SUSTAINABLE PROGRESS:

ENVIRONMENT, PSYCHOLOGY, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

by

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ABSTRACT

We live in a world where social change is a constant. Rather than be passive players, citizens can take an active role in the process and direct change to be as sustainable as possible. I will introduce the process ecology perspective, where sustainability can be defined as the hallmark of a system that persists dynamically through time without dramatic temporal degradation. Human society is a system, and change that is sustainable reduces stress and harmonizes its functioning. Since individuals necessarily precede society, I focus conceptual analysis of social change to this level and examine the individual's fundamentality to sustainable social change. Bottom-up changes are the most thorough and sustainable. Individuals can best achieve social change with a sustainability of mind, which allows the mind to operate harmoniously and without stress, and includes attitudes like love, nonviolence, altruism, and compassion. We see that such attitudes, which often arise in a spiritual context, have secular value as well. Finally, I suggest that a shift toward the more sustainable for society will be interlinked with a new involvement in and valuation of the natural world and its role in our evolution and existence. The ultimate power and responsibility to bring about such change resides within the individual.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the developed world, especially in the United States, the pace of life seems to be quickening, the time in a day decreasing, and our ability to focus on one thing disappearing. These changes in private lives are paralleled by turbulence in the public sphere. Globally speaking, revolutions, wars, natural disasters, technological breakthroughs, and social interactions occur at a faster rate now than they ever have in the past. Institutions unable to adapt to the changing environment and accommodate the reality of 21st century existence cause friction for the people they touch. The US Congress embodied this friction when throughout 2011 both parties refused to compromise on the federal debt limit and left many Americans in a collective existential crisis about the ability of the government to govern. This discontent was one factor that helped crystallize the Occupy movement, beginning in September 2011.

Citizens of Tunisia, Egypt, the UK, Spain, Canada, Mexico, and Russia, among others, also apparently harbor doubts about their governments, and/or are more willing to be vocal about them. All of these countries experienced some form of acute political unrest in 2011 and 2012. The range of complaints by the respective peoples is interestingly diverse, with demands for change in environmental, socioeconomic, educational, and legal status quos.

I highlight the increasingly pervasive state of tumult not to paint a negative picture but to point out that an era of rapid social change is upon us, and that it is

advancing inexorably, whether we're "ready for it" or not. Buddhist scholar and systems theorist Joanna Macy has even said the "Great Turning" that we are now in the midst of is a pivot point of the same magnitude as the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions, two moments which spectacularly altered human history.[1] Moore's law, which specifically prescribes that the number of transistors that fit on integrated circuits doubles every two years,[2] but which is generally cited to mean that every two years the size and cost of such micro-technology shrinks by a factor of two, has approximately held since 1975. Current capacities of wireless technology, communication, information availability, and transportation have inextricably linked the fates of near and far corners of the globe. These factors facilitate social change, and the more interlocked the peoples of the globe's lives, the more encompassing the changes are.

The question which provides impetus for this paper is how can we, as a society, move forward in a sustainable way, ensuring that the change we effect is the most conscious and beneficial change possible? In America specifically, we have experienced many weighty events that impact our collective conscience in 2012 alone: Hurricane Sandy; a presidential campaign and election; mass shootings including an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, a movie theater in Colorado and a Sikh temple in Wisconsin among others; climate change and social justice rallies and demonstrations; and war abroad. These occurrences are causing many to reexamine the state of our union and consider what direction we're going, and if it's the right one. In any case, change is upon us. It's just a matter of whether or not it will be tacitly accepted, where citizens are passive recipients of new social codes and status quos, or part of an active process, where citizens are participants and decide what it is they do

or don’t want and then spring into action to achieve that change. This change could mean revolution if circumstances are dire enough. This paper, then, will also examine what direction and form our change should take if we desire a state that is more peaceful and sustainable than it is today.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINITIONS AND PHILOSOPHICAL BASES

The Meaning of Sustainability

The meaning of "sustainability" is at the heart of our discussion so it is vital to be clear on how I will use the term. Generic definitions might say "sustainability" means "the capacity to endure." My own more elaborate definition, from a process ecology viewpoint, is the following: A process is sustainable if the integrity of interacting parts that comprise the system can be continually renewed without degradation of the whole over an unnaturally short time period. Ecological sustainability, for example, requires a balance of components integral to that ecology. Energy input from the sun; the oxygen and carbon dioxide exchange by plants; the water cycle; and the level, salinity, and temperature of the oceans; and the "circle of life," in which there is a regenerating equilibrium of consumption by and of plants and animals, including humans; must be relatively consistent and balanced for this ecology to remain sustainable.

A few facets of sustainability can be noted using the example of ecology. For one, the massive and complex global ecology is a member of supra-ecologies and is composed of sub-ecologies. As Alan Fox writes, "There are a virtually infinite number of entities, and each entity is itself infinitely fractal both macro- and microcosmically."[3] A lake is a subsystem of its watershed, and within the lake there are macro- and microenvironments which sustain plant and animal life, and then the internal systems that sustain the life of, say, a fish. Within the circulatory system of

the fish are blood cells and veins which are regulated on the molecular level. Molecular substrates of a cell are influenced not only by the substrate below them, that of atoms, but also by the equivalent molecular processes of both neighboring and distant cells. Accordingly, instead of seeing a fish as a "thing," which ignores its true complexity, we view it as a process. This dynamic perspective incorporates the dimension of time and acknowledges the underlying activity inherent in reality. In this perspective, we see that enfolded within and interacting with any process are essentially infinite other processes, with a high degree of *interconnectivity*. When these processes are sustainable, the constituent factors are in balance and relatively stable over time.

Yet we know from evolutionary theory that the natural world is anything but static. Its constant is *change*, which is a second feature of sustainability. Though sustainability both requires and achieves constancy, it does this by finding balance in a state of flux. Environments constantly change and drive evolution. Changes occurring naturally to the environment are slower and integrated with the whole—one might say they are graceful. But the way that environments change naturally is different from human-driven environmental change in the era since the Agricultural Revolution. The destructive aspect of human-driven environmental change has been, especially in the last 150 years, too rapid for earthly processes to rebound from resource depletion (hence the "unnaturally short time period" portion of the sustainability definition) and too extensive for the ecology to simply overgrow and overcome. Rachel Carson writes, "The rapidity of change and the speed with which new situations are created follow the impetuous and heedless pace of man rather than the deliberate pace of nature."[4] An ancient Daoist text, the *Zhuangzi*, says, "In all things, the Way does not

want to be obstructed, for if there is obstruction, there is choking; if the choking does not cease, there is disorder; and disorder harms the life of all creatures."[5] The unspoken human attitude of dominion over earth invites methods that are more akin to an amputation than an abrasion, and are thus unsustainable.

The dynamic equilibrium of natural ecological development exists in a sustainable state. Though it may result in the extinction of a species, the extinction will not be violent and untimely. Extinction is a consequence of a species no longer being able to compete effectively in its environment. But human-driven environmental destruction is unlike the natural rhythm. As Daniel Quinn points out in *Ishmael*, for millions of years, species became extinct and other species evolved, but on the whole, this process served to enhance the diversity on the planet.[6] *Homo sapiens sapiens* is a result of this diverse speciation. But we've come to consider earth and its resources as ours to own and use, instead of something to respect and replenish. The environmental change we have wrought via logging, mining, pollution, agriculture, and human settlements has decreased biodiversity. Almost a 25% of the world's mammals face extinction within 30 years; extinction is currently thought be occurring at a rate of 100 to 1000 times faster than typical "background" extinction; 90% of all large fish have disappeared from the world's oceans in the last five decades; and as of 2003, lion populations had dropped by 90% in the previous 20 years.[7] As a Biology 101 textbook will explain, biodiversity is a hallmark of a healthy ecosystem. Biodiversity enables a population to withstand and recover from a variety of disasters, and it stabilizes ecosystems and prevents over-proliferation of one species.[8] Biodiversity is in direct relationship with the sustainability of a system, and we are reducing it.

Human-driven environmental change is unsustainable because it compromises the ability of the whole to function normally by heavily damaging constituent processes. For example, dumping chemicals into a river may seem an insignificant action in isolation, but these chemicals flow downstream, damaging other organisms, eventually reaching oceans, evaporating, and raining down on regions distant from the initial contamination site.[4] Such incidents occur frequently, and chemical contamination has become more widespread.

Another facet of sustainability is *beneficence*. Any process which involves humans has the potential to benefit everyone it touches, and it must for it to be truly sustainable. Whereas the process of evolution by natural selection implies that those with lower reproductive fitness do not survive, humans have the capacity to take care of all of our own, regardless of differences from person to person. In *Critical Path*, Buckminster Fuller writes

> With the unselfish use of technology, it is now possible to take care of all humanity at a higher standard of living that any have ever experienced and do so on a sustaining basis by employing only our daily energy income from Sun and gravity and (2) that we can do so in time to permit the healthy continuance of humans on planet Earth.[9]

This book was published in 1980, when the population of the earth was around 4 billion people. Today it is slightly over 7 billion. But technology has advanced immeasurably since then, and his assertion remains truer than ever. But certain human innovations have institutionalized the idea of competition. Pure competition necessitates that for one person to win, another must lose. I argue that this is an unsustainable system. Capitalism is an example of this. We turn again to the process of evolution for support. In his book *Nonzero*, Robert Wright argues that both biological evolution and human cultural evolution actually came about as a result of

non-zero sum interactions, where one party doesn't have to lose for the other to win.[10] According to Wright, win-win interactions are the motor of evolution. A non-zero sum game is nearly synonymous with *cooperation*. That people have created a system that is diametrically opposed to a defining feature of evolution means that as far as capitalism's (invisible) hand reaches, evolution (whether biological or cultural) cannot flourish there. Capitalism is a brilliant system when it comes to creating efficient, profitable, and sometimes progressive companies, and providing variety to the consumer, but perhaps at too great a cost to be sustainable in the long run. Wendell Berry writes,

> The law of competition is a simple paradox: Competition destroys competition. The law of competition implies that many competitors, competing without restraint will ultimately and inevitably reduce the number of competitors to one. The law of competition, in short, is the law of war.[11]

At the critical juncture in our cultural and technological development at which we now find ourselves, we can opt for either building each other up for mutual growth or concentrate solely on personal interest and gain. In the latter instance, as some must lose for another to win, society's net benefit remains at zero or less. As Wright argues, "We are playing for the highest stakes that have ever been played for, and winning… will depend on not wanting other peoples to lose."[10] We're all in this together—the first shades of acknowledgement of this fact now seem to be appearing on public radar.

Therefore, as it applies to processes in which humans are directly involved, the concept of sustainability includes interconnectivity with other systems, a state of dynamic equilibrium, and beneficence in the sense described above.

I have continually referred to sustainability in terms of processes and systems. It is better understood in the process or system context because these terms supply the level of activity and change that are requisite before the idea of sustainability even makes sense to discuss. As mentioned above, it is more meaningful to call a tree a process or a system than an object or a thing. It involves interacting parts, though it appears static. (Even non-life is dynamic. A rock simply changes on an enormously longer timescale than a tree. Moreover, everything in the physical world is dynamic because of the ceaseless activity of electrons and "quantum foam" which compose matter. It's easy to ignore this though because we can't perceive the commotion. Trees and rocks just typify the process view to different degrees—see "Thinking in Degrees" below.)

One final thought regarding our use of the term "sustainable" involves the versatility of the word. I apply it to a variety of situations, as there are few human activities that don't involve varying degrees of sustainability. For example, a marathon runner must embark with a sustainable pace in order to perform well; if she runs as if it were an 800 meter race, she'll fizzle out without finishing. Binge drinking is unsustainable in that it causes a dramatic high and then a dramatic low the next day with a hangover, as opposed to a gradual and more graceful path if one doesn't drink to excess. Assuming that most people want to live a healthy, normal-length life, the "rock and roll" lifestyle is somewhat unsustainable. Characterized by intense passion and disregard for consequences—heavy drug use, sexual promiscuity, rejection of authority—some musicians are able to create masterpieces for a short period time but often fade into obscurity or die young. Their flame shines incandescently for a short period and then burns out, rather than achieving a longer, more sustained burn. Jimi

Hendrix, Kurt Cobain, and Elvis—bless them—fit this category. (Also, calling something unsustainable is never a value judgment here; it isn't synonymous with "bad" or "careless," but is simply an objective observation.)

