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Therapy, for the Person and Society

The Hebrew word *shalom* is one of the most versatile expressions of a human ideal in any language. It is the word for peace, and is also used as a greeting at the start and end of most conversations. But in distant Biblical times, the original meaning of *shalom* was a sense of completeness or wholeness.

Fast forwarding to Twentieth Century Palestine, which became the state of Israel, a diverse collection of utopian social experimenters developed the institution of the *kibbutz*, or cooperative agricultural settlement. While different *kibbutzim* have varied widely in their adherence to the ideals (often socialist in their base) of their founders, the institution has had an influence on Israeli society that has been lasting and greater than the numerical proportion of kibbutz residents. And one of the kibbutz ideals was the same sense of completeness embodied in the ancient sense of the word *shalom*. The institution advocated the complete man or woman¹ in which both the mind and body were nurtured and fulfilled. Its founders were reacting to a previous overemphasis in Eastern European Jewish society on the mind as opposed to the body, and helped to promote the greater respect for physical activity that has characterized Israeli society.

Balance between the mind and body is a common ideal in many other cultures. It was stressed in the classical cultures of ancient Greece and Rome, in particular. In fact the Romans coined a proverb still current among educated Westerners: *mens sana in corpore sano* (a sound mind in a sound body).

Completeness means a harmonious blending of mind and body as well as different parts of mental and emotional life. The discussion of the last two chapters on self-actualization argues in favor of synthetic, holistic views of the human personality. Modern scientific findings in neuroscience, experimental psychology, and neural network theory further strengthen belief in the ideal of blending together elements

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of the personality that are seemingly in conflict. This is an ideal that is not just a modern one but as old as recorded history. Aspects of the ideal have been expressed with many different words in different cultures.

Philosophical Ideals

Synthesis of disparate elements has been particularly prominent in Eastern philosophy. The Chinese notions of Yin and Yang, illustrated in Figure 8.2, were the heart of the *I Ching* or Book of Changes, the Chinese book of divination and wisdom that dates back to antiquity. The traditions of this book² were written long before the Confucianist or Taoist religion developed and exerted a great influence on the origins of both those religions. As summarized by the essayist Fridtjof Capra, yang and yin originally meant the sunny and shady sides of a mountain but then became broadened to represent a host of other polarities: “*Yang*, the strong, male, creative power, was associated with Heaven, whereas *Yin*, the dark, receptive, female and maternal element, was represented by the Earth.”³

Western thought until recently has tended to regard Yang as superior to Yin. In the extreme, some people associate Yang with good and Yin with evil. Figure 8.2, however, suggests that the two ideas were meant to blend together, with neither one defeating the other. The light of Yang encloses a bit of darkness, and the dark of Yin encloses a bit of light.

The *I Ching* consists of an elaborate display in which Yang is represented by continuous lines and Yin by broken lines. Groups of six “Yins” or “Yangs” form into every conceivable pattern. Ancient Chinese sages used this book for prophecy. Whatever pattern was randomly encountered on opening the book would help determine what balance between these two principles was needed to guide a person’s actions. In the same spirit, Lao Tzu, the founder of Taoism, gave some exhortations whose purpose was to put people in balance. He tried to free people from rigid either-or mental constructs (see Chapters 5 and 6):

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Be bent, and you will remain straight.

Be vacant, and you will remain full.

Be worn, and you will remain new.⁴

Whether or not we accept the validity of prophecies based on the *I Ching*, neuroscience and neural network theory suggest that it is common sense to accept the ideal of balance — or, better yet, synthesis — between the seemingly opposed elements in that book. The Hindus express a similar ideal, often called *transcendence*. One aspect of transcendence is “being in the world but not of it.” This could mean, for example, being successful at a profession or business without being corrupted by it. It could also mean enjoying sensual pleasure without being a slave to it. Or transcendence could mean participating in spiritual or ascetic disciplines without becoming overly proud of oneself or bitter toward the world. Since in Hindu metaphysics the ultimate (*Brahman*) is incomprehensible and without definable attributes, their social view tends to discourage glorifying some human attributes at the expense of others.

This Oriental-like strain is not as important in traditional Western philosophy, but not absent there either. Perhaps its best known Western exponent is the Nineteenth Century philosopher Georg Hegel.⁵ Hegel was notable for his opposition to setting up absolutes in abstract thinking; in fact, he believed that abstract ideas are almost interchangeable with their opposites. In the development of wisdom about anything, he proposed that an original idea or *thesis* tends to meet with its opposite or *antithesis*. Eventually, the thesis and antithesis unite to form a *synthesis*. Then the synthesis in turn becomes the thesis for another antithesis, repeating the cycle. While he stood for scientific rigor against the fashionable romanticism of his day, Hegel saw scientific truth in terms that are dynamic rather than static:

The bud disappears as the blossom bursts forth, and one could say that the former is refuted by the latter. In the same way, the fruit declares the blossom to be a false existence of the plant. These forms do not only differ, they also displace each other because they are incompatible.

