. — Louis D. Brandeis

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Are Humans Innately Evil?

Throughout recorded history, religious leaders and philosophers have suggested that greed and belligerence are innate human characteristics — dictated by vindictive gods, a wily Satan, or the cruel dictates of evolution in a world of limited resources. Some have suggested that each of us has an inherent "dark side" that makes us greedy, irrational, angry, depressed, jealous, arrogant, and cruel.

It is true that human nature drives us to secure food, water, shelter, love, and sex and that this regularly puts us in conflict with others. Moreover, we have an aggressive side that enables us to kill prey, steal food from other animals (or people), and threaten our predators. Our hormones stimulate a sexual craving that can drive us to distraction for large parts of our lives. However, these drives certainly do not indicate that we are wicked, and they are not beyond our control. We can consciously decide how to act.

Admittedly, people can be completely out of control at times. Severe thirst, hunger, or deprivation will compel us relentlessly to find a way to satisfy our cravings, even at others' expense. Threat of mortal danger will make us fearful and stimulate a rush of adrenaline into our bloodstream, preparing us for an extremely powerful "fight or flight" response. Moreover, whenever someone attacks our sense of worth by insulting, taunting, or mocking us, we may explode with rage.

However, each of these is a defensive response to protect our bodies and our sense of worth from immediate danger. Each is an appropriate response to a particular situation and subsides when the danger passes.

Research over the past few decades indicates that extreme and enduring negative emotions — grudges, malevolence, phobias, depression, arrogance, cruelty — are conditioned responses to brutal or long-term oppression.[2] When people are severely traumatized or routinely neglected or battered, they swallow the hurt in a way that makes it come back out twisted and merciless — resulting in inappropriate reactions and intense, persistent negative feelings. In short: severe oppression induces wickedness. People who act badly are not evil — they are emotionally injured. If they had never been mistreated or if they had had a chance to heal, they would not act maliciously.

Of course, some people are truly psychotic or schizophrenic. They apparently have chemical imbalances in their brains that make them deranged. Since they are insane and not responsible for their actions, they too cannot be considered evil. Moreover, their condition can now sometimes be treated with drugs.

It is also true that children in our society are taught many evil ideas. Parents may inadvertently pass on oppressive attitudes like racism, sexism, ageism, classism, heterosexism, and so forth whenever they teach their children about the world or read them a story. Some parents, teachers, and church elders explicitly teach children to fear or detest other people based solely on their appearance, speech, beliefs, or practices.*

No one is born a bigot. — Bumpersticker

Many children are also indirectly taught behavior that is unsuitable in a civilized society. Society's leaders justify war, violence, and coercion if carried out by "duly appointed authorities." They often wink at acts of deception, corruption, and theft if committed by the beautiful, rich, or powerful. A great deal of advertising encourages gluttony, greed,

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* Some people have argued that prejudice is natural and irrevocable. However, until children are taught prejudice, they have no understanding of it — they see difference, but do not judge. Many people raised in bigoted households have refused to adopt prejudice, and many others who have been deeply imbued with prejudice have overcome it. So prejudice is clearly not inherent in humans.

lust, and envy. To a great extent, our culture passively tolerates date rape and battering of women and children.

Evil ideas can be learned, and in our current society, they are learned by many people. But evil ideas can also be unlearned or never taught in the first place.

Overall, there is little evidence that humans are *inherently* evil. To the contrary, much evidence suggests that humans are naturally cooperative and loving.

• That we are usually shocked and appalled by war, violence, rape, intimidation, and terror (rather than bored, comforted, or delighted by it) attests to our good nature. When people are hurt or cry, our empathy moves us to comfort them and respond to their needs. Typically, our greatest joy comes from laughing and playing with others.

• That six billion of us can coexist on this tiny planet, mostly without incident, indicates that we are amiable beings. Every day, each of us typically encounters hundreds of people. Generally, other people are nice to us, and we courteously reciprocate. People seldom wage war against their neighbors, and when they do, it is unusual enough to be newsworthy.[3]

• That some people can endure ruthless torture extending over years and still be compassionate towards other people (sometimes even toward their torturers) indicates how great is humankind's potential for love, forgiveness, and reconciliation

Moreover, humans have many inherent traits that counter whatever bad side we might have. For example, altruism *is* probably an inherent human trait since it makes evolutionary sense: those who help their family, community, and species are more likely to ensure that their offspring survive than those who work only for themselves.[4]

This is not to say that humans are perfect. We all make mistakes, and we regularly hurt others. Nevertheless, our ability to make mistakes does not mean we are inherently evil, and it does not prevent us from creating a good society.