The stereotypical "artist" can sometimes share these characteristics. The constant blur between genius and insanity, the teetering between high highs and low lows, is too wild and irregular to be sustainable. This tendency often drives artists to new vistas of creativity but forebodes a hard crash resulting in depression or stagnation.[12] It is thought that Vincent van Gogh was a manic depressive, having short, powerful episodes of creativity, countered by periods of depression and ending ultimately in suicide.[13] Jack Kerouac typed the original manuscript for his seminal *On the Road* almost nonstop over a three-week period on a single scroll that was 120 feet long. But he died when he was 47 due to internal bleeding and liver damage from a lifetime of heavy alcohol use.[14] These are just a few examples of artists who, while contributing beautiful and important works to society, lived in a manner that was relatively unsustainable for them (whether or not they consciously chose that lifestyle). Art does not need this method for its production—it can also come from a stable wellspring of inspiration.

The lesson here is that sustainability can be applied to interpersonal interactions and states of mind. If the mind is not a thing but a process or system, then its operation can be harmonized. A sustainable state of mind enables one to move through life with the least mental and physical stress. This goal happens to be resonant with the qualities of peace, tranquility, compassion, and equanimity that are endorsed by many spiritual traditions around the globe. This state of mind and its relationship to religion will be discussed in more detail in a later section.

Truth and Ideals

Social change which occurs in a completely sustainable manner is "true" social change. Prefacing another term with "true" here indicates the ideal, perfect form of something. It implies that it is at its highest level of functioning, serving its purpose with no error, fully expressing its haecceity. There is purity in truth, in the sense that there is no tampering, corruption, or interference. It is perfection—but is perfection attainable in the world that we live in? I submit that as humans—with our inherently limited physiologies and minds—cannot achieve the ideal form of something, although we can approach it (Figure 1). According to Fox, "This is because all [processes] experience interference from other [processes]."[3] This goes beyond human capability—in the natural world, no process exists in its purest form, isolated from other processes; all overlap and interact and prevent one another from operating ideally. If any process were ideally sustainable, it would never degrade. But in reality, there are always forces at play that will prevent a process from existing forever.

Applying our definition of sustainability to social change requires some additional elaboration, because social change isn't a system, per se. Instead, society itself is the system, composed of the vast symphony of human activity—interpersonal relations, productivity, consumption, birth, death, construction and destruction, exploration, advancement, triumphs, failures, politics, and so on. Sustainable social change, then, would help to optimize society in such a way that these many moving parts synchronize and complement each other. If society is a symphony of many instruments, sustainable social change increases the harmony and decreases the dissonance. Since part of sustainability is beneficence, this harmony would make the lives of those involved better. It follows that true or ideal social change has never occurred in human history.

But there have been close approximations. Mohandas Gandhi attempted, and brought about to an extent, this type of change. He wanted Indian Hindus and Pakistani Muslims to treat each other as friends and neighbors despite deep-seated historical differences; he wanted the British to "Quit India," but still treated them with respect, sincerity, and compassion. Such forms of action increase harmony and reduce dissonance to a great degree. Though he would insist that he was far from a complete *satyagrahi* (one who practices his form of non-violent resistance, or *satyagraha*), he constantly sought to become more loving, non-violent, and modest. And by the end of his life, he was much more developed in these qualities than most people—yet he would correctly say he could still improve. This is perhaps better represented mathematically (since mathematics itself is an expression of natural ideals).

In Figure 1, let the x-axis be time and the y-axis be truth. The upper asymptotic limit represents Truth, in its pure, ideal sense (and as it applies to any concept, like "true" sustainability). The sigmoid curve inches closer and closer to Truth as time approaches infinity, but never reaches it. I argue that this is how ideals function—with human actualization moving along the curve, continuously coming closer to the ideal, though it is unattainable in our imperfect lives.

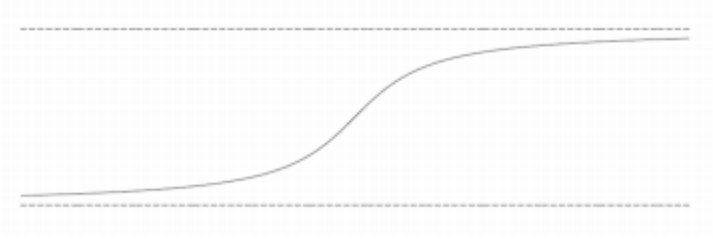

Figure 1 an asymptotic sigmoid curve

Thinking in Degrees

Gandhi never enacted ideal social change. But his form of social change came closer to true social change than any other social campaign in the modern era. Though reaching an ideal is a human impossibility, everything exists in degrees of totality. The ideal is the flawless highest degree, which is unattainable. But Gandhi still achieved a high degree of true social change. Similarly, there are varying degrees of sustainability. For example, a Prius has a higher degree of sustainability with respect to energy consumption than a Hummer. Gandhi's social change has a much higher degree of sustainability than Hitler's social change.

The pragmatism of thinking in degrees comes in its distinction from binary thinking. Black or white, right or wrong, sustainable or unsustainable, good or bad—though cognitively simpler, neither pole of these dichotomies ever captures the complete picture of the situation to which they apply. Such rigid definitions sometimes clarify but often oversimplify—they cut off the defined concept from other possibilities with which it is invariably connected. Cartesian dualism, which has influenced Western thinking for centuries, introduces a system of thought which in many ways hinders perceiving the complexity and subtlety of a situation. If sustainable social change is an ideal, it can never be achieved in its truest sense. But different degrees of it can be attained—it is not either sustainable or unsustainable.

The Use of Philosophy

The Chinese character for "philosophy" is a combination of the two characters for hand and mouth (Figure 2). This signifies that in Chinese language and culture, the thought aspect of philosophy is inseparable from the action aspect. Theory and practice, the talk and the walk, are completely unified. I also take the stance that to

have a theory but not put it into practice is to not have a philosophy at all. The philosophical suggestions which are in this paper presuppose a seamless interface between thought and action—their ultimate end is pragmatic, and though founded upon ideals, there is a balanced emphasis on thought and action. In the end, a theory which doesn't get applied to one's life is essentially useless. And it is useful to the degree that it has the intended effect. For our purposes here, because I theorize about effective ways to better man and society, if the theory does not actually better man and society, it is also useless. Suggestions have been considered against this condition.

Figure 2 the character on the left means "philosophy": the portion encircled in blue means "hand", in red means "mouth." The character on the right means "the study of"

Drawbacks and Limitations

Ideals, truth, perfection—these sometimes carry the connotation of being "unrealistic." In fact, they are unrealistic, but they provide the goal at which we should realistically aim. Striking a balance between realism and idealism—knowing both where we are and where we need to go—will determine our ability to move forward. The two perspectives must inform each other; and, though opposed, the one requires the other in order for the validity of the first to be confirmed. Put more simply, realism

without a mix of idealism will lead to stagnation, and vice versa. Working within pragmatic guidelines, anything that leads to stagnation and doesn't promote sustainable progress is useless and should be discarded or modified.

As long as perfect doesn't become the enemy of good, then ideals remain important and necessary for growth. Progress happens, anyway, in small steps. It is a journey with perhaps no end. Mankind, and thus, society, can always improve, so there is perpetually room to keep pursuing an ideal. The changes that drive us in the right direction won't happen overnight but over time.

CHAPTER 3

CHANGING SOCIETY FROM THE BOTTOM UP

"All men plume themselves on the improvement of society, and no man improves."[15]
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Vehicles for Change: Individual versus Institution

Individuals compose institutions, and thus influence them. Institutions have strength of name and number behind them—public recognition and membership—and so influence individuals. Does social change come from one or both of these sources? Is one a more effective driving force of social change?

Undoubtedly, both people and higher-order societal bodies like government, corporations, and organizations, mold society in different ways. Though I acknowledge the possibility and validity of institution level-generated change, I choose to focus on individual level-generated change here. The latter method is somewhat more fundamental, as people must precede institutions and not vice versa.

The purpose of the United States Government, in a nutshell, is to facilitate and codify what the people want. We elect representatives who are charged with advocating for their districts and making improvements to their current status quo. Although this representation rarely happens as thoroughly and accurately as it should, it is clear that the will of a collective of individuals is the basis for policy and legislation. So in the governmental example at least, the individual is the starting block from which new changes emanate.

Another reason I focus on the individual is because no corporation or government can have a mind of its own. It isn't a being, a volitional body of any sort—its will is the will of a collective of individuals. Berry puts it ironically:

> But the limitless destructiveness of this economy comes about precisely because a corporation is *not* a person. A corporation, essentially, is a pile of money to which a number of persons have sold their moral allegiance. As such, unlike a person, a corporation does not age. It does not arrive, as most persons finally do, at a realization of the shortness and smallness of human lives; it does not come to see the future as the lifetimes of the children and grandchildren of anybody in particular. It goes about its business as if it were immortal, with the single purpose of becoming a bigger pile of money.[11]

A corporation cannot wake up one morning and say, "I've been sending out too many paper products, I'm going to switch to electronic notifications instead." No, if such a shift were to occur, it would happen because one or several individuals decided that it would. An individual can have such an epiphany. An individual can come to be dissatisfied with either personal or societal modi operandi, and can summon the resolve to act and transform whatever isn't up to par. In part, then, this paper is about why people are seeking, and should seek, changes in personal and societal states of affairs; and how, once they do come to such a realization, we can direct resulting changes for the most sustainable.

Why the Individual Can Change Society

An ancient Chinese text called the *Da Xue*, or Great Learning, discusses how peace should be brought to the entire world:

> The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own States. Wishing to order well their States, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things… The whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy. From the Son of Heaven down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything besides.[16]

This approach moves from macrocosmic to progressively microcosmic realms and gets at the root of issues, reducing them to their most fundamental, manageable, and malleable form.

One can utilize the same method in determining the best way to change society. The most efficient and thorough social change cannot come from the institutional, social, or governmental level, dispensed in a top-down ordinance from a distant bureaucracy. These methods rarely get at the root of what needs to change for society to improve. Trying to change society for the better through a new policy or program is like watering a plant's leaves and expecting it to grow—some water will trickle down the stem into the ground and nourish it, but the far more efficient way to achieve growth is to water it at the root. Likewise, effective social change must come from the personal level—at the level of the individual himself, because the individual is the root and building block of society. This change can be in the heart and mind of the person and through a group of such persons organized under a common cause. Henry David Thoreau expresses this sentiment in Walden, when he says, "beware of all enterprises that require new clothes, and not rather a new wearer of clothes. If there is not a new man, how can the new clothes be made to fit?"[17]

Attacking a problem at its root is then the most sustainable path to a solution. Employing superficial solutions will in the long-run result in more energy and resources expended before the problem is truly rectified. Ignoring dirty dishes in the sink is a temporary solution, but is an unsustainable one in that the dishes won't clean themselves and will probably only become smellier as time passes. Another example is found in the condition of depression. Recreational drug use may alleviate depression during the high, but is a temporary escape and can worsen the baseline condition during sobriety. Even antidepressants, though more responsible, may not be a wholly sustainable solution—Andrews points out that antidepressants have been shown to increase the risk of relapse after they are discontinued.[18] Antidepressants also present a psychological issue in unsustainability, in the case that they precipitate a feeling of dependence in the patient. One may begin to believe the drugs are required to feel better, rather than learning how to achieve feelings of well-being on their own without the drug. In their absence, a feeling of helplessness can ensue, which certainly doesn't promote healing from depression. Though useful, they are a band-aid, and don't necessarily teach the patient mental attitudes and coping strategies that can organically alleviate depression.

For a problem to be truly fixed—not covered up, pushed out of view, or allayed by a temporary solution—it must be addressed at the root. This type of analysis doesn't require a normative or moral judgment, but a pragmatic one. It isn't "bad" to address a problem unsustainably, it's just more inefficient in that the solution isn't as lasting and healthful. The problem will still exist, and the unsustainable solver suffers more for it in the end. One will have to invest more time, resources, and energy to fix it for good.

Social change is somewhat paradoxical in that social problems only exist when a group of individuals come together, yet the solution to such problems is an inherently personal one. Padmasiri De Silva describes the Buddha's approach to the matter: "As an initial method of settling disputes the Buddha requires that people practise the art of diligent self-analysis and search for the roots of discord within themselves, for this is the surest way of minimising social tensions."[19]

Because the individual is the building block, the root of society, change must ultimately occur on this level. New technologies, governmental laws and policies, and other top-down changes don't provide a real remedy (though the right ones facilitate the process). Individual behavior has to be modified—current habits of consumption, production, and destruction of natural environments are completely unsustainable.