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Their fluid nature, however, makes them, at the same time, elements of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which one is as necessary as the other ...⁶

Hegel's outlook foreshadows the approach to science taken by this book and others influenced by modern dynamical system theory.

Another Western philosopher influenced by Hinduism and transcendent notions was Ralph Waldo Emerson. His view of the highest ideal, as embodied in an "over-soul," was something that rises above specific human traits, even the most desirable ones:

The soul is superior to all the particulars of merit. The soul requires purity, but purity is not it; requires justice, but justice is not that; requires beneficence, but is somewhat better ...⁷

Emerson wrote many essays noted for avoiding the typical Western dichotomy between the spiritual and secular. In his writings, religious and metaphysical themes blended harmoniously with descriptions of earthly pursuits, such as climbing Mount Katahdin in Maine.

In the late Twentieth Century, Robert Pirsig in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* wrote in the same synthetic tradition.⁸ The "Zen" strain in his semi-fictional book relates to suggestions he makes for breaking out of accepted molds. For example, he advocates that people working hard on a creative problem walk away every so often from the problem and "go fishing," metaphorically or literally, to gather their thoughts. But Pirsig is not to be confused with modern popular self-help writers who advocate getting *out* of your "head" and into your feelings (or, worse yet, out of your "left brain" and into your "right brain"*). Instead, he values *both* the classical, rational aspect of mental life and the romantic,

* Most neuroscientists who study the functions of the brain's two hemispheres, such as Robert Efron (*The Decline and Fall of Hemispheric Specialization*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1990) and Michael Gazzaniga, (*The Social Brain*, Basic Books, 1985), debunk the popular notion that the "left and right brains" constitute radically different personalities. Specialization of functions between hemispheres, they say, is a matter of evolutionary convenience, and can be altered by some conditions such as left-handedness.

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intuitive aspect. He sees a balance or synthesis between those two outlooks (called by others *Apollonian* and *Dionysian* after the two ancient Greek gods Apollo and Dionysius who represented them) as necessary for all pursuits that require mental activity. This includes both “exalted” pursuits like scientific research and philosophy, and “mundane” pursuits like repairing a motorcycle.

Pirsig’s book spawned several other books on “Zen and the art of (fill in the blanks)” but remains, in my opinion, the best of this genre. It doesn’t just react to the over-intellectualizing of Western society but propounds an ideal that synthesizes both Western and Eastern strengths. (Later, when talking about different forms of psychotherapy, I will return to the distinction between a reactive outlook and a synthetic, proactive one.)

The ideal of synthesizing the best of different outlooks is hard to grasp and harder to live up to. It requires being a “boundary agent” between disparate groups or ideas, that is, appreciating what each one has to offer and trying to arrive at creative syntheses between them. It also requires having close contact with these groups or ideas but not falling into the prevailing traps of any one of them. We must make that effort, though, if we are ever to create a fundamentally cooperative society. By now, our global problems are so complex that a cooperative global society is a necessity. Probably the only alternative to world-wide cooperation is either destruction as a species or some kind of world-wide fascism.

The “three brains” idea⁹ and the dynamical system approach to neural networks suggest that cooperation in society has to be based on cooperation within each individual human’s brain. Intellect, emotions, instincts, habits, memories, plans, drives, beliefs, concepts, goals, and aspirations all have their place in the larger networks describing our brains and minds. Rather than making any one of those things superior to others, modern neural network models suggest that all these aspects of our mental and spiritual lives function best in a rough balance of power. This suggests Walt Whitman’s poetic ideal of a “democratic system” within the individual (see Chapter 11 for how this relates to the brain).

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Social Experiments

Since the 1960s, more people have started to experiment with such synthetic approaches, not only in social organization but in the arts and life styles. Other people have suggested in fiction some novel syntheses that have not yet been tried in an actual society.

There is an organization called the Fellowship for Intentional Community in Rutledge, Missouri, that has published several editions of a Communities Directory that lists many groups with experimental living arrangements — predominantly in the United States but also including brief mention of communities in 21 other countries¹⁰. The term *intentional community*, which is widely used for such groups, has been defined in many ways by their members. Perhaps the best definition is this one by Geoph Kozeny, who is based in a San Francisco community called Stardance but has extensively lectured in other communities:

An “intentional community” is a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values. The people may live together on a piece of rural land, in a suburban home, or in an urban neighborhood, and they may share a single residence or live in a cluster of dwellings.¹¹

The intentional community movement (often described as a “utopian” movement) was quite strong in the United States in the Nineteenth Century, with such well-known examples as New Harmony, Brook Farm, Oneida, and Hopedale¹². This movement waned in the first half of the Twentieth Century, but since the revolutionary period of the late 1960s it has waxed again.