Some families are not dysfunctional. Some schools nurture and support children. Some people are healthy, rational, self-assured, compassionate, and nonviolent. If some people can be this way, why not everyone?

Is There a Shortage of Critical Resources?

Every human requires a certain amount of resources — air, water, food, shelter, and so on — to have a good life. If there were not enough critical resources for everyone, then it would be impossible to create a good society. No matter how cooperative and compassionate we were, our society would still be miserable if, for example, we were all starving — at best, we could only share our misery equally and democratically. If there are not enough critical resources in the

world, then the best possible society might be one like our own in which some people live well, others live miserably, and powerful armed forces, working at the behest of the rich, ensure it stays this way.

There might have been times in the past when our world was constrained by critical resource shortages, perhaps in prehistoric times during ice ages or more recently during periods of prolonged drought or flood. Now, however, our world is assuredly not this way.

As an example, consider food supplies. Researchers at the Institute for Food and Development Policy (Food First) have shown that there is enough food to adequately feed every person on earth — even enough in each of the poorest countries to feed every person in that country.[5] They find that all that is missing is real democracy that would enable those at the bottom to exert control over the distribution of societal resources.

Our current world also has supplies of clean water, shelter, and basic healthcare adequate to meet the needs of every person. Shortages of these resources now only occur in those places where people are at the mercy of powerful armies. Furthermore, there are no real shortages of human interaction, community, and love — these are only in short supply when our shyness, fear, and cultural hangups get in the way. Hence, there appear to be sufficient resources to create a society that meets the basic needs of everyone in the world.

The world has more than enough resources to accelerate progress in human development for all and to eradicate the worst forms of poverty from the planet. Advancing human development is not an exorbitant undertaking. For example, it has been estimated that the total additional yearly investment required to achieve universal access to basic social services would be roughly $40 billion, 0.1% of world income, barely more than a rounding error. That covers the bill for basic education, health, nutrition, reproductive health, family planning, and safe water and sanitation for all.
— United Nations Development Programme[6]

Moreover, I believe our world is rich enough to provide more than just the basics. In 1995, $865 billion (2.8% of the world monetary economy) was devoted to producing military equipment and supporting military personnel.[7] A good society could redirect these resources to fulfilling human needs.

Moreover, we could use our resources much more efficiently. Most western European countries have high standards of living, similar to the United States, yet consume far fewer resources than here. In addition, fewer resources would be needed if products were made to last and to be recycled when they reached the end of their life. Even fewer resources would be needed if we could reduce the world's population. This should be feasible in a good society.

Are There No Viable Solutions?

If humans are not inherently evil and if we are capable of adjusting to real world resource limitations, then why have we not yet created a good society? Are the difficulties just too large and intractable?

In this world, problems are inevitable. Humans are eternally vulnerable to weather, disease, pests, and predators. As independent individuals, we often disagree with each other. Our wants and needs frequently conflict. Clearly, there is no way we will ever be able to eliminate all problems and conflicts.

However, for centuries, social explorers have searched for ways to grapple with social problems, and they have discovered many remedies that solve or mitigate them. Over the years, these explorers have tested their solutions and recorded them for the benefit of others.

Especially in the last century, the expansion of detailed, systematic research and advances in the technology of recording and communicating ideas have enabled researchers to discover and disseminate many ingenious and practical solutions to some of the most vexing of society's problems. They have developed means to negotiate treaties between warring nations, to cooperatively resolve conflicts, to organize efficient and just economic systems, to raise children to be self-confident, self-reliant, and emotionally healthy, to heal people from horrible emotional traumas, and to challenge injustice, repel violence, and topple oppressive governments. Figure 1.1 shows six solutions developed over the last few centuries that address some of the most difficult and seemingly intractable problems.

No matter how cynical you get, it is impossible to keep up. — Lily Tomlin

As an example, consider one of the more formidable problems facing humankind — the problem of "evil" people who viciously attack others. As described in the previous section, psychologists have determined that much of this evil is imbued in childhood through brutal trauma. If children are not brutalized, they do not become malicious. For those who are brutalized, intensive emotional therapy can heal much of the injury over time. Those few people whose trauma cannot be healed could be restrained so they do not hurt others. They could be kept away from society in humane homes, designed not to punish but only to prevent them from hurting anyone else.