If we grant that individual must change somehow, in what direction should he or she change? There should be a guiding principle or a goal toward which to strive. I submit that sustainable states of mind, to be described in the next section, answer the call. On a related note, the path to personal change has already been laid out to humanity on a massive scale through the various spiritual traditions of the world. Arguably, one of the central purposes of the most developed spiritual traditions is to increase the net amount of compassion, love, and peace in the world. (As we'll see later, the social movements which are most sustainable also tend to emphasize such values.) Usually, guidelines are offered for the individual to follow to become a participant in the creation of the above. Rather than reinvent the wheel, we can look to these traditions for inspiration as to how individual change should be oriented and executed.

CHAPTER 4

SOCIAL CHANGE VIA SUSTAINABLE STATES OF MIND

Defining Sustainable States of Mind

Gandhi not only inspired his nation's people and others to a massive collective action, he did so by adhering to the values of non-violence, universal love, persistence, and acceptance. These qualities are semi-synonymous with, and constitute, what I refer to as "sustainable states of mind" or a "sustainability of mind." Therefore, a sustainable state of mind is one that expresses the above and related qualities which, in addition to their benefits in personal relationships and happiness, are necessary to instigate successful social movements. Social movements can be considered successful if they bring sustainable social change to society, in the sense of our earlier discussion of ideals. This is *true* social change because it is not transient and myopic but positive and healthfully enduring.

Applications

Social psychology provides an interesting introduction to the topic of sustainable states of mind. Crocker and Park point out that Americans have a culturally-induced impulse to pursue boosts in self-esteem.[20] The methods of doing so, they argue, involve external validation of self-worth, the pursuit of which "create[s] the opposite of what they need to thrive," and actually "undermine[s] learning; relatedness; autonomy and self-regulation; and over time, mental and physical health." These short-term, temporary gains are an unsustainable approach to achieve the self-

esteem people seek, because they don't achieve true change for the individual. At the conclusion of the article, Crocker and Park suggest alternative ways to do so, which include developing self-esteem that is noncontingent upon external validation, and shifting one's goals from a self-centered need for worth to something that involves others and is bigger than oneself.

Essentially, they argue that one must develop sustainable states of mind to achieve the self-esteem that one desires. With a sense of self that is always seeking something, in the unstable form of approval and validation from others, the individual's self-image is vulnerable to transient highs or lows. One can never actually achieve the well-being that is sought. By shifting one's mindset and finding personal meaning in something more selfless or timeless, one develops a self-esteem that is more lasting and less affected by changes in ephemeral external circumstances. This is a sustainable approach to take.

Achieving a sustainability of mind is analogous to the modern meaning of sustainability more broadly. In an environmental context, Wasik notes that construction of green homes actually grew while the rest of the housing market suffered between 2004 and 2006: "Environmental construction may represent the only consistent pocket of growth in a market wracked by a housing downturn, foreclosures, and a credit crunch."[21] Green construction was impervious to threats from the complex web of economic causation perhaps because it relies on processes that are more timeless than consumer preferences, banking errors, and oil supplies.

Not only is the market for green construction stable and sustainable, but the green buildings themselves are as well. As the world's finite oil supply diminishes and costs of heating grow, green homes find themselves wholly unaffected by such

fluctuations. They are extremely efficient, heated by solar power and geothermal energy, which are relatively invariant seasonally. In fact, Wasik reports that during the unusually cold Midwest winter of 2007-2008, one green home's heating costs for the seven months from November through May were $350. Further, Iceland uses geothermal energy for 89% of its homes, and despite a yearlong need for heat, emits 62% less CO_2 per capita than the US.[22] There is clear correspondence between a green home that is sustainable because it derives heat from renewable and unchanging sources, and a person whose sense of self is sustainable because it derives meaning and happiness—personal "heat" if you will—from unchanging sources (see Chapter 9).

There must be as much of an emphasis on developing sustainable states of mind in American citizens and abroad as there is on implementing sustainability practices into architecture, agriculture, development, business, education, healthcare, and so forth. There is no "architecture" or "business" if there is no person—the person underpins and drives these processes. And if there is a body of citizens who, for example, understand sustainability and exemplify those principles through their mindset and actions, then the above fields will naturally come to embody these principles as well.

The field of psychology again finds analogy within the person that applies to other superordinate systems. Psychologist Raymond De Young notes that individuals that are extrinsically motivated to recycle (e.g., by a monetary reward) only continue to recycle as long as they are rewarded. Individuals who are, on the other hand, intrinsically motivated (by enjoyment, understanding, and satisfaction) recycled regardless of presence of a reward.[23] Again we see behavior, the measurable outcome,

affected by the mindset of the individual, where an externally contingent action ceases without the motivator, and the internally contingent action persists regardless of external circumstances. The internally motivated action is sustainable. How does this apply to social movements?

There is no arena of society where the influence of the individual on the collective is as apparent as in a social movement. This is because the citizens involved are literally pushing their goals, desires, and mindset on the rest of the population (for better or worse). When these individuals understand a situation and desire a change—an intrinsic motivation—then they go about pursuing it on their own. If desire for a change, however, is extrinsically motivated, it cannot be sustainable because the action does not spring from personal motives, but only arises to satisfy an external condition. Such motivations are fleeting, and the motivation to continue acting ceases without the external motive. No real change would have occurred in the individual's position and understanding of the issue at hand.

A prime example of an unsustainable external motivation is American Prohibition. The external motivation to not sell or consume alcohol came from the law—yet this law received little support by the general populace of America. They had little comprehensive understanding of, and little agreement with, the reasoning behind the law and thus no intrinsic motivation to act in a particular way regarding alcohol. So they broke the law. This law is known to have produced many more problems than it solved – it created resistance in the form of 100,000 speakeasies in New York City by 1925 and corruption amongst the police force, elected officials, Senators, and even the Attorney General, who accepted a $500,000 bribe from a major bootlegger.[24] For social change to occur most effectively it cannot be proscribed by an

out-of-touch and broad government program—it must be called for by the hearts and minds of the people.

Leaders are the ones who inspire others by generating or revealing intrinsic motivation in them. This activates their innate capacity to act and move towards a change. William James said,

> The mutations of societies, then, from generation to generation, are in the main due directly or indirectly to the acts or the examples of individuals whose genius was so adapted to the receptivities of the moment, or whose accidental position of authority was so critical that they became ferments, initiators of movements, setters of precedent or fashion, centers of corruption, or destroyers of other persons, whose gifts, had they had free play, would have led society in another direction.[25]

Whether the change is sustainable or not depends on the values, put forth by the leader, which resonate with citizens. In this resonation the same values are activated and energized in the individual. We finally come back to Gandhi. He had an unwavering devotion to non-violence and love, saying "wherever you are confronted with an opponent, conquer him with love… This law of love has answered as the law of destruction has never done… Non-violence is a weapon of the strong… The law of love will work… whether we accept it or not."[26] The only social change that could have emanated from one who followed Gandhi would have been sustainable to a high degree. We'll examine it more closely in the next section.

His commitment to the value of love is more than just a pleasant affection—it also holds an indispensable pragmatism. In subsuming an act of violence with an act of love, the negativity that was expressed in violence becomes negated. This is symbolically illustrated by the Pulitzer Prize-nominated photograph below.

Figure 3 "Flower Power." Runner-up photograph for the Pulitzer Prize and "perhaps the most iconic photo of the turbulent 60s." A man places a flower in the barrel of a soldier's gun.[27]

CHAPTER 5

A CASE STUDY OF GANDHI

> The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. So it goes. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.[28]
>
> —Martin Luther King, Jr.

Gandhi's Stance on Religion

Gandhi was a deeply religious man who found texts, lessons, and principles from various religions meaningful and valid. He sought to emphasize the commonalities between different faiths, and he points out accurately that all share one or a few fundamental teachings. For example, he believed that "we forget the principle of non-violence, which is the essence of all religions."[29] He elaborates:

> One of the axioms of religion is, there is no religion other than truth. Another is, religion is love. And as there can be only one religion, it follows that truth is love and love is truth. We shall find too, on further reflection, that conduct based on truth is impossible without love. Truth-force then is love-force. We cannot remedy evil by harbouring ill will against the evil-doer.

"Truth-force" or "love-force" is how Gandhi literally translates *satyagraha*, the Sanskrit word for his method of social change, also termed "non-violent resistance." Non-violence, then, is more than just not striking back when one is stricken. Non-violence is a comprehensive attitude, which involves nonviolence not only to life in its myriad forms but also towards circumstances and events. Often when a circumstance

arises that we don't like, we tend to react violently towards it internally, through resisting, complaining, and distributing blame to others. But true non-violence accepts these situations gracefully and even embraces them. Thus, it isn't enough to not strike back after one is stricken—ideally one should hold the striker in compassion despite his damaging actions. This mental attitude should underlie the non-violent action in the *satyagrahi*.

Gandhi also has a unique definition of God. For him, "God" is synonymous with Truth and Love:

> To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist… He transcends speech and reason.[30]

It is worth noting that in Gandhi's most beloved and native religion, Hinduism, there is no one God similar to the one described above. He has arrived at his own definition of God, a synthesis of concepts from eclectic traditions and personal experience. The broadness of his definition illustrates how pervasive a concept it was in all of his endeavors.

Gandhi's satyagraha was an ongoing process, intimately related to his religious beliefs. Using the above passage, one can substitute "truth" or "love" to have *satyagraha* mean "God-force." He says, "For me, every, the tiniest, activity is governed by what I consider to be my religion."[29] Resisting injustice nonviolently requires and engenders a vibrant spiritual belief. In becoming a more ideal satyagrahi, such a forceful spiritual sentiment develops. Whether the improvement in one's stature as a satyagrahi causes the spirituality or vice versa, the most important thing is that this sense is always present in the advanced satyagrahi. Satyagraha is inherently spiritual.

How Religious Principles Must Inform Satyagraha

The process of growing into an ideal satyagrahi involves cultivating qualities typically espoused by different religions. He said,

> There is no doubt that it is difficult to produce a *satyagrahi* leader. Our experience is that a *satyagrahi* needs many more virtues like self-control, fearlessness, etc., than are requisite for one who believes in armed action… The strength of a warrior is not measured by reference to his weapons but by his firmness of mind. A *satyagrahi* needs millions of times more of such firmness than does a bearer of arms. The birth of such a man can bring about the salvation of India in no time. Not only India but the whole world awaits the advent of such a man.[29]

Since the use of force was firmly anathema to his strategy for social change, a satyagrahi had to rely solely on the force of his character to carry him to victory. As he indicates, it takes the development of several virtues in order to be able to effectively counter force with truth-force, which might include those listed above as well as equanimity, love of one's enemies, perseverance, and acceptance of circumstances. The immense power of satyagraha properly employed is exemplified in a chilling account of a rally against the British in 1930:

> With a sigh of released patience the crowd began to move slowly, relentlessly, proudly, towards the deadly corner. The leaders held their heads high … till the rat tat tat of machine guns sent them bowing awkwardly into the dust. The English had fired as they had promised.
>
> Still there was little confusion… the next in rank stepped over the dead and came towards the guns… It was India demanding a chance to be heard. The guns were removed, the crowd melted away like magic, lifting up the wounded and burying their dead. But the voice of silent India had been heard on her own street of Bombay.[31]

The satyagrahis defied the fear of death, and by dying in the spirit of something larger than themselves, defied death itself for a common cause. They understood and enacted the principles of satyagraha, and through an unwavering belief in them achieved astounding results. When such positive principles are practiced

emphatically, the result must be positive and sustainable. Sustainable social change was a hallmark of the Gandhian Indian Independence movement, because it was founded upon the values of non-violence, universal love, persistence, and acceptance. In the end, the British did Quit India—they left voluntarily, because the Indians demonstrated time and again that they were unwanted, but did so much less violently than may have happened without the insistence on satyagraha. A resolution like this is somewhat miraculous. Other conflicts of territorial and colonial nature have resulted in bloody tragedies—in places like Israel, central Africa, and the United States—that leave both parties depleted in both material and spirit.