The ideals these communities embody are diverse. Some are centered around a particular religion. Others have a main focus that is ecological, attempting to grow food and perform other major functions in ways that conserve natural resources. That includes an urban “eco-village” in two city blocks of Los Angeles as well as many rural communities. A few are particularly involved with communal child rearing or nontraditional sexual arrangements. Most such communities are democratically run and avoid strong

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central leadership (although there have been some successful communes centered around charismatic leaders¹³). Their modes of organization vary from very loose structures to a large number of detailed rules. But all have in common the sense of people creating their own ways, using both their rational capacities for detailed problem solving and their emotional capacities for sensitivity. Another communitarian, Laird from Sandhill Farm in Missouri, described the process as an intense and challenging one:

It's like a crucible: the heat of it, the intensity. ... There can be this real wild swing, from joyous "Ah-hah" moments when groups surge past difficult barriers, to deep despair when the obstacles seem insurmountable and unbudgeable.¹⁴

Now let's describe a few groups of people that embody aesthetic and religious ideals compatible with the goals of self-actualization. Some of these overlap with the groups forming intentional communities. Others will be discussed in the final chapter in the book, when we project into the desired future.

Aesthetic and Religious Experiments

Since the beginning of time, people with imagination have been aesthetically drawn to contrasts and ironies. Contrasts are attractive to people because they contain an element of surprise. This enhances the sense of "what you get is more than what you see" about life and people.

Many of us get pleasure from things which combine one quality and its opposite. As a child I loved the fairy tale about the little prince who wanted a food that was both light and dark, and both hot and cold. The palace cooks tried many combinations in a vain effort to please this difficult prince. Finally they came up with the idea of putting chocolate sauce on ice cream, and the prince was delighted with the invention.

The main technical subject of this book, neural networks, combines the "ice cream" of pure theory with the "chocolate sauce" of application to human feelings and relations. Conversations among the most forward looking neural network researchers ramble in much the way this book does, only more so. The

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talk flows freely between technical points about mathematical models or biochemical systems and emotional reactions to life or news stories.

I have also experienced and enjoyed the beauty of ironic juxtapositions in many other parts of life. As a student, for example, I was active in the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA), which grew out of an informal May Day tournament in the mid-1960s (when else?) at Berkeley, California (where else?). The Society's founders included the noted fantasy writer Marion Zimmer Bradley. SCA recreates medieval and Renaissance tournaments and revels with people dressed in garb appropriate for that era, each having a Society name attached to some kind of in-period persona (Viking warrior, Italian courtly lady, et cetera). The entire Society is organized into shires, baronies, principalities, and finally kingdoms on top.

SCA's aesthetic irony is that it doesn't recreate *all* of medieval life, but is selective about what it reproduces. Modern technology is not rejected, even if some devices are given fanciful medieval names (such as "steed" or "folksdragon" for automobile, or "farspeaker" for telephone). Nor is modern medicine: a few Anachronists play at being lepers or plague victims, but there are no real ones. There are "wars," but the "killing" that takes place in them is symbolic, not real, and the rate of serious injury is much less than in professional football. Finally, the political structure that has evolved in SCA is not genuinely feudal but closer to democratic, even though people make ceremonial obeisance to simulated royalty. Kings are chosen by tournaments and crowns aren't hereditary; actual administrative functions are carried out by Seneschals of both sexes who are usually chosen by consensus. But music, dancing, crafts, games, food, heraldry, and (non-lethal) combat are practiced to a fine art and made as authentic as possible. The Society's members try to live up to its motto of recreating the Middle Ages "not as they were, but as they should have been."

The SCA is typical of many interest clubs that take what they see as the best of a particular historical period or culture without succumbing to the common nonsense of that period or culture. This selective, eclectic approach need not produce blandness but instead can produce combinations with a great deal of creative vitality. Another example is the American neo-Pagan religious movement.¹⁵ This is a loose

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coalition of groups drawing on beliefs and rituals from ancient goddess worship, European witchcraft traditions, Celtic Druidism, American Indian ceremonies, and many other sources, most of them connected with respect for the earth and its cycles* It is a movement with many subgroups that don't agree on everything but keep in largely friendly contact with each other and sometimes work together in national festivals.