In summary, the problem of "evil" people could be mostly solved by protecting people from brutalization, counseling those who were hurt, and humanely restraining those who could not be counseled back to health. If these solutions were applied widely, then the problem of "evil" people would shrink to insignificance and would not prevent us from creating a good society.

Other solutions are not as well known, but also exist.* Generally, the more I have searched for solutions, the more solutions I have discovered. And the more I investigate them, the more impressed I am with them.

I am convinced there are viable solutions to *every* critical, human-caused problem that plagues our world. For every type of disagreement, conflict, and confrontation in the world, no matter how unyielding it appears, invariably someone has solved a similar problem at least once somewhere, sometime.

Clearly, many problems are not always solved well. For every time an effective solution is applied well to a problem, there are hundreds of other times when the wrong solution or no solution is applied, leading to worthless or counterproductive results.

What exists, is possible. — Kenneth Boulding

Nevertheless, if there is a way to solve a problem once, then obviously it is not an *impossible* problem — it *can* be solved. Conceivably, we could solve it every single time if we could just apply the known solution. Nothing must be discovered or invented. No laws of physics must be overturned. We need only to learn of these solutions, pass them on to the people who need them, and then help those folks obtain the necessary resources (time, money, people-power, expertise, and so on) to apply them well. Certainly these are daunting tasks, but they are not impossible.

Is Society Too Far Gone?

Perhaps there are so many problems intertwined so tightly into a miserable mess that it is impossible to untangle them all. If so, then we could never create a good society.

At times, I have certainly felt this was the case. There are so many problems, they are so tangled, and they are so persistent that they seem overwhelming. Fortunately, we live in a time when similarly complex problems are routinely solved.

For example, before it was done, putting a human on the moon seemed like an impossible task — one with a myriad of conflicting problems that would require tens of thousands of people to work together to create almost flawless equipment. Though extremely difficult, this task was accomplished. Achieving this goal required engineers to develop several whole new disciplines (including project management and systems engineering) and to expand others greatly — such as the field of quality control.

It is difficult to say what is impossible, for the dream of yesterday is the hope of today and the reality of tomorrow. — Robert H. Goddard, pioneering rocket scientist

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* Chapter 2 describes many of these solutions. The books listed in the Methods of Changing Society section of Chapter 12 describe many more.

It also once seemed too complex to solve the problem of integrating people of vastly different cultures into a single nation. But over the last two hundred years, the United States has demonstrated that it is possible — though our society obviously still needs a great deal more work. Achieving this goal required developing and spreading two new concepts: the idea that people could integrate into another culture and then, later, the even better concept of a diverse multicultural society.

There are many problems that once seemed too complex to solve — until they were solved. To date, humans have been able to solve virtually every problem they consistently and unambiguously devoted effort to solving (within the constraints of physics). People living a few hundred years ago would consider our now commonplace technologies (like jet aircraft, computers, and the Internet) and social systems (like national healthcare and the system of libraries) to be extraordinary, almost unimaginable accomplishments. The problems we now face seem insurmountably complicated, but they too may only require systematic sorting and solving.

Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.
— Arthur C. Clarke, science fiction author