The relatively peaceful (and if satyagraha were enacted perfectly, completely peaceful) resolution of India's struggle for independence presents a new model that can be emulated for social change. It was founded upon positive ideals and achieved positive results. Historical examples of other fights for independence—the American and French Revolutions, for example—show that non-violence is far from necessary for social change. But in a time when the figurative gas pedal is pressed to the floor, it's more important than ever that we act deliberately and choose a road that is more sustainable. Force produces results but it is undesirable, usually unnecessary, and most of all, within our power to avoid. History repeats itself only as long as we let it. Our species has thousands of years of experiences, lessons, and situations from which we can draw. As the zeitgeist changes ever more quickly, we can choose strategies that advance us in the right direction. That's the legacy that Gandhi left—that the possibility and power to create a better world resides within us.

CHAPTER 6

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE PSYCHOLOGY: MODERN NEUROSCIENCE AND PSYCHOLOGY

Neuropsychology: Unsustainable States of Mind and Brain

It is useful to examine the effects on physical and mental health caused by an unsustainable state of mind. If a sustainable state of mind includes acceptance, calmness, and compassion, then an unsustainable state of mind includes fear and anxiety, among others. When these attitudes become acute and chronic, habitual patterns of damaging negative thought emerge. The following phenomena are well-documented: 1) Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Major Depressive Disorder, considered mental illnesses by the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual,[32] have a high degree of comorbidity; 2) prolonged activity of the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal axis (HPA axis) is implicated in both of the above; and 3) the amygdala, a brain structure associated with emotion and fear, is associated with activation of the HPA axis. In investigating the psychophysiological bases for such emotions using the three considerations above, we'll discover that unsustainable states of mind have tangible effects on the organism's health and functioning.

Imagine the following common situation in the wild. A herd of antelope are grazing on the savannah, but are unknowingly stalked by a lion. When the lion bursts forth into action, an antelope undergoes a rapid series of physiological changes that help it escape the jaws of death. The heart beats faster, digestive processes slow as blood is redirected towards the limbs, respiration increases, adrenaline is released into

the blood, and vigilance heightens, among others. The perceived threat of the lion induces these functions, which are mediated by the sympathetic nervous system, to help mobilize energy the organism can utilize to survive. The HPA axis is the interface between brain and body that makes this mobilization possible.[33] A deep neurological impetus for HPA activation is a structure called the amygdala. As mentioned, the amygdala is involved in emotional response and processing; its role in fear and anxiety has been well-studied. It projects to many brains areas, like the hypothalamus, that are involved in fear and anxiety.[34]

Once the lion is perceived, the hypothalamus, a brain center important for maintaining homeostasis, receives signals from the amygdala. In turn, it sends signals to the pituitary gland, a part of both the central nervous system and the endocrine system. The pituitary gland sends chemical messengers into the bloodstream which soon reach the adrenal glands situated atop the kidneys. These glands promote several further metabolic cascades, which include releasing cortisol into the blood and converting fat into glucose, which is then used for energy. An important feature of the HPA axis is that it is part of a negative feedback loop—when the hypothalamus and the pituitary sense the presence of cortisol, further secretion of the chemicals which initiated the process is inhibited.[33]

In the wild, the HPA axis is an absolutely essential system that promotes survival. Humans have this system too, but we also have something other animals don't—the ability to perceive, in the mind's eye, fictional psychological threats. For example, a pending final exam puts the student in no real danger, and yet with some imagination, it can assume serious gravitas, and thus activate the HPA axis. Another situation that may activate the HPA axis is public speaking. In physical terms, giving a

presentation is in no way a threat to a human's survival. But again, we can worry ourselves into a state where the brain and body are tricked into HPA activation. This is why one's mouth dries out, palms sweat, and jumpiness and nervousness increase in such a situation. We respond to a made-up threat. And because it exists only in the mind, there's often nothing as definitive as seeing the lion amble away that can tell the brain to turn off the HPA circuit. So in prolonged states of worry, the HPA axis remains active since the hypothetical threat is constantly perceived.

Under normal conditions (e.g., the antelope running from the lion) the HPA axis is activated for a short period of time and then ceases. But when activated for a period of hours, days, or weeks, it can seriously damage the body. Extended cortisol exposure and chronic stress is known to decrease the volume of the hippocampus, a brain region necessary for learning and the consolidation of new memories. It suppresses the immune system and inflammatory response. It decreases restorative REM sleep and increases wakefulness.[35] It reduces sexual functioning.[36]

When an animal is placed in a situation of stress and fear, like having to avoid a predator, it may become more unpredictable, expressing reactivity, fear behavior, and aggression. Translated into human terms, prolonged activation of the HPA system, which can be brought about by excessive worrying or fear, puts one into a state of stress, anxiety, fatigue, and illness.[37] Speaking a little more subjectively, this state leaves one feeling very unhappy.

Chronic HPA activation causes detriments that are both mental and physical and cause one to feel depleted and unmotivated. The link between depressive disorders and chronic stress through HPA activation is strong,[38] and depressive disorders are highly comorbid with anxiety disorders.[39] Depression and anxiety are unsustainable;

this isn't a value judgment but simply an observation that they hinder one's ability to subsist in a contented and peaceable mental state and function optimally.

We now have a basic understanding of the physiology behind unsustainable states of mind. The HPA axis-mediated emotions of anxiety and depression were used as examples here simply because this pathway is so well understood. To be fair, these emotions are more complex than can be explained solely in HPA-axis terms. But other emotions, like jealousy, resentment, and hate—though their neurobiology isn't as thoroughly documented—also constitute unsustainable states of mind. Sustainable states of mind, then, should work nearly opposite to the processes described above. Let's see what modern neuroscientific and psychological studies have to say about this.

Neuropsychology: Sustainable States of Mind and Brain

There are several practical and conceptual reasons I've said that certain qualities make up a sustainable state of mind. These qualities tend to work towards enhancing one's sense of well-being, increasing feelings of connection to others and one's environment, reducing egoistic reactivity, and enabling healthful emotional coping. Clearly, when the above occur, the individual, for lack of a more technical explanation, leads a more fulfilling life, frees herself from negative habitual thought and action, and comes more closely in contact with her human potential. Such individuals must form the basis of a society that is in harmony with itself and the planet.

Some specific attributes which may contribute to a sustainable state of mind are the following: love; compassion; nonattachment, nonjudgment, and nonresistance, for which I'll use the blanket term *equanimity*; focus and attention; self-confidence

noncontingent upon external validation; forgiveness, which includes not holding grudges and resentment; and open-minded presence. Some of these terms may seem vague now, but I trust that as we continue their meaning will become clear.

Just as negative emotions have harmful effects on body and brain, these positive emotions have beneficial effects on body and brain. These are the qualities which are aimed to be cultivated through forms of meditation. Such practice actually changes the physical structure of the brain. In recent years, neuroscientists have become fascinated by how the phenomenon of neuroplasticity enables physical changes in brain structure to occur. *Neuroplasticity* is the process by which nerve cells tune more finely to each other based on environmental or psychological input; it is believed to be the neural basis for learning and memory. In simple terms, neuroplasticity enables the neural circuits that mediate a particular emotion, habit, or state of mind to become strengthened and more likely activated in the future. For example, a recent study suggests that the neural bases for empathy and violence may be similar. As the lead author says, "We all know that encouraging empathy has an inhibiting effect on violence, but this may not only be a social question but also a biological one—stimulation of these neuronal circuits in one direction reduces their activity in the other." He continues: "Educating people to be empathetic could be an education for peace, bringing about a reduction in conflict and belligerent acts."[40] I tend to think of such dispositional pathways, towards empathy, for example, as a well-worn path through the woods. The more one walks along it, the better established it is. But with disuse the path becomes overgrown and largely lost.

Neuroscientists have focused on meditation and mindfulness-based studies because the practices involve the intentional development of certain qualities, which

include compassion, equanimity, and focus on the present moment, which result in tangible changes in the circuitry of the brain. A recent study by researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital and colleagues demonstrated that after several weeks of mindfulness-based meditation, participants had decreased activity in the right amygdala when shown emotionally positive, neutral, or negative images of people and situations. This suggests more stable emotional regulation and response to stress. Another group of participants, who practiced compassion-based meditation, showed decreased amygdala activity in response to positive or neutral images, and increased amygdala activity to negative images, which depict some form of human suffering. An author of the study explains the results:

> We think these two forms of meditation cultivate different aspects of mind. Since compassion meditation is designed to enhance compassionate feelings, it makes sense that it could increase amygdala response to seeing people suffer. Increased amygdala activation was also correlated with decreased depression scores in the compassion meditation group, which suggests that having more compassion towards others may also be beneficial for oneself. Overall, these results are consistent with the overarching hypothesis that meditation may result in enduring, beneficial changes in brain function, especially in the area of emotional processing.[41]

Ample studies buttress these findings. Rick Hanson, neuroscientist and author of the book *Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom*, details the results from dozens of studies that investigate the effects of meditation and mindfulness-based interventions (which often involve meditation, group discussion, and yoga) on the brain, medical conditions, psychological treatment, and personal well-being. It is worth articulating just a part of the long list of benefits here, taken from a presentation given by Hanson[42] (italics added for emphasis):

Effects of Meditation on the Brain

- Increased gray matter (nerve cell bodies) in the insula, a structure important for interoception (or internal bodily stimuli), self-awareness, and emotional empathy
- Increased gray matter in the hippocampus, which is vital for memory consolidation, visuospatial memory, apprehending context, and inhibiting the amygdala and cortisol
- *Increased gray matter in the prefrontal cortex (PFC), vital for executive function and attention*
- Reduced thinning of the brain's outer layer, or cortex, with age in the insula and the PFC
- Increased activity in the left frontal lobe, an area associated with positive affect and mood
- Increased potency of gamma waves, brainwaves associated with integration and the states of "coming to singleness," and "unitary awareness"
- *Telomere length preservation, associated with longevity*

Effects of Meditation, Mindfulness, and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in

Personal and Medical Contexts

- Less amygdala reactivity and depressive symptoms
- Decreased perception of mundane hassles and psychological stresses
- *Increased empathy towards self and others and enhanced senses of well-being, self-actualization, self-responsibility, and self-directedness*
- *Improved attention and compassion*
- Reduced pain, fibromyalgia, psoriasis, and insomnia
- Reduced distress and physical suffering in cancer patients
- *Improved glycemic control in Type II Diabetes patients*
- Strengthened immune system
- *Reduced symptoms of cardiovascular disease, asthma, Type II Diabetes, PMS, and chronic pain*

Effects of Mindfulness-Based Intervention on Psychological Treatments

- *Reduced relapse after treatment for major depressive disorder*
- Improved anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and sleep in adolescents
- Reduced duration of psychotherapy

This impressive list of measurable health improvements resulting from meditation and mindfulness practice shows that cultivating these positive attributes have real effects on body and mind. Many of the attributes are also exactly the ones I've listed as components of a sustainable state of mind. One's prevailing state of mind or disposition in large part determines one's course of action through life. Thus, a person with greater emotional connection to herself and others, self-awareness, well-being, and focus, is much more likely to lead a fulfilling life and contribute positively to society than one who remains trapped in bad habits, is unable or unwilling to understand her own emotions and those of others, and doesn't enjoy a general peace of mind. Indeed, if society is made up of the former individual, it will be healthier and more sustainable.

The Sustainability of Self-Esteem and Self-Compassion

Self-Esteem

I've already touched upon Crocker and Park's "The Costly Pursuit of Self-Esteem," but it's worth exploring in more detail here.[19] Though we typically tend to think of self-esteem as a good thing to possess, the authors explain why it can actually be an obstacle in achieving what self-esteem truly seeks—inner peace and self-love.

The authors explain that most people, whether they have high or low self-esteem, tend to engage in the pursuit of self-esteem at one time or another. The resulting boosts in self-esteem provide temporary relief from anxiety and fear, but are short-lived, and soon one is back to feeling inadequate and needs another self-esteem boost. Most importantly, the way in which we seek these boosts tends to be unsustainable. This is clear just from the fact that the gain from the boosts quickly

fades, but it's also evident from the nature of the pursuit actions themselves. For example, "high self-esteem people typically pursue self-esteem through dominance and competence… Low self-esteem people pursue self-esteem by seeking acceptance." Further, "particularly pernicious is the tendency to focus on the shortcomings of others as a way to avoid looking at one's own weaknesses and faults." All of these have to do with the satisfaction of an egoistic desire—dominance, competence, judgment—which, rather than truly bolstering one's sense of self, quickly dissolves again in the flame of the ego, leaving the same sense of lack that existed prior to the boost.

Moreover, these methods of pursuit of self-esteem have costs.