Neo-Pagans, like Creative Anachronists (the two groups overlap a lot!), don't accept the traditions they come from indiscriminately. This is why they are "neo" and not just "pagan." For example, the ones who are goddess worshipers don't sacrifice the male consort of the high priestess every year, as some ancient goddess-worshipping Greeks and Sumerians did. They tend to be eclectic and inventive, as illustrated by one account from Margot Adler's book:¹⁶

Alison Harlow, trained in Victor Anderson's "fairy" tradition and in the Gardnerian tradition, began a coven with four women, all from different traditions. They combined their teachings and rituals and, presto, they had a new tradition: the Tanic.**

Religious eclecticism and creativity are found in people from all existing religious traditions. In addition to the neo-Pagans, there are equally creative people who have come out of more mainstream religious traditions, such as Christianity, and made selective changes in them. For example, my own religion of Unitarian Universalism (UU) is a creative offshoot of Protestantism. Despite their roots, most services at typical UU churches aren't closely tied to the Bible. Depending on what points the minister (or lay

* Contrary to some people's misconceptions, the sources of Pagan beliefs *don't* include Satanism. Neo-Pagans aren't "inverted Christians" but are reviving or inventing spiritual traditions that are largely separate from Christianity. A minority of Pagans even combine Christian elements of worship with Druid, American Indian, ancient Greek, or Norse elements.

** The woman mentioned in this passage, a leader in the neo-Pagan movement, works professionally as a computer systems consultant, particularly dealing with medical databases. Disproportionately many people in that movement work in scientific or technical professions, combining them harmoniously with mystical beliefs. She is also a member of an intentional community near Santa Cruz, California, that I've visited: the community is called Eclectia and is made up mainly of Pagans who are also computer professionals.

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preacher) wishes to make, sermons draw on Christian, Eastern, Jewish, or Pagan spiritual sources, modern novels, political commentary, science, philosophy, humor — you name it. It is a religion where people are drawn together by common social concerns and desire for spiritual connection with each other, but insist on using their own consciences and reasoning powers. This means UU's don't share an elaborate dogma or set of theological doctrines. We joke sometimes that we tolerate all people in our church except those who are intolerant!

Just as Unitarian Universalism is a creative offshoot of Protestantism, Bahai is a creative offshoot of Islam. Like UUism, Bahai includes forms of worship and belief that incorporate traditions other than its parent faith. It has its own prophets (Baha'ullah and Abdul Baha) as well as accepting most of the prophets of other major faiths and emphasizing international brotherhood. And there is also a lot of creative vitality within traditional denominations. In the United States, for example, many Methodist or Presbyterian ministers stay largely within centuries-old Christian doctrine but break with parts of established doctrine to embrace modern social outlooks they believe in, such as feminism and gay rights. (In some cases, the national denominational governing bodies have themselves modified the old outlook, provoking an outcry from many traditionalists.)

In every religious group, there are people who feel themselves and are regarded by others as very much part of the group, but manage to avoid some of that group's common faults. This takes a combination of personal qualities: commitment to be part of a certain community, intuition to recognize any common nonsense prevalent in the community, and courage not to conform to that common nonsense. People with similar qualities are found in every definable group, not just religious ones. These include business executives who aren't obsessed with short-term profit; environmentalists who don't despise cities; academicians who aren't stuck in narrow specialties; clergy who aren't dryly moralistic; politicians who don't lack ethical principles. All of these people hold beliefs that encompass flexible rather than stereotyped categories (see Chapter 5).

Such flexible, and yet solidly grounded, attitudes are open to adoption by everybody, not just a small elite. Most of us, not just those with special talents, have brains with a dynamic potential that society

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often suppresses. How can we influence a lot more people to think and act this way? At its best, individual (or group) psychotherapy can play a vital role in bringing out the best potential in human beings. Like any other institution, the profession of psychotherapy has its own brands of common sense and common nonsense.

Implications for Psychotherapy

Not surprisingly, the professional practice of psychotherapy has borrowed some notions from Eastern philosophy and religion. Partly this has been done as a counterbalance to the heavy Western emphases on intellectualism and on absolute morality. Some of the Eastern religious ideas have been filtered through the teachings of the Russian mystic G. I. Gurdjieff, born between 1872 and 1877. Gurdjieff has left few writings, and his teachings are described best by other authors such as Peter Ouspensky, Maurice Nicoll, and Charles Tart.¹⁷ The main focus of psychotherapy based on either Buddhist meditation or Gurdjieff is to promote *mindfulness*. This means awareness of what one is doing, feeling, and thinking in the present, as opposed to the larger and longer-term implications and significance of events. One of the offshoots of mindfulness is that ordinary happenings, such as shopping or driving to work or washing dishes, are observed more closely. Often as these mundane events are experienced more deeply, they become more pleasurable as well.