Figure 1.1: Seemingly Impossible Problems and Some Viable Solutions

"Impossible" Problem	Underlying New Paradigms	Viable Solution	Primary Methods	Some Main Developers
Disease, natural disasters, superstition, irrationality	Reality is consistent, understandable, testable, and changeable by humans	Scientific method of analysis (leading to technological solutions)	Hypothesis-testing, open debate and challenge	Hundreds of people including Aristotle and Plato
Oppressive powerholders who cannot be persuaded to change their ways and, when violently overthrown, are replaced by equally oppressive rulers	Powerholders are dependent on the support or at least passive consent of thousands of others	Nonviolent struggle	Withdrawal of support for powerholders — when the consent is withdrawn, the powerholder must change or lose power; care for and personal support of adversaries while requiring them to change their destructive behavior	Thoreau, Tolstoy, Gandhi, King, and thousands of others
"Evil" — aggression, malicious, wanton violence	Humans are inherently decent, but they are conditioned by destructive cultural conditioning and dysfunctional emotional conditioning	Education, loving attention, emotional therapy and healing	Education, meditation, solitude, journal writing, emotional counseling, emotional catharsis, prayer, community support, nonviolent struggle	Psychologists, religious leaders, "New Age" activists
Rigidity, prejudice, intolerance, dogmatism, obsession, compulsion, inhibition	In a safe environment, humans will rise to their full human potential and be powerful, loving, responsible actors	Emotional/ spiritual growth practices	Loving, respectful childrearing; emotional counseling, structured exercises, games, rituals, role-playing, and other experiences carefully designed to shake us out of our old rigid patterns and let us explore and practice new ways of acting in a safe, controlled environment	Human Potential movement, advocates of loving, respectful childrearing, spiritual organizations
Conflicts over beliefs or resources	There are mutually satisfactory solutions to real problems	Consensus decision process, conflict resolution	Cooperative decision-making, principled negotiation, mediation, conflict resolution	Quakers, nonviolent activists, arms control experts
Mind control — human susceptibility to cults, manipulation, and propaganda; mob behavior	When raised to think for themselves, humans are intelligent and responsible	Individual empowerment and personal responsibility	Empowering childrearing and educational methods in which children are given responsibility and allowed to make mistakes without harsh criticism	Jefferson, Bakunin, radical education movement

REASONS FOR HOPE

After considering these arguments, I conclude that it is possible to create a good society — there are no insoluble problems, nothing that is physically impossible or culturally unachievable. Humans created this society and we re-create it every day — we can create another kind of society if we try. Of course, this does not mean it will be easy. We face strong and widespread opposition at every level. Creating a good society will require more effort than we have ever exerted before.

Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed. — UNESCO Constitution, 1946

Still, many factors make it not only possible to create a good society but make it much easier than we might expect. Whenever I feel discouraged, I try to review these points.

• Most People Have Experienced a Bit of a Good Society

At some point in their lives, most people experience periods of kindness or peace that provide them with an inkling of what a good society could be like. These times may only last a short while, they may involve only a spouse or a few close friends, or they may only exist in a movie or book, but they suggest what a wider good society might be like. When people experience these moments, they generally wish they could prolong them. This leads to the next point…

• Most People Want a Good Society — We Are All on the Same Side

I have never met anyone who did not want life to be good for herself and others. Virtually all people would like to live in a just and compassionate society where they have control over their lives — a world of respect, joy, love, and laughter.

Admittedly, many people cannot imagine such a society, most do not believe it can or will ever come to pass, and everyone has different notions about how that society would be configured. Moreover, some people's ideas, if implemented, would infringe on the happiness of others. And, of course, some people would rather keep our existing society, since in their present positions of power and affluence they are doing quite well.

Nevertheless, I believe that most people do want a good society and would be willing to devote some effort to create it. Since most people want a good society, when we are truly working towards that goal, then all these people are on our side.

• Most People Agree about the Basic Elements of a Good Society

Almost everyone agrees about the basic components of a good society. For example, no one wants to be hurt, so everyone can understand that no one else would ever want to be hurt either. Therefore, everyone understands the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Most people assume a good society would stand on this principle and assume that in a good society no one would be oppressed or exploited.

Similarly, most people's vision of a good society would ensure everyone had her basic needs met for air, water, food, shelter, safety, warmth, healthcare, meaningful work, leisure, exercise, community, and love. If pressed, most people would also probably acknowledge that in a good society disagreements would have to be worked out in mutually satisfying ways — no one should be able to just impose her will on another.

Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you. — Confucius, *Analects* 15.23

This is the sum of duty: do naught to others which if done to thee would cause thee pain. — *The Mahabharata*, 5,1517

What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah; all the rest of it is commentary. — *Talmud,* Shabbat 31a

As you wish that men would do to you, do so to them. — Luke 6:31, Matthew 7:12 (RSV)

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. — Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:39 (KJ)

• Most of the Time Most People Are Civil

Most of the time, most people obey laws and treat each other with civility. Most do not attack, rape, murder, or oppress other people or commit vandalism or arson against others' property.

• Most People Act as Well as They Can

Most people believe they are good. Even when their behavior is less than admirable, they believe they are doing their best. When they behave badly, they believe there is some good reason for their behavior. For example, parents who abuse their children usually scold them for some real or imagined transgression that justifies the "discipline." In addition, abusive parents typically rely on their own abusive childhoods to decide what is normal or legitimate.