> People concerned about how they are perceived and evaluated by others tend to consume more alcohol, smoke, sunbathe, diet excessively, undergo cosmetic surgery, use steroids, drive recklessly, and engage in unsafe sex to obtain the approval of peers. Although these behaviors may boost self-esteem in the short term, they have health consequences that accumulate over time… [which] poses a burden not only to individuals but also to others and to society.

These costs weaken "learning; relatedness; autonomy and self-regulation; and over time, mental and physical health."

But most important are the solutions the authors give following the critique of self-esteem offered throughout the paper. Interestingly, they recommend actions and attitudes highly synonymous with sustainable states of mind as a remedy to transient self-esteem boosts: "pursuing self-esteem by being virtuous, compassionate, generous, or altruistic would seem to have fewer costs, especially fewer costs for others." They continue, "Only by letting go of the goal of having self-esteem and saying 'So what?' to fears and anxieties that are assuaged by self-esteem can the costs of pursuing self-esteem be avoided. If one's self-esteem becomes higher… that is a bonus, but it

cannot be the goal." And finally, to close the paper, they say, "the only way to create love, safety, and acceptance is by giving them."

No one wants to feel unhappy and inadequate. It is significant, then, that the authors deconstruct why the methods that most use to alleviate these feelings are unsuccessful, and suggest a more viable approach which involves employing sustainable states of mind. It is also apparent that the virtue, compassion, generosity, and altruism recommended by the authors also form the backbone teachings of several forms of spiritual thought.

If we seek the feelings of inner peace and self-love that self-esteem shoots for but ultimately misses, what other framework should we work within to achieve these goals? Psychologist Kristin Neff says the answer is self-compassion.

Self-Compassion

In "Self-Compassion, Self-Esteem, and Well-Being," Kristin Neff compares the constructs of self-esteem and self-compassion.[43] In self-compassion, the "stance towards the self does not require inflating our self-image or seeing ourselves as better than others." Self-esteem requires that one feels superior to others in areas of value to the individual. Thus it is based upon judgment and making one separate from one's peers, whether it means seeing oneself as superior and thus achieving self-esteem, or feeling inferior and pursuing the boost in self-esteem described by Crocker and Park to make oneself feel superior. This reifies and reinforces the sense of separation between individuals. In self-compassion, by contrast, "instead of evaluating oneself as a distinct, separate individual, with boundaries that are clearly defined in contrast to others, the self is seen as part of a greater, interconnected whole." By weakening the sharp lines between self and other, the need to evaluate oneself in comparison to

someone else diminishes. Neff argues that cultivating this type of sentiment brings the true well-being that self-esteem can't.

Neff elaborates on this point: "Self-compassion may be a key source of the 'optimal' or 'true' self-esteem extolled by some theorists. This healthy form of self-esteem is described as a self-determined way of evaluating oneself that is not dependent on particular outcomes, social approval, or feeling superior to others, and is founded on stable and non-contingent self-evaluations." The stable foundation for one's self-perception is what the self-esteem construct lacks, because one must continuously boost one's self-esteem to feel good, and then these feelings are only based on such unstable factors like superiority to others. Self-compassion establishes a more stable, and thus sustainable, foundation for one's well-being.

Neff outlines three main components of self-compassion: self-kindness over self-judgment, feelings of common humanity over isolation, and mindfulness over self-identification. The first facet is relatively self-explanatory. The second "involves recognizing that all people fail, make mistakes, and feel inadequate in some way. Self-compassion sees imperfection as part of the shared human condition, so that the self's weaknesses are seen from a broad, inclusive perspective." The third, mindfulness, has already been detailed above. Within Neff's construct, "Mindfulness involves taking a meta-perspective on one's own experience so that it can be considered with greater objectivity and perspective. Mindfulness also prevents being swept up in and carried away by the story-line of one's own pain, a process that I have termed 'over-identification.'" These three components introduce a new paradigm. Rather than being trapped in a cycle of continuous egoistic need that never achieves fulfillment, one is liberated to take an understanding, accepting, and compassionate stance towards one's

own and others' problems. This generates more sustainable feelings of well-being and allows us to transcend problems rather than becoming consumed by them.

Again, self-compassion is highly similar to sustainable states of mind. Both have the same goal—to achieve a more peaceable, loving, stable, and confident inner state—and involve similar methods of getting there. Self-compassion is also resonant with religious teachings; Neff states that "my definition of self-compassion is derived from Buddhist psychology, but the construct is conceptualized in secular terms within the scientific literature."

Both Neff and Crocker and Park have come to the understanding that finding lasting solutions to individual psychological problems involve cultivating the wisdom of the higher-order attitudes such as compassion and altruism. If the best place to start building a healthier society is at its most fundamental level, the individual, then these findings should be taken seriously because they expound a path for individual improvement. Additionally, the scientific approach of psychology is beginning to recognize the value of teachings that primarily fall into the realm of spirituality, evidenced by use of terminology like "mindfulness," "compassion," and "shared human condition." In the next section we'll explicitly explore the connections between these values, where they appear in various religious systems, and how they apply to social change.

CHAPTER 7

THE SPIRITUAL LINK

"Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself."[44]
—Rumi

For the length of this paper, I've argued that it is of personal and social value to cultivate and practice certain sustainable traits and understandings. Many of these traits and understandings have already been explained in detail and advocated for by spiritual teachers and traditions for millennia. However, I do not want to promote the adherence to a certain religion, system of thought, or particular practice. What I encourage is self-knowledge and self-growth in a sustainable direction; a phrase which, in my terminology, ends up being near synonymous with religious practice in its essence, stripped down of dogmas and superficial differences. At their core, religions teach us how to be better people. But my point isn't that people should be religious; it's that ancient systems of thought have already laid out a path that promotes sustainability of mind, of which it would behoove most of us to be aware.

The world's religions come in all shapes and sizes—some have one god, others have multiple, some have none; some emphasize mysticism and some don't; some are text-oriented and doctrinal and others are practice-focused. There is immense variety. But the common ground of the major religions is, to be general, the emphasis on being more compassionate and good to our neighbors—actions that are personally and interpersonally sustainable. Our world needs more of those things, whether they come

from a Jew or a Buddhist or an atheist. If one decides that she should like to implement sustainable states of mind by practicing a Buddhist technique or reading a Daoist text, more power to her. The religions described below are well-established, -studied, and -known worldwide, so it is of use to explain their connection to my argument. But it isn't necessary for one to become religious in order achieve a sustainability of mind. By the same token, because the characteristics in religious teachings and in sustainable states of mind are often one and the same (as we'll see below), one may discover that in living with sustainable states of mind one is also living more spiritually. The messages of these religions are simply highly resonant with the construct I'm presenting. The context and application of my argument is new. The ideas themselves are ancient.

I focus mainly on Buddhism and Daoism because they introduce concepts that may be less familiar to Judeo-Christian thought that predominates in the West. Judeo-Christian, Islamic, and Hindu traditions, however, also promote traits that foster sustainability of mind. For example, Jesus preached about non-violence ("If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn and offer him the other also"), love ("Love you enemies and pray for your persecutors"), non-judgment ("Do not judge, and you will not be judged") and the "golden rule" ("Always treat others as you would like them to treat you").[45] Christian beliefs were also a major impetus of Dr. King's Civil Rights activism, a sustainable movement similar in many ways to Gandhi's. For concision's sake alone we limit ourselves to these two Eastern-based traditions.

Buddhism

The Buddhist tradition is rich with practices and concepts that promote sustainable personal and social change. In Padmasiri de Silva's book, "An

Introduction to Buddhist Psychology,"[19] he details the ways in which the Buddha's teachings take root in the individual mind. His commentary illuminates the ways in which said changes bring about change in the individual and in society. For example, to repeat a passage I've already cited: "As an initial method of settling disputes the Buddha requires that people practise the art of diligent self-analysis and search for the roots of discord within themselves, for this is the surest way of minimising social tensions." The self is the one thing the individual can't escape. As an anonymous proverb says, "No matter where you go, there you are." It makes sense that finding a sustainable solution to a problem then involves not pointing out the flaws in others or in a societal construct, but rather looking inward and coming to terms with one's own personality. If the "roots of discord" can be eradicated, then true progress has been made because in theory the same issue won't arise again with that individual. For example, if Henry has an argument with Jane, it can be resolved in 2 ways. They can ignore the problem, forget it happened, blame each other, and/or cease communication, in which case the problem no longer exists in the context of their relationship—but the two of them still possess the "roots of discord" and misunderstanding that caused the problem. They may bring that same discord to other relationships where it could cause similar problems, and thus the overall level of discord increases.

The other way to solve it is to be open and frank with each other and themselves, honestly appraise their faults and foibles that may have contributed to the argument, and work genuinely towards a resolution. With this option, the grip of the negative trait that caused the argument weakens, the two can continue their

relationship with less resentment, and will bring less of that same discordant trait into relationships with others. The latter path is the sustainable resolution.

We're closely connected with those around us, so positive changes in the individual have a beneficial ripple effect on our circles of social contact. De Silva writes,

> Emotions like greed, envy, jealousy, pride and fear—all derive significance from an interpersonal context, and if we do not want to spread the seeds of discord, we have to begin with ourselves and then try to foster the same spirit in others. It is upon these foundations of healthy ethical values that meaningful social structures can then be built. Thus it may be said that, while presenting the necessary psychological foundations for the building of healthy society, the Buddha cuts across the somewhat exaggerated dichotomy between the individual and society. It is said, 'Protecting oneself one protects others, and protecting others one protects oneself.'

Living with sustainable states of mind enables one to be an example to others and begin a cycle of positive interaction from which all benefit. In order to bring the harmony and well-being into society that we desire and deserve, the origin that is both startling and empowering is in oneself. This realization is startling because suddenly vast new responsibility and power are thrust upon one's shoulders, but becomes empowering once one grasps that she can truly begin to implement sustainable social change through her own thought and action. And by becoming a healthier individual, both mentally and physically, one diminishes his or her input of discord to society. In doing so, others consciously and unconsciously may take note of this behavior and begin to act positively as well.

This method is strongly applicable to more problematic social phenomena like violence and war. As outlined in Chapter 5, social change for Gandhi involved employing a group of people who were each actively seeking a sustainability of mind—becoming compassionate, forgiving, and non-violent—in their own lives. In

doing so, they formed a collective based on those principles, whose presence was a powerful and inspiring symbol of the importance of overcoming violence. Likewise, De Silva writes, "Though the Buddha attempted to deal with the emergence of hatred both at the social and individual level, it is through the inner transformation of the individual that the urge to aggression can be tamed." In fact, not only is the individual the most important place for social change to occur, it's also the easiest. One can begin to live more sustainably, materially and mentally, right now. It simply requires making new choices. It often takes a long incubation period for social movements and activism to precipitate significant change in societal institutions (though the importance of this method of change is undeniable).

De Silva admirably sums up the gist of my entire paper in this succinct (and already partially referenced) passage:

> In fact, on certain occasions the Buddha cuts across the somewhat exaggerated dichotomy between the individual and society. It is said, 'Protecting others one protects oneself'. Emotions like greed, hatred, pride, jealousy and envy derive meaning in an interpersonal context, but if we begin with ourselves and try to restrain them, we do not spread the seeds of disharmony to others. If others do not excite our sense of greed or hatred by their own greed and hatred, then greed and hatred lose meaning as forms of social encounter. Thus if each of us begins with himself to eliminate the potential seeds of social discord, the ground clearing for a good society has already been done. But if we leave untouched the sources of social conflicts within ourselves, no social institution can create the conditions for peace and harmony.

The same sentiment, which privileges introspective analysis as a first step to sustainable solutions, is echoed by the Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, the leader of a school of Tibetan Buddhism:

> With anger, all actions are swift. When we face problems with compassion, sincerely and with good motivation, it may take longer, but ultimately the solution is better, for there is far less chance of creating a new problem through the temporary "solution" of the present one… Through money or power you cannot solve all problems. The problem in the human heart must first be solved. Then, the other human-created problems will be solved naturally.[46]

De Silva and Gyatso both acknowledge the primacy of sustainable corrective action at the individual level. Through such change the larger societal bodies that individuals compose, like government and communities, become more harmonious by virtue of having more harmonious parts.

These are vital perspectives on the locus of change. When it comes to values, Shunryu Suzuki, one of the first Zen Buddhist masters to come to America to train students in Zen, had this to say on the topic of control: "To give your sheep or cow a large, spacious meadow is the way to control him."[47] Trying to exercise force as a method of control never establishes the true control one seeks. It may succeed in physical restraint, as a cow or sheep may be kept in a cage, but the animal will be internally resistant of this means of control. Instead, providing a large meadow allows the animal to have the space and freedom it needs to *want* to remain under the watch of its owner.