The recent best seller by Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul*, also emphasizes enjoying mundane events.¹⁸ Moore stresses that a bit of self-indulgence, and taking care of bodily needs, is good for the soul. This is an apparent reaction to the emphasis on self-denial and sacrifice at the heart of much Christian and Jewish morality — even though the author himself is a former Catholic monk.

Soul care and mindfulness are obviously valuable for a great many people. But these techniques don't tell the whole story, because a healthy personality eventually needs to integrate both intellectuality and altruism as well. The authors of the books and articles about mindfulness and soul care are trying to promote balance between intellect and emotions, between self-denial and self-indulgence. But some

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psychotherapists and counselors seem to use techniques like these somewhat blindly. In reaction to the prevailing emphases of Western culture, they create the opposite emphases. This runs the danger of unconsciously influencing their clients to devalue intellectual life, discipline, and concern for others, even though that's not the counselors' intention.

Some therapists, in an effort to break the stranglehold of confining families and religions, focus on the individual and soft-pedal community ties and obligations. As Rabbi Lawrence Kushner relates: "I recall reading an article by a psychiatrist who commented that she had heard several of her colleagues boast of having made patients more assertive, more independent. She didn't remember ever hearing one boast of having made a client more charitable, more nurturing."¹⁹ If this is true, many psychiatrists and other therapists need to approach self-care a bit more broadly. Self-care includes not only self-indulgence or advancement of one's personal goals, but also includes feeling that one is being useful and compassionate to others. Self-care also at times includes the possibility of consciously denying oneself (say, of excessive food) in order to feel better. And as for the reaction against over-intellectualism — my awareness of my emotions includes the fact that I genuinely enjoy an intellectual challenge, whether it involves a serious problem or a game.

In general, *reaction to* an overemphasis is not the same as synthesis or even balance between opposites. At best, reaction to overemphasis is a first step toward balance. Many people do in fact need help with first steps that they haven't yet taken. But as people develop greater maturity, and find contexts in which they are comfortable, sometimes instead of a first step they need help in moving from a successful sixteenth step to an uncertain seventeenth step.

At worst, people who are overreacting get stuck in their reaction and may create a counterreaction, either in themselves or in other people. The state of an individual, or an analogous social network, can oscillate back and forth between the two opposite poles: between love and hate, overwork and inertia, chaos and conformity, et cetera. This is captured by the neural network metaphor of the gated dipole (see Chapters 5 and 6) which encodes pairs of opposites.

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Synthesis is analogous to justice, but overreaction is analogous to revenge. It is as if our emotional needs are treated as perpetual “victims” needing special treatment rather than defense of their equal rights. This is a common nonsense which is analogous to the current American disease of “political correctness.” It is like the mind set, for example, of the male-bashing portion of the feminist movement which treats women as victims, or the white-bashing portion of African-American leadership which treats blacks as victims.

How can we structure psychotherapy in a more synthetic manner? The dynamic systems approach of neural networks can give us some clues.

It sounds like a truism to say that our brains, and therefore our mental lives, are dynamic and change over time. But psychotherapy has been uneven in integrating that idea into practice. A few psychological movements (e.g., humanistic, transpersonal, and at times Jungian psychology) tend to be ahead of others. As the humanist psychotherapist Roger Walsh discussed, mainstream therapy is still sometimes based implicitly on the common nonsense that there is a norm called “mature adult functioning,” that the goal of all therapy is to break barriers toward reaching this norm, and that growth basically ceases once the norm is reached.²⁰

An individual’s conflicts are too often evaluated without regard to the person’s level of development (mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual). In contrast to this notion, Erik Erikson, one of the giants of modern psychotherapy, discussed several distinct stages of adult life.²¹ These adult stages are characterized by struggles described as “generativity versus stagnation” and “ego integrity versus despair.” These deal with very different issues than the struggles of adolescence (e.g., “identity versus role confusion”) or childhood (e.g., “basic trust versus basic mistrust”). Erikson posited definite age ranges for these conflicts. The implications of neural network dynamics support his general conclusions but suggest there could be wide individual variations in the ages at which conflicts occur.

Besides the notion that growth ceases with adulthood, Walsh discussed another bit of common nonsense: that the main goal of psychotherapy is to reduce anxiety.²² As Abraham Maslow pointed out, when lower-level needs have been met, a person may not move immediately toward absolute contentment.

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Rather, he or she may move to a higher level of discontent!²³ For example, if an underemployed person gets a steady job, her or his grumbling about lack of a job might be replaced by grumbling about whether the job expresses her or his deepest aspirations. If the personal fulfillment issues get resolved, that can in turn be replaced by grumbling about the general unfairness of society (an example of what Maslow called a *metagrumble*).