Even those who act according to high moral values can err. We are often confronted with moral dilemmas that have no easy solution — "damned if you do, damned if you don't." No matter which we choose, we are forced down a path that violates our standards.

Each of us must also struggle with irrational compulsions, addictions, fears, and inhibitions of which we are only vaguely aware and over which we appear to have little con-

trol. When we "knowingly" act contrary to our own moral code, it is usually due to forces beyond us.

Will Rogers once said that he never met a man he didn't like. I cannot go quite that far, but I have never met anyone whose actions seemed unwarranted once I took the time to hear her story. It appears to me that all people — given their upbringing, their education, their internalized fears and prejudices, and their current situation — act as well as they can under the circumstances in which they find themselves.

To understand everything is to forgive everything.
— French Proverb

If we were able to create a society in which there were fewer bad choices and people had more information about the negative consequences of their actions, then I believe each person's guiding morality would lead her to act well most of the time. This, in turn, would make it more likely that the society as a whole would be good.

• Society Has Improved in Some Important Ways over the Centuries

Many efforts to improve this country have succeeded. For example:

• Women can now own property and vote. Overt discrimination against women is no longer acceptable.

• It is fast becoming indefensible for men to "discipline" their children or wives by beating them.

• Women are no longer expected to obey their husbands.

• Racial and ethnic discrimination is illegal.

• Lynchings are no longer acceptable.

Slavery was once considered "the American way."

• Resolving conflicts by dueling is no longer acceptable.

• Disease is no longer considered unavoidable or interpreted as the vengeance of angry gods. Scientists have learned how to eradicate and control many diseases.

• Psychosis is now treated as mental illness, rather than moral affliction.

• Most homes are weatherproof, heated, and have running water, electric lights, refrigerators, and stainless steel silverware — luxuries that kings of yore would envy. Most people also have books, magazines, telephones, radios, televisions, VCRs, and automobiles — an abundance of material goods.

• A wide variety of basic human rights have been accepted and codified in compacts such as the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights and the United Nations Human Rights Charter.

These are just a few victories, but they indicate that change efforts can accomplish a great deal.

• Movements for Progressive Social Change Are Viable and Powerful

Movements for progressive change have accomplished a great deal.* Here are just a few examples of recent successes in the United States:

• Reduced discrimination against and greatly expanded opportunities for women, racial minorities, gays and lesbians, and the disabled.

• Ended construction of new nuclear power plants and forced old ones to adhere to strict safety standards.

• Limited U.S. intervention in Central America.

• Helped to end apartheid in South Africa.

• Saved from extinction many endangered species.

• Banned or restricted many toxic substances such as asbestos, DDT, and PCBs.

• Many People Now Work Hard to Create a Good Society

Thousands of people work diligently every day, mostly without pay or recognition, to set things right. Approximately 68% of Americans contribute money to charities and 49% volunteer their time, averaging four hours per week.[8] Though the results are not as great as we might like, this hard work shows how much desire and dedication there is for creating a good society.

Fortunately, many people would prefer to live a simple life in a good society than a life of riches and power in a horrible society.

• Even More People *Want* to Work to Create a Good Society

Many more people want to set things right. They want to live in consonance with their values, they want to work for goals they believe in, and they want to work with other kindhearted people.

Whenever social change movements illuminate an injustice and demonstrate a positive alternative, thousands of people rush forward to volunteer their time and money, even at the risk of their lives, their livelihood, or their stature in the community. Orators, like Eugene Debs and Martin Luther King, Jr., who speak directly to social problems and ask for help, often get a surprisingly positive response.

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* Describing the history and many successes of progressive social change campaigns is beyond the scope of this book. See the Social Change History section of Chapter 12 for a list of introductory books.

SO WHAT ARE WE DOING WRONG?

If it is not impossible to create a good society and we have all these things going for us, then why have we not done it yet? What are we doing wrong? How can we do better?

These are the questions I ask and try to address in the rest of this book. However, first (in Chapter 2) let me explain a bit more what I mean by a "good society."

Not for ourselves alone, but for all humanity… Let us hasten to find the path that leads to liberty, safety, and peace for everyone.
— Thomas Jefferson

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 1

[1] William Morris, "Art Under Plutocracy" in **Political Writings of William Morris**, A.L. Morton, ed. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984, HX246 .M72 1984), p.85.