While de Silva, Gyatso, and Suzuki provide wonderful modern commentaries on Buddhism, the original teachings themselves contain the essence of sustainable states of mind and social change. The Eightfold Path, for example, is the set of steps prescribed by the Buddha to free oneself and others of suffering.[48] The fourth step on the Path is Right Action, which "means to act kindly and compassionately, to be honest, to respect the belongings of others, and to keep sexual relationships harmless to others." If a person follows these steps, regardless of any spiritual or religious

motive pertinent to Buddhism, she becomes a more positive contributor to the dynamic of human society. Likewise, Right Effort, the sixth step, is required to direct one's mental energies toward fueling "self-discipline, honesty, benevolence, and kindness." Even these most rudimentary attempts at what might be called "becoming a better person" bring about beneficial changes. At a more lofty level of cognitive development is the eighth step, Right Mindfulness, which involves seeing events and circumstances as they are, without the ego filter that adds to them an attractive or repulsive spin. Situations themselves are always neutral, they just *are*; our interpretations imbue them with emotional valence. The mind "posits concepts, joins concepts into constructs, and weaves those constructs into complex interpretative schemes. All this happens only half consciously, and as a result we often see things obscured." Cultivating Right Mindfulness alleviates the tiring drama that getting caught up in the transient highs and lows of everyday life brings us, and begets a more stable, equanimous sense of peace and happiness.

The values touched on by Suzuki and in the Eightfold Path—acceptance, compassion, honesty, kindness, and mindfulness—are ideals that fall under the umbrella of sustainable states of mind. The fundamental goal of Buddhism is to relieve suffering, and its practices are designed with that end in mind. Buddhism then has great value as a personal guide to achieving a more sustainable mental state.

Daoism

> And to be able to transform customs and conventions without issuing orders or commands, is to act secretly within one's heart. How could legal restrictions and punishments in themselves ever be enough to bring this about! Hence, the sage inwardly cultivates that which is the root instead of outwardly putting ornament on that which is the tip.[49]
>
> —Yuan Dao

Whereas Buddhism is generally oriented towards the transcendence of suffering, Daoism is concerned with maximizing personal potential and integrating seamlessly with the world. An example of its application to sustainable states of mind comes from a text called the *Yuan Dao,* which roughly means "Source of the Way."[49] It says, "Hence, the pliant and the weak are the trunk of life, while the hard and strong are the companions of death." This implies that life is characterized by a sort of yielding, flowing energy, while death, or things that tend toward death, involve force and rigidity. In a strong storm, the trees that are the hardest and most unyielding are the ones that lose branches or are knocked down, while the pliant ones simply bend over and then right themselves when the squall has passed. This can be applied to an internal disposition, or mental attitude: by demanding that things be a certain way and dealing with emotions or situations by force, demands, or oppression, one denies oneself access to a vibrant energy that inhabits a mind that is spontaneous, open, and flexible. The rigid mind will encounter more friction and stress on the path of life and will be worn down more quickly. A more sustainable approach, as the Daoists would advocate, would be to face life with a cognitive and emotional pliancy, which allows one to deal genuinely and appropriately with any situation that arises.

The most famous Daoist text, and one of the best known spiritual texts of any tradition, is the *Dao De Jing*. It is abundant with messages of flexibility and openness like the passage above from the *Yuan Dao,* along with other themes resonant with

philosophical and mental sustainability. In Chapter Sixteen, it is said, "To know constancy is called 'enlightenment.' Those who do not know constancy wantonly produce misfortune. To know constancy is to be accommodating. To be accommodating is to work for the good of all."[50] Laozi, who for simplicity's sake we'll assume is the author of the text, accentuates stability or constancy, which endows one with a sort of clarity and groundedness of mind. Stability is an essential component of a sustainable system, especially when the system in question is a dynamic one. A consistent and sound interpretation of the *Dao De Jing* reveals Laozi's view that the universe is a complex process ecology (see Chapter 2), and processes exist in a stable equilibrium despite having continuous change through time (or pro-cessing) as a constant. Knowing constancy allows one to integrate more smoothly with the Way of nature and the fabric of society, which benefits everyone. If one can do this ideally, then constancy becomes enlightenment.

In Chapter Thirty, Laozi touches on the dangers of ruling by force: "Those who serve their ruler with the Way will never take the world by force of arms. For such actions tend to come back in kind." This theme spans many religious traditions—that violence and force beget violence and force, and neither side gains from the exchange. Nonviolence, then, both outwardly and inwardly, is a sustainable mindset partly because the net damage suffered by both sides is lessened; but more importantly, because by experiencing a violent act and not responding in kind, the negative intent of the violent act transmutes into a more powerful and transcendental force like love or compassion.

Chapter Fifty-three contains commentary on inequality: "The court is resplendent, yet the fields are overgrown. The granaries are empty; yet some wear

elegant clothes; fine swords dangle at their sides; they are stuffed with food and drink; and possess wealth in gross abundance. This is known as taking pride in robbery. Far is this from the Way!" This is a teaching of moderation. Standards of living vary greatly from nation to nation. But in general, having much more than one needs leads to a sort of heaviness of the psyche because it is so invested in the excess material things. In Yangism, a tradition often described as "proto-Daoist," one of the primary tenets is to not invest one's *qi* (or life force) in material things.[51] This allows one to retain *qi* for more vital activities that sustain and lengthen life. (For any readers who are also Harry Potter fans, think of Lord Voldemort when he divided his soul into seven horcruxes—he became a hollow, hardly-living specter.) Western society is highly materialistic, in the sense that expensive cars, houses, clothes, jewelry, and other possessions are symbols of high status. We place a premium on personal appearance as expressed through new styles, makeup, and hairdos, largely for the sake of looking good in front of our peers or boosting self-esteem. Many of us invest much time and energy every day in beautifying and refining our outward appearance, to the neglect of the inward. Laozi urges us not to be so taken up by possessions, fine food and drink, and status symbols. The normative implication is that we should put more energy into inward cultivation and less on the fleeting circumstances of the external world. This reallocation of priority can help generate a sustainability of mind and drive positive social change.

Zhuangzi is another well-known and widely-read Daoist master. His eponymous work includes the following passage:

> Suppose you and I have had an argument. If you have beaten me instead of my beating you, then are you necessarily right and am I necessarily wrong? If I have beaten you instead of your beating me, then am I necessarily right and are you necessarily wrong? Is one of us right and the other wrong? Are both of us right or are both of us wrong? If you and I don't know the answer, then other people are bound to be even more in the dark. Whom shall we get to decide what is right?[5]

Here he touches on the danger of being too fixed or set in one's views and ways. An exchange I had with a Buddhist monk revealed a similar sentiment when he said to me, "People with fixed views are the problem." In the world we inhabit, there's no way to *know* a thing for certain—even in science, one cannot say that something has been "proven." Even "natural laws" aren't eternal, implacable laws; they're observed regularities in nature. Demanding that one knows *the* right way to do something, or that one knows or owns *the* Truth, only obstructs possibilities for new learning and understanding to occur. It is therefore unsustainable to be so entrenched in the duality of right and wrong because it generates a cognitive restraint or block to new views and ideas.

One of the most frequent motifs in Daoist thought is the importance of yielding and accepting situations and events so that one blends in more perfectly with the Dao, or Way—"going with the flow," if you will. This is an important component of a sustainability of mind. Daoism promotes many attitudes that enable sustainable living and social interaction.

CHAPTER 8

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

"America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves."[52]
—Abraham Lincoln

Organic Farming near the Mojave Desert

I spent three weeks in January of 2013 working on an organic peach farm in the remote town of Lake Hughes, California, in the mountains just outside the Mojave Desert. The farm itself was rustic and isolated. I found that many of the little comforts that typically filled my life were absent. We only left the farm for contact with the "outside world" twice during my whole stay, for a few hours to travel to a group meditation near Los Angeles. The house was unheated, and at night, outdoor temperatures got down to 15 degrees. The only heated water in the house was provided by a solar heater which, on a warm and sunny day, might provide 5 minutes of hot water for a shower. But the most conspicuous absence was of the little things that filled spaces in my life. For example, if I ever feel bored at home or at school, I have the freedom to contact any one of an abundant group of friends for an engaging social experience. I'm busy with many responsibilities during semesters, and I find that in such periods I have little time to take a step back, reflect, and relax. But for two of the three weeks on the farm, my only companions were another volunteer and the monk who owned and ran the farm. The secluded mountain setting was quiet and

natural. There was no television in the house, no reason to travel to a nearby town, no billboards, no shops, and no opportunities for alternative social stimulation.

Figure 4 Ananda Marga Organic Peach Farm, Lake Hughes, California

The diet was startlingly pure. There were no processed foods available in the house. Most of the groceries were organic. We regularly made our own nut butters and baked sourdough bread every day. We followed a vegan diet, and also excluded garlic, onion, coffee, tea, or anything else that may have a stimulating effect on the mind.

The diet is in accordance with the spiritual beliefs of the monk who owned the farm. He is part of a group called Ananda Marga, an organization which practices a combination of Vedic and Tantric traditions from ancient India. As a result, daily

spiritual practice was imperative for the monk, and the other volunteer and I joined in often.

The conditions on the farm felt desolate at first. They were very different than I was used to, and from what I was expecting—I was told there would be several volunteers there; my prior impression was that it was near a lively community and beautiful town; and the website's pictures showed a farm brimming with fruit and life. None of these preconceptions turned out to be valid. Ironically, we spent several days uprooting scores of dead peach trees.

The combination of all of this resulted in some degree culture shock. In fact, it felt the way I imagine a minor episode of withdrawal to be. What is culture shock, after all, but withdrawal from the norms, expectations, and comforts to which one is accustomed? These things had fallen away. At first it was hard, and I even considered leaving—I felt lonely and isolated. But soon, as I adapted, my preoccupation with the unanticipated situation faded and new realizations began to dawn on me. What was missing were all of the little things that distract me, and countless other Americans, from what is going on at a deeper level around and within us. There's a certain level of distraction—in the sense of scattered attention—and stimulation inherent in the external world that numbs us to reality. It doesn't take much to observe this. In my hometown, a drive down the major thoroughfare offers billboards, lights, restaurants, shops, endless opportunities for consumption. But excess stimulation also exists in a less blatant form. Walking down a sidewalk, it seems like every other person is looking down at their phone rather than where they're going. Televisions shows now come in 8 minute blocks punctuated by rapid fire commercials, which are designed to be extremely attention-grabbing so the viewer is more captivated and convinced of the

worth of the good or service pitched. TV shows themselves are offering increasingly distorted pictures of what could really happen, are becoming more risqué, and in general continuously push the limits of what is acceptable to show in a primetime slot. The same is true of movies—it is shocking how coolly, casually, and frequently violent acts like murder are portrayed—but we become desensitized and they no longer surprise or scare us. As a result, movies, TV, songs, music videos, and even books grow more ribald, reach for new levels of thrills or shock value to grab our attention and rope us in. We often choose to consume what the entertainment industry puts out without considering what effects it really has on all of our psyches—it's all too exciting and stimulating to notice.

And it gets even subtler. What does one do nowadays when bored? Perhaps read a book, go for a run, or play the piano. But probably equally likely is a quick boredom-fix—our culture is loaded with them. My peers and I will often simply log onto Facebook, for what is meant to be a 5-minute episode but somehow turns into a 30-minute escapade of "stalking" others' pages and reading vapid status updates. Or we'll play the best new app on our smart phones, or check email compulsively. As the mind becomes cluttered and compromised by these impulses, our living spaces also become filled up with "stuff" that we felt compelled to buy and then use a few times, and put away.

Over time, our internal and external worlds become filled with meaningless dross. Rates of mental "disorders" are soaring in the West.[53] Obesity rates in America are higher than ever and climbing, expected to cause a 267% increase in medical costs associated with treating preventable obesity-linked disease by 2030.[54] And despite general affluence in America, levels of emotional well-being aren't higher beyond a

certain income peg ($75,000/yr).[55] And in my own observations, many various people, in their very quiet moments, begin to feel as if something isn't right, as if they've missed something. They're unfulfilled; they think living meaningfully and happily should offer a challenge, but should not be *this* challenging. Not to overdramatize, but it's rather pervasive—I've felt it, I've spoken to family and friends who feel it as well. It's a low-level background feeling of anxiety, upset, or fear. But before any serious contemplation of deeply rooted issues commences, the phone rings, or one has to go to an appointment, or the new episode "Breaking Bad" comes on, and it's all gone. That's what a constant scattering of attention allows. That's not to say that in general our lives aren't happy or that we don't feel OK most of the time. As Americans, on average we enjoy a higher standard of living than most of the world. But on a deeper level, some psychological needs are not being fulfilled, or are being fulfilled in the wrong ways. It creates a sense of imbalance when noticed.