As people make peace with aspects of their lives and take on new challenges, they naturally get anxious about their ability to succeed in more difficult tasks. It is important not to wring one's hands about this kind of high-level anxiety but to recognize it as a "healthier" form of anxiety than the type people feel when worried about basic survival, or even about basic self-esteem. I had such a feeling of apprehension when, after having written a technical textbook that was adopted at several universities, I started in earnest to write this book for a general audience. My apprehension was not only natural and healthy, but akin to religious awe and rather pleasant!

When someone takes on a new challenge, however, the stress can make her or him revert to nonoptimal patterns of behavior that were previously abandoned in easier situations. At those times, other people — including the media, if the person is a public figure, and therapists — may become more critical of her or him than is justified. During the 1988 American Presidential campaign, for example, some reporters from the *Boston Globe* wrote a political biography of Michael Dukakis, the Democratic Party candidate. They said that Dukakis had learned useful lessons from the time back in 1978 when he had been defeated for re-election as Governor of Massachusetts. By abandoning earlier patterns, these reporters said, he had regained his office and then become a successful Governor for two terms. The patterns he had overcome included speaking in an overly unemotional tone and failing to reward loyal campaign workers with job appointments. Upon reading this I noted that under the stress of running for higher office, he had reverted to his earlier unemotionality! Polls showed that the American public was critical of him for lacking passion (e.g., when asked how he'd react if his wife were raped).

Similarly, in his first few months as President, Bill Clinton fell into bad habits he had largely "outgrown" as a successful Governor of Arkansas. These included tendencies to make policies in secret,

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and to float the most radical proposals (e.g., his health care plan and policy changes on gays in the military) before garnering enough support for them. His mistakes led to an onslaught of media and public criticism that continued to hurt Clinton's supporters a year and a half after his inauguration, during the November, 1994, elections for the United States Congress. (Unlike Dukakis, Clinton was given a chance to grow in office and recover from his mistakes.)

What lessons can we draw from the Dukakis and Clinton stories? All of us, and psychotherapists in particular, need to show compassion toward those who are struggling with taking on new challenges, and showing stress as a result. In line with the theme of "what you get is more than what you see," we need to give these people credit for past growth that may be temporarily extinguished by their current stresses. The more we as individuals and societies develop that kind of compassion, the more people will be encouraged instead of discouraged to stretch their limits. And stretching limits is what we need to create a cooperative world.

In order to encourage people to take on new challenges, we need to change the prevailing Western mode of emphasis on definite solutions.²⁴ Too much emphasis on measurable final results makes us tend to criticize people unduly for partial efforts in the right direction. One scientist who recognized this as common nonsense was Warren McCulloch, the physician, neuroscientist, and mathematician who was one of the founders of both neural networks and modern computer science. McCulloch was often criticized for making speculative leaps that were far ahead of his time and therefore, because of how far science had developed, couldn't be supported by airtight logical arguments. But he had a standard answer to such verbal attacks, which I believe applies to many other situations including therapy. He would answer: "Don't bite my finger, look where I am pointing."²⁵

We can replace "finger biting" by a more common sense, open-minded attitude toward people if we view the human mind as possessing more richness and complexity than it shows at any given time. This view of the mind is partly captured by the neural network model of preferences between old and new Coke (see Chapter 6). The Coke network suggests that people don't always have "traits" or even "preferences." Instead, they may have many possible, conflicting, but simultaneously existing behavior patterns, each able

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to appear in the proper context. If a behavior pattern we want isn't currently visible, we shouldn't lose faith that something might be done to bring it out. "What you get is more than what you see" needs to be an operative phrase for a genuinely humanistic psychology.

The mechanistic theory of cognitive functions provided by neural networks leads to another truism with major consequences. This is the notion that mental function combines multiple conceptual levels. My own neural network models of card sorting (shown in Figure 4.2) and consumer decision (Multiattribute Decision Making in Context...) are dauntingly complex. It is even more daunting that each network shown in those figures models only a tiny part of the brain! This means that our brains and minds are so intricate that no single aspect of our mental life can dominate all the others.