[2] For references to the scientific literature, see the section called Dysfunctional Emotional Conditioning in Chapter 3.

[3] This may be difficult to believe after watching local television news a few evenings. However, the news media generally focuses our attention on violent spectacles. It discounts acts of compassion and loving interactions, instead fixating on the relatively few cases of hatred and destruction. This skews our perspective. See for example, Barbara Bliss Osborn, "If It Bleeds, It Leads… If It Votes, It Don't: A Survey of L.A.'s Local 'News' Shows," **Extra** 7, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 1994): 15; and Martin A. Lee and Norman Soloman, **Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in News Media** (New York: Carol Publishing Group, Lyle Stuart, 1990, PN4888 .O25 L44 1990), pp. 238–244.

[4] See Robert M. Axelrod, "The Evolution of Cooperation," **Science** 211 (March 27, 1981): 1390–1396; and Robert M. Axelrod, **The Evolution of Cooperation** (New York: Basic Books, 1984, HM131 A89 1984) for an interesting discussion of this point. Using the Prisoners' Dilemma strategic game model, Axelrod shows that cooperation based on reciprocity can evolve and remain stable even in a situation dominated by non-cooperating individuals.

[5] Frances Moore Lappé, Joseph Collins, and Peter Rosset, with Luis Esparza, **World Hunger: 12 Myths** (1986; 2nd ed. fully rev. and updated, London: Earthscan Publications Ltd., 1998, HD9000.5 .L35 1998). After studying the worldwide food situation for twenty-five years, they conclude:

• No country in the world is a hopeless case. Even countries many people think of as impossibly overcrowded have the resources necessary for people to free themselves from hunger.

• Increasing a nation's food production may not help the hungry. Food production per person can increase while more people go hungry.

• Our government's foreign aid often hurts rather than helps the hungry. But in a multitude of other ways we can help.

• The poor are neither a burden on us nor a threat to our interests. Unlikely as it may seem, the interests of the vast majority of Americans have much more in common with those of the world's hungry. (p. 1)

The world is awash with food, as chapter 1 will show. Neither are natural disasters to blame. Put most simply, the root cause of hunger isn't a scarcity of food or land; *it's a scarcity of democracy.* (p. 4)

Finally, in probing the connection between hunger and scarcity we should never overlook the lessons here at home. More than 30 million Americans cannot afford a healthy diet; 8.5 percent of U.S. children are hungry, and 20.1 percent are at risk of hunger. But who would argue that not enough food is produced? Surely not U.S. farmers; overproduction is their most persistent headache. Nor the U.S. government, which maintains huge storehouses of cheese, milk, and butter. In 1995, U.S. aid shipments abroad of surplus food included more than 3 million metric tons of cereals and cereal products, about two-thirds consisting of wheat and flour. That's enough flour to bake about six hundred loaves of bread per year for every hungry child in the United States. (p. 14)

See also Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins, **Food First: Beyond the Myth of Scarcity** (1979; rev. & updated, New York: Ballantine Books, 1979, HD9000.6 .L34 1979).

[6] United Nations Development Programme, **Human Development Report 1998** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, HD72 .H852 1998), p. 37. This report also points out that this $40 billion cost represents about 4% of the combined wealth of the 225 richest people in the world—about $1 trillion (p. 30). It also contrasts the $40 billion figure with the money spent on cosmetics in the U.S. ($8 billion), pet foods in the U.S. and Europe ($17 billion), business entertainment in Japan ($30 billion), cigarettes in Europe ($50 billion), and worldwide military spending ($780 billion) (p. 37). <http://www.undp.org/hdro>.

[7] U.S. Census Bureau, **Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1998**, "Table 574, Worldwide Military Expenditures: 1987 to 1995" drawn from U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, **World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers**, annual. <http://www.census.gov:80/statab/www/index.html>

[8] Independent Sector researchers estimate that in 1995, 48.8% of adults volunteered an average of 4.2 hours each week and 68.5% of households contributed money to voluntary or philanthropic organizations. Virginia A. Hodgkinson and Murray S. Weitzman, **Giving and Volunteering in the United States**, **1996** (1200 Eighteenth Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20036: Independent Sector, 1996), Tables 1.3 and 1.5. <http://www.indepsec.org/media/gv_summary.html>