This is a roundabout way of saying that, on the farm, almost all of the little space-fillers were eliminated from my life. I couldn't help but wonder at first—in a beautiful mountain setting, why do I feel so off? But soon I got used to it, and it became apparent that all of the distractions, activities, and stimulation embedded in our culture act as opiates with which many unconsciously fill their lives to avoid facing harsh truths and titanic questions that sometimes crop up, regarding topics like purpose, meaning, and mortality. Avoiding these issues is particularly problematic (and arguably more desirable—though not more sustainable) when the questions involve long-standing beliefs and ways of life.

That's why the withdrawal metaphor works so well. We become addicted to our distractions, and soon we need more to feel OK, and our baseline affect is lowered

to a rather dismal state. That's why these patterns persist and grow more hyperbolic—we need more violence in our movies, more busyness in our days, more comfort foods to feel alright. But like any addiction, this escalation is completely unsustainable, and will either end in disaster, or one can take the necessary action and fully vanquish the addiction.

The brain has innate pleasure circuits which are necessary for the experience of reward upon fulfillment of fundamental biological impulses like sex and eating. But in addiction to cocaine, these circuits are hijacked by the drug, which provides a long-lasting and intense surge of pleasure. The brain didn't evolve to handle reward in such steeped intensity, and the super-saturation of pleasure makes it crave more. Soon, tolerance develops and one needs more cocaine to feel as good as it did the first time. A classic 1954 experiment showed that with time, lab animals will even prefer cocaine-like stimulation over the basic, vital, and instinctual activities of eating and sex.[56] This neurobiological example can be applied analogously to our culture more broadly. Our nervous systems aren't designed to handle the hyperstimulation our everyday lives contain.

Consider this common knowledge: the evolutionary process that produced the human brain took place over millions of years in the natural environment. In nature, prior to the beginning of advanced human society (say, around the time of the Agricultural Revolution), our ancestors rarely confronted anything as stimulating as what our culture presents to us today. No food like a Big Mac, or Skittles, exists in the wild. No entertainment as engrossing and terrifying as the *Saw* or *Paranormal Activity* films was available. There were no text messages to constantly await, no Abercrombie stores filled with intoxicating scents and trendy clothes. These things awe and entrance

us. We have the same physical brains as our ancestors from 12,000 years ago, but we live in a very different environment—saturated with attention-grabbers—of which we're not fully equipped to make sense or handle.

On the farm, I felt as if I experienced a minor withdrawal, but once I re-normalized, I had a more acute and critical view of these superficial aspects of society. Ultimately, this led me to an interesting place mentally and emotionally: there was no running from any anxieties and worries I experienced. Rather than unconsciously moving to absorb myself in a new task when faced with an issue, there was nothing to do but to feel and undergo it fully. Rather than running from fears, I simply experienced them wholeheartedly and, by virtue of the fact that I'm still here writing this paper, dealt with and overcame them. As fundamental and unimportant as it may sound, I think to an extent we all subconsciously avoid, repress, or ignore problems, as a coping mechanism. This certainly differs from person to person, but overall, to ignore a fear or a worry is an easy response. But it seems to me that through avoidance it only becomes more deeply lodged within and inaccessible to conscious awareness. Rather than experiencing its painful effects acutely, but briefly and with full attention and then dispatching it, it creates an underlying, background, dull and tolerable but still present, sense of anxiety or displeasure. One then has to do some serious digging or introspection to unearth and exorcise the demon.

In the end, the traversal of and emergence from this inner drama left me feeling more empowered than I had when I arrived. It wouldn't have been easy to have the frank and liberating emotional experience that I did if I were still surrounded by the noise of our American culture. Though technology has simplified our lives in many ways, it has also added new layers of complexity to wade through, and it may in fact

be adding more variables to our lives than it takes away. We must question the place of unfettered advancement of technology and pace of life to which we've grown accustomed. Are these changes actually making things better? Or are they just making things different? Technology changes society, but not necessarily for the more sustainable. The critique I've given here is similar to a concept introduced by psychologist Erich Fromm in 1954 that he called the "Pathology of Normalcy."

The Pathology of Normalcy

If a certain behavior is performed by a large enough number of people, it may be considered normal. If a certain idea is thought by a large number of people, it may be considered normal. But societal norms exist regardless of more absolute ethical boundaries, or effects on mental or physical health. For example, holding slaves was once largely considered acceptable, despite the fact that today most societies would say with enlightened hindsight that slavery is a violation of some inalienable human rights. It follows that the attitude that enables one to think it acceptable to sell, purchase, own, and employ without compensation another human—some deep-rooted conviction of one's superiority to the slave—could not have been a healthful attitude to hold. In fact, Fromm introduces the idea that many can engage in an activity that is actually insane—but since everyone does it, the insanity of it remains unnoticed and the activity continues.

> Today we come across a person who acts and feels like an automaton; who never experiences anything which is really his; who experiences himself entirely as the person he thinks he is supposed to be; whose smiles have replaced laughter; whose meaningless chatter has replaced communicative speech; whose dulled despair has taken the place of genuine pain. Two statements can be made about this person. One is that he suffers from a defect of spontaneity and individuality which may seem incurable. At the same time, it may be said that he does not differ essentially from millions of others who are in the same position. For most of them, the culture provides patterns which enable them to *live with a defect without becoming ill*. It is as if each culture provided the remedy against the outbreak of manifest neurotic symptoms which would result from the defect produced by it.[57] (Italics added by me for emphasis)

Fromm also uses the metaphor of cultural opiates and withdrawal from them:

> Suppose that in our Western culture movies, radios, television, sports events, and newspapers ceased to function for only four weeks. With these main avenues of *escape* closed, what would be the consequences for people thrown upon their own resources? I have no doubt that even in this short time thousands of *nervous breakdowns* would occur, and many more thousands of people would be thrown into a state of *acute anxiety*, not being different from the picture which is diagnosed clinically as "neurosis." If the *opiate* against the socially patterned defect were withdrawn, the manifest illness would make its appearance. (Italics added by me for emphasis)

Buried beneath all of the noise of society are minds riddled with neurosis and defective patterns of thought. Perhaps we can subsist in this state indefinitely, as long as collective realization of the cultural pattern's insanity is suspended. These observations were recorded in 1954—how much more true must they be today, considering that in the last half century Western ethos has done nothing but accelerate its pace? We are what we were in 1954, but "more" on most accounts.

We can subsist in this automaton state. However, this is hardly a state in which to thrive. To be certain, it exacts its toll, in the various symptoms of our ailing nation: swelling obesity rates;[54] defense spending on the order of $711 billion in 2011, more than the next 13 biggest military spenders combined;[58] increased diagnosis of mental

disorders.[53] Yet in practice we remain blind to the glaring problems we face, perhaps because it's too hard to face the truth.

But a fundamental reason I wanted to write this paper is because we cannot, *cannot*, continue on this path for much longer. As I said at the outset, we're fast approaching tipping points beyond which there is no return, especially with respect to climate change.

One example comes from one of the most popular *Rolling Stone* pieces ever, entitled "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math."[59] It informs us that we have already raised the average temperature of the planet by 0.8°C, which alone has produced dastardly effects. They include: 3,215 high-temperature records broken throughout the US in June of 2012; that same month was the 328th "consecutive month in which the temperature of the entire globe exceeded the 20th-century average, the odds of which occurring by simple chance were 3.7x10^{99}, a number considerably larger than the number of stars in the universe"; the hottest rain in global history in Mecca at 109°F; the coldest winter in China in 30 years; unexpected flooding in Pakistan in September; the wettest year in England (2012); temperatures so cold in eastern Russia that traffic lights stopped working; extreme heat in Australia where the first 8 days of 2013 were among the 20 hottest ever recorded there; the hottest day in recorded history in Rio de Janeiro at 109.8°; the list goes on.[59,60] 2012 was the hottest year on record and saw destructive wildfires, droughts, and Hurricane Sandy, which alone caused $50 billion in damages.[61]

And this all with just 0.8°C of warming. According to the author of the *Rolling Stone* article, Bill McKibben, 2°C is the limit agreed upon by scientists and governments worldwide that the average global temperature can increase before

complicated ecological feedback loops take over and weather and climate spin out of control to deadly effect.

The urgency comes in when we consider McKibben's next two numbers: 565 and 2795 gigatons of CO_2. The first is the amount of carbon dioxide that we can emit before reaching the limit of 2°. We burn roughly 30 gigatons a year, so we should reach that number in about 15 years at current rates. The second is the amount of carbon already contained in the reserves of the world's fossil fuel companies—in other words, the amount of fossil fuels we're planning on burning. We have five times the amount of fossil fuels that we can burn and have a reasonable chance of recovery ready to go. This will eclipse the 2° limit and plunge the planet into irreparable warming that would last several thousands of years.

These statistics represent the scary reality we're living in, and the even scarier one we're hurtling towards at an alarming pace. The environmental issues are microcosmic of the political, economic, social, and ethical ones we're facing: business as usual simply won't get the job done.

Another touching commentary on the American dilemma comes from the cynical but perceptive mind of comedian George Carlin. It's worth reprinting in full here:

> The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings but shorter tempers, wider Freeways, but narrower viewpoints. We spend more, but have less, we buy more, but enjoy less. We have bigger houses and smaller families, more conveniences, but less time. We have more degrees but less sense, more knowledge, but less judgment, more experts, yet more problems, more medicine, but less wellness.
>
> We drink too much, smoke too much, spend too recklessly, laugh too little, drive too fast, get too angry, stay up too late, get up too tired, read too little, watch TV too much, and pray too seldom.
>
> We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often.

> We've learned how to make a living, but not a life. We've added years to life not life to years. We've been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet a new neighbor. We conquered outer space but not inner space. We've done larger things, but not better things.
>
> We've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul. We've conquered the atom, but not our prejudice. We write more, but learn less. We plan more, but accomplish less. We've learned to rush, but not to wait. We build more computers to hold more information, to produce more copies than ever, but we communicate less and less.
>
> These are the times of fast foods and slow digestion, big men and small character, steep profits and shallow relationships. These are the days of two incomes but more divorce, fancier houses, but broken homes. These are days of quick trips, disposable diapers, throwaway morality, one night stands, overweight bodies, and pills that do everything from cheer, to quiet, to kill. It is a time when there is much in the showroom window and nothing in the stockroom. A time when technology can bring this letter to you, and a time when you can choose either to share this insight, or to just hit delete.
>
> Remember to spend some time with your loved ones, because they are not going to be around forever.
>
> Remember, say a kind word to someone who looks up to you in awe, because that little person soon will grow up and leave your side.
>
> Remember, to give a warm hug to the one next to you, because that is the only treasure you can give with your heart and it doesn't cost a cent.
>
> Remember, to say, 'I love you' to your partner and your loved ones, but most of all mean it. A kiss and an embrace will mend hurt when it comes from deep inside of you.
>
> Remember to hold hands and cherish the moment for someday that person will not be there again.
>
> Give time to love, give time to speak! And give time to share the precious thoughts in your mind.
>
> And always remember, life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by those moments that take our breath away. [62]

Carlin is incisive about the paradoxical lives that we lead today. Though he focuses primarily on the negative aspects of our culture, his observations are sound. And finally, a less critical but nonetheless insightful take on the broad challenges facing society today comes from Buddhist scholar and practitioner Peter Hershock:

> [We] are living in times of unparalleled social, political, economic, and cultural change. Daily, we are reminded that ours is not a world built on long-established foundations. On the contrary, it is a world being built on the run, a world in which change is not just given, but rapidly accelerating. Long relied-upon practices and values are being fundamentally questioned—and often abandoned and replaced—at dizzying rates. And still we seem to be stumbling headlong from crisis to crisis with no end in sight.[63]

The myriad of voices that express awareness and concern about the current path of humanity illustrate the growing consensus that somewhere along the way, something has gone amiss, and it increasingly calls for fixing.