The lesson of such complexity for psychotherapy is to avoid reducing all personal struggles and conflicts to the lowest common denominator. In particular, it is wrong to confuse anxiety about a higher-level need with anxiety about a lower-level need. For example, at early stages of therapy, adolescents and young adults often have problems with basic self-esteem. That is, they are struggling to define themselves as autonomous beings independently of their background and respecting themselves as individuals. But years later, the same person who has achieved a fair amount of healthy autonomy may return to therapy to discuss anxieties about *self-promotion* in relation to some vocational or interpersonal goal. Selling oneself to others is a different mental level than selling oneself to oneself (although some personality types actually find the former easier than the latter). Confusing the two is not only inaccurate but potentially harmful. It may shake the client's faith in the growth she or he has previously made in the self-esteem dimension. Good psychotherapy for such a person would draw on Erik Erikson's theory of life cycle developmental stages,²⁶ which encourages a proper respect for different mental and cognitive levels.

Focusing on Health, Not Disease

Abraham Maslow broke new ground in clinical psychology by focusing on what makes people mentally healthy, not how they are mentally deficient.²⁷ He treated neurosis as an ill-conceived attempt at

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growth. While he inspired a large Humanistic Psychology movement, Maslow's insights are too often ignored even today by many practicing therapists. When they see a client stuck in a neurotic pattern, some therapists ask why he or she *wants* to preserve the pattern. This is unnecessarily insulting because the person is really at that point in time a captive of "The good that I would I do not: but the evil that I would not I do."*

In fact, it is often difficult to disentangle neurotic behavior patterns from healthy adaptive patterns. Most neurotic patterns have perseverated from an earlier time, such as childhood. But the pattern usually involves a tendency that covers a wide range of situations. This means that some perfectly healthy behavior may accidentally fit into the same general pattern as the neurotic behavior! For example, suppose that as a single person, you became overly cautious in entering sexual relationships, and this led to blocks against creativity in other areas of life. Then suppose you get into a good marriage, and AIDS is epidemic. Caution in sex outside of marriage is now appropriate, both for marital stability and for the health of the two partners. But on some brain level, the current appropriate behavior reinforces the earlier timidity which suppressed creativity. In this example, a statement by a therapist that you "want" to stay timid is particularly inappropriate because your behavior is justified by healthy personal goals.

The normative lesson of the "sex and AIDS" example is that there is a world of difference between wanting to do X and wanting to do Y which has consequence X (even if the wanter *knows* it has consequence X!). The therapist should honor this difference to enhance the client's self-respect.

To put it another way, not all emotional conflicts are what Maslow calls "growth versus safety." Some could be more accurately described as "growth versus growth": dilemmas that occur when the person feels a potential conflict between two courses of action, each of which seems to him or her to advance two separate and healthy goals (such as individual creativity and good marital relations). Once again, the effort should be directed at novel syntheses that bridge such paradoxes.

* As in Chapter 1, "evil" is taken here in the sense not of deliberate wickedness, but of stunting human growth or potential.

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Current mainstream psychotherapy, in the United States at least, tends to focus on pointing out the client's inner conflict. For people (adolescent or adult) whose self-awareness is low, people who have been stuck in a habitual pattern and slow to challenge it, this mainstream focus is necessary and valuable. For many people at a higher stage of self-awareness, however, *integrating* these conflicts, as in the synthetic style of Daniel Wegner and Robin Vallacher²⁸ (see Chapter 7), is more useful. If such a person is overly self-sacrificing, for example, it's not enough to exhort the person to be more assertive and defend her or his autonomy. She or he may be seeking creative ways to combine assertiveness with consideration for the interests of other people. Such a person may have already overcome the abstract guilt of a confining religion or possessive parents, but still care a lot about a significant other, friends, family, or a community. This person will usually want to keep others' needs in mind while at the same time defending her or his own.

The famous psychological and sociological results on self-fulfilling prophecy and Pygmalion effects (see Chapter 1, Case 1) tell us that the more we believe people can do, the more they will do. So the therapist shouldn't underestimate his or her client's level of growth. A therapist who communicates a faith that the client can reach his or her higher goals will be more likely to make the client achieve those goals.

David Hestenes, who is a neural network modeler and an innovator in science education, has suggested (personal communication) that education is a good metaphor for most of what psychotherapists can do. The medical model which is applicable to patients who have serious mental illnesses may not be a good one for people who are less disturbed but simply seeking new patterns for work or relationships. The model of learning a skill (either a social or a time management skill, for example) may be a better one. Hestenes is interested in applying neural network theory to the learning processes involved in education, a project that hasn't yet begun.

Synthesizing paradoxical goals within the individual is analogous to the mediation that many therapists practice successfully within groups.²⁹ As with groups, there is usually some merit to both "sides" of the argument, and it is unhealthy to dismiss either side. This kind of synthesis is also analogous to the politics of meaning³⁰ (see the section on "Implications for Politics" later in this chapter for more discussion of this).