The Role of the Developed World

But not just anyone can set us back on track. As we move forward toward a sustainable future, we must practically consider who has the greatest ability (and duty) to produce and implement solutions. The biggest problems that plague the globe have originated in the developed world and must be solved by the developed world. The issue of climate change, by definition a worldwide event, has precipitated via colossal industrial output of countries like the U.S. and China. Though, to be sure, America has reaped some of what it has sown,[59,60] perhaps the greatest consequences have been bestowed upon a few developing nations that contribute negligibly, if at all, to the problem of climate change. For example, the Maldives is a small island nation south of India with a population of about 385,000. The country's highest point is less than 2 meters above sea level. The nation's president, Mohamed Nasheed, is (reasonably) terrified for the fate of his people, who will feel the effects of sea level rise caused by global warming extremely harshly. Nasheed announced in 2009 that the Maldives has committed to become carbon-neutral by 2020, the first country to do so.[64] Mark Lynas, a British climate change expert who is helping with the Maldives' sustainability plan, has said,

> The Maldives is in the front line of climate change. It is perhaps the most vulnerable country in the world. If nothing is done to cut global carbon emissions, the country will sink beneath rising seas this century. It is a poor country, but here we have a government that is throwing down the gauntlet to the rich, highly polluting countries.[64]

Though hardly contributing to the problem, the Maldives has taken a bigger step towards fixing it than the U.S. is able to muster.

The central Pacific island of Samoa has suffered from a shoreline that has retreated 160 feet in some places, necessitating massive relocation of shoreline inhabitants. Tuvalu, a neighbor, has lost sources of drinkable groundwater due to encroaching saltwater.[65]

Climate change has largely originated from the industrial habits of the developed world. So has the material culture and consumerist mindset addressed above. These seem to be the most glaring issues that now face us. Interestingly, they are as much external issues as they are *mindsets.* Or rather, the external issues emanate *from* the mindsets. A shift in attitude or perspective that sees the gestalt would work wonders at alleviating the dysfunctionality of current attitudes.

But returning to climate change: naturally, the resolution of these unsustainable practices will be implemented where the problems exist. In fact, developing nations don't even have the luxury to fully face or experience problems like consumerism or materialism. If Abraham Maslow's "hierarchy of needs"[66] is applied to a state-scale, developing countries tend to first focus on achieving enough basic economic security to have a population consistently and satisfactorily fed, clothed, sheltered, and educated, before it can attack more subtle psychological issues like the unsustainable mindsets that are truly "first-world problems."

CHAPTER 9

THE RETURN TO NATURE

Nature, Psychology, and Sustainability

The environmental discussion unearths another obvious feature of sustainability that links it to psychology. When speaking of environmental issues, what makes a particular process unsustainable? A process is unsustainable when it draws on something *finite*. Our level of fossil fuel consumption is unsustainable because we'll expend all that we have. There is only so much coal, oil, and natural gas on earth that we can burn. Deforestation is unsustainable, because at current rates we'll eventually cut down all of the forests. Hydraulic fracturing is unsustainable because soon, underground deposits of natural gas will simply be gone. Not only do these processes rely on finite resources, but they require hideous practices that disrupt ecologies to acquire them, so they're unsustainable on at least these two major accounts. (Regardless of my personal feelings about environmental degradation, the purpose of calling something unsustainable here means that it should be avoided. Why be unsustainable when you can be sustainable? Cold, objective calculation alone shows that we're better off with the sustainable.)

Harkening back to our discussion in Chapter 2 about Thinking in Degrees and Ideals, we can say that a perfectly unsustainable process will receive impetus solely from finite sources. Then the perfectly sustainable process will only receive impetus from the infinite. Accordingly, the alternatives to fossil-fuel-derived energy come from wind, water, and the sun—resources that are for all intents and purposes, infinite.

Though nothing in the material world is truly infinite, the sun will shine on our earth for so much longer that we can consider it infinite. Thus drawing energy from the sun is sustainable. The wind will blow and waters will fall no matter what—these resources are not finite—so we might as well stick a wind turbine and a mill into them and get what we need from something that cannot be destroyed, depleted, claimed, or fought over.

The same analysis can be applied to psychology and mental states. We saw in Crocker and Park's paper that self-esteem is unsustainable because it relies on fleeting and unstable—or finite—sources: a sense of superiority, dominance, competence. Once these distinctions are being made, there will always be someone you perceive as more superior, dominant, or competent than you, so the vicious cycle of temporary self-esteem boosts persists. We also saw through neurobiological research that harmful mental states like anxiety and fear actually have tangible detrimental effects on the body and brain. These attitudes can be designated unsustainable states of mind because the mental inspiration they rely upon—judgments of superiority and temporary "good" or "bad" situations—are what fossil fuels are for energy use. Just as the population that derives its energy needs from finite fossil fuels will eventually end up ruining the earth's climate and its own home, so will the person who derives her well-being needs from transient, superficial judgments eventually end up confused and in despair.

Just as we need sustainability for our energy and environment, so do we need it for our own mental states. The essence of sustainable states of mind is that they draw upon the infinite. For example, love for others, when unconditional, is felt regardless of whether or not it is returned. It is unfettered and timeless, non-contingent on

superficial considerations. A lower form of love for another person, where one needs the other to feel it before he or she can truly let herself feel it, is less sustainable. Likewise, confidence is truly sustainable when it is based upon infinite or timeless beliefs, not beliefs that require others to be less for one to be more. Equanimity, when created by a drug, an external stimulus, will fade as soon as the high does. But equanimity originating from cultivating mindfulness, and practices like meditation, is less prone to fade away. Joy, when based upon a fleeting accomplishment or praise, can just as easily turn to sadness when the external stimulus is removed or when the opposite occurs—a failure or a criticism. But joy that comes from, say, the infinite knowledge that "I am one with all of life," doesn't ebb and flow but remains a constant undercurrent regardless of froth and foam on the surface. The more mental states draw upon limitless sources for their impetus, the more sustainable they are, and the better they are for the individual's health and circle of influence—society.

Back to Our Roots

Once we begin discussing infinite sources of mental energies, such ideas generally fall into the realm of the "spiritual." But whether we choose to view them spiritually or secularly—at this point, the discussion certainly could become a spiritual one, as I aimed to show by highlighting the religious connection to sustainability in Chapter 7—the value of sustainable states of mind remains regardless. If we can objectively grant that it would do us good to cultivate sustainable states of mind, how would that manifest itself in our world? What would that change about our everyday lives?

We would return to nature and see it not as separate from us, but as part of us—or rather, see ourselves as part of it. It assembled our species, just the tip of one

branch on a long and differentiated tree of the evolution of life. We are animals, just like tigers and worms and bats and sharks. Yet our extraordinary ability to cognize ourselves and build and innovate has allowed us to construct a world where we are separate from nature. We're sheltered from the elements by homes and clothes, and we never have to experience a rainstorm if we don't want to. But if we begin to achieve a greater sustainability of mind, I argue than an inevitable byproduct is that our relationship with nature will change for the more profound. And as such processes typically work both backwards and forwards, I argue that if we spend more time understanding, observing, and being in nature, we will also develop a greater sustainability of mind.

Nature is life, in all shapes and sizes, expressed around us. As the Lion King tells us, life is endlessly cyclic, and our lives are a temporary experience of awareness of that cycle. We are literally born from nature, and when we die, we turn again into nature. It's not that we're ever not nature, but in developed society we're jettisoned into a constructed world where most are probably never introduced to the fundamentality of nature to life.[6] Nature is our home, in that we emerge from it, and when it's time to rest, return to it. To deny that is to disconnect ourselves from a nourishing source, an alma mater, Mother Nature. To deny that is to be a vagabond who has forgotten whence he came, and thus, where he means to go. It then becomes no wonder that we are able to exploit nature and see it as ours for the conquering. But it is clearly unsustainable to destroy the thing which allows you to live, because it will bring about your end as well. Therefore, becoming more sustainable will necessarily involve reconnecting with nature, and through it, ourselves. It will involve seeing

nature not as something to own but something to coexist with and celebrate. To again follow the wisdom in the Lion King, we must remember who we are.

From such a shift in perspective, we would see vast amounts of pollution as a grave sin, and would immediately begin to devise new ways to create our products and power our cars that don't require the debilitation of the natural world.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

> His soul had arisen from the grave of boyhood, spurning her grave-clothes. Yes! Yes! Yes! He would create proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul, as the great artificer whose name he bore, a living thing, new and soaring and beautiful, impalpable, imperishable.[67]
>
> —A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

> Never depend upon institutions or government to solve any problem. All social movements are founded by, guided by, motivated and seen through by the passion of individuals.[68]
>
> —Margaret Mead

Power, Duty, and Responsibility

When we reframe modern social, economic, and political issues as not originating at the institutional, or some other larger, level but rather as originating at the personal level, they become understandable and actionable. When defined at an institutional level, the problem remains abstract and ill-defined and thus difficult to combat. It's the bystander effect on a mass scale. For example, the climate movement attacks Big Oil for lacking any semblance of social responsibility and polluting the environmental and exploiting the earth without paying for any consequences. To which a Big Oil executive might respond, "It's our *job* to be profitable; we have an obligation to our shareholders to make a good return; it's a business and we're just trying to grow like any other business." On some level, they're right. With justification using terms like shareholders, business, and profit, the industry can dodge

accepting culpability for their actions. But the problem highlighted here must run more deeply than a flawed business model.

The more fundamental issue is how the men and women who make these decisions think it reasonable to damage the future of the planet for everyone while they make a fortune. Or how they view the earth as something to be owned and sold rather than to respect and coexist within. There is a problem of the human heart—the lust for greed, power, and status—the same condition that has plagued mankind from its birth—that manifests in supra-human bodies. Rather than attacking the problem at an ethereal, abstract level, it makes more sense to attack it in a fundamental, concrete form, at the root, so that it can be righted once correctly. Fixing something decisively at its most essential level is sustainable.

As I suggested in the opening lines of this paper, these problems have wrought as much destruction and suffering as they can on human beings and on the earth: we have reached a turning point in human development. An evolution must happen, because "business as usual" simply won't cut it any longer. If our ways don't change soon, the planet will become vastly less inhabitable because of the bottom line of climate change. The above problems are embedded within each of us, and cannot be tackled by new innovations, drugs, or laws. They must be addressed where they begin. It is this realization that I referred to above as both startling and empowering. It is startling because we come to understand that each of us is broken in some way, has a bad habit that nags at our psyches, or an old pain or grief that we drag along with us each day that affects how we behave in the world. I have referred to these as "problems" but might be better framed simply as traits that require attention, care, and effort to be transmuted into something sustainable both for oneself and for society.

The realization is empowering because once one accepts the above internal situation—the human condition (or as the Buddha might put it, "All life is suffering")—one can immediately start anew. Every day is an opportunity to begin again, with the past only existing as memories. One has the power to create a new self and new society whenever that choice is made.

With power comes responsibility and duty. The power to transform and recreate ourselves and society brings with it the responsibility to act on that power and use it for the good and sustainable. Though as a species we are at a turning point, there is no guarantee that affairs will turn out just fine in the end. It requires effort, learning, some pain, honesty, and growth for us to frankly see our bad habits and devise ways to enact new, sustainable approaches. This power is a responsibility and duty, though, because there won't be a special committee or organization making all of the changes that will advance our race. Though a small group of committed individuals can indeed change the world, the impending perspectival shift can and must occur in the "average" person. The power is in the people, the everyman. They (we) are often referred to as consumers, the public, laymen, or other terms that lump each individual into some abstract, middling category without their consent or knowledge. But instead of tacitly accepting a comfortable existence in one of these safe categories, the individual can come to understand that the best place for change to begin is within the self, *one's own* self. It's up to no one else.

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Appendix

CODA

As I would have hoped, my views and understandings of the issues presented here have evolved dramatically over the year-long process of research and writing. This paper is a reflection of the ideas that underpin it, and thus, like the society it critiques, is a constant work-in-progress. I'm sure that my views will continue to transform. I'm glad to have the opportunity to present my case and I hope my readers were inspired to examine matters in a new light.

As important as the individual is to social change, the institution is vital in allowing changes to take full effect. For example, the Civil Rights Movement was indeed sparked by passionate and courageous individuals, but aimed for and required *de jure* legitimation by the government. Still, enshrining equality into law cannot enshrine it in the hearts of citizens, and *de facto* discrimination persists despite the law. I now see individual and institutional change as two processes that must work in tandem, constantly, for change to be truly felt in full force. Sustainable attitudes like equality can thus be reified and racism eradicated within both the individual and the institution.