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Appropriate methods of psychotherapy are diverse and context-dependent. These methods run the gamut (for different people) from behavior modification to primal scream, meditation to Jungian analysis: the list is long. Still, both neural dynamics and Maslow's outlook suggest one very general paradigm that is applicable in many situations. A client has a persistent behavior pattern with a bad consequence, call it A, and he or she wants to change the pattern. Current mainstream therapy American tends to focus on the pathology which caused, or is causing, the pattern itself. Instead, a more health-oriented approach is to treat the pattern as an attempt (even if it is an unsuccessful attempt) to achieve a good consequence B. For example, a person may subconsciously avoid improving his or her performance on a job in order to keep other people from being jealous and so preserve valuable friendships. The therapist should then discuss with the client how to get B without A, even if it's more difficult than his or her current mode — in that case, how to improve job performance while making sure that the job improvement doesn't destroy friendships.

Psychotherapy a century after Freud is still far from being a science. There is much work ahead in applying to therapy the insights from the sciences of this book — neural network theory, dynamical systems, neuroscience, and experimental psychology. There have been a few efforts in this direction, sporadic so far.³¹ The insights of the last two sections can help point the way toward a more refined scientific theory of effective therapy. This will help make the systematic distinctions between people at different life stages and different levels of coping that are too frequently glossed over in current practice.

The systems theory we have employed in this book points to analogies between organizations at different levels of complexity. Concepts designed to deal with one level are often useful as metaphors for processes at another level. In this case, the approach I have taken to individual therapy also suggests approaches to “therapy” for communities, societies, and political systems.

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Building Healthy Work Places and Organizations

Like therapy for the individual, organization in the work place or community is most effective when it appeals to the best instincts in people. The basic principles of listening to conflicting interests, respecting the dignity of all different points of view, not overestimating people's cynicism but looking for the best in people, are applicable in organizational and work situations as well as in individual or group therapy.

Mediation is an increasingly common method for resolving disputes, such as in legal disagreements or divorce cases, and one that involves specialized training.³² The skill of facilitation in an organizational or work setting is often a variant of mediation. Authors who write about mediation of disputes emphasize that mediation isn't therapy. Mediators don't seek to change or heal the people involved, but merely to achieve a settlement of specific issues that the people involved can agree to live by. But I think the difference between the two situations is less a difference of behavior principles than it is a difference of goals. Moreover, dealing peacefully with a difficult situation can lead to personal healing as an accidental by-product. And facilitation in situations where more continuing intimacy is desired — marriage counseling, or leadership in close-knit community groups — can sometimes include deeper explorations of feelings than is called for in typical divorce mediation.

There has been much writing recently on how to restructure work situations to promote good communication between employees, as well as self-actualization by individuals.³³ In particular, the management theorist Chris Argyris has long sought ways to overcome what he calls "defensive routines" in the workplace. These are strategies, particularly by management, that protect turf and image at the cost of effective communication. Such routines are characterized by "the use of soft data ... Inferences that are tacit and private ... Conclusions that are not publicly testable."³⁴ Argyris demonstrated earlier that defensive patterns are common even in firms where the participants characterize the relationships as frank and open.³⁵ The consequence is a lack of perceived freedom of emotional expression, including expression of work-related complaints, by lower-level employees.

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Like habitual patterns of people with frontal lobe damage (see Chapter 4) and entrenched maladaptive patterns of imperial societies (see Chapter 1, Case 2), defensive work routines take on a life of their own. These patterns, in the typical pattern of common nonsense captured by the MART neural network of Figure 4.2, tend to justify themselves and resist change. But there are known ways both to change and prevent them. Argyris discusses the skills required for preventing defensive routines,³⁶ with case studies in later chapters of the same book. Figure 9.1 contrasts two general models for business organizations drawn from Argyris' work. His Model II, which he considers more effective against defensive routines, is built on openness, a striving for synthesis rather than winning or losing in conflict situations, and a deemphasis on rationality. Argyris cautions, however, that his more guarded, less open Model I can't be abandoned utterly:

Acquiring Model II as a theory in use does not mean that we should discard Model I. The latter is more effective for routine, nonthreatening issues. The former is more effective for nonroutine, innovative issues as well as those that are threatening and involve defensive routines.³⁷ *

A more comprehensive theory about what types of social and organizational situations require what types of responses is outlined in the work of the interdisciplinary social scientist Sam Leven.³⁸ Leven described three prevailing human decision making types (see Figure 6.1), which are somewhat analogous to the three parts of the triune brain (instinctive, rational, emotional). These types are the *Dantzig* solvers who tend to stick to one pattern of doing things; the *Bayesians* who optimize among a fixed set of rules; and the *Godolians* who favor innovation and intuitive mental leaps. While it is common for the same person to adopt different decision styles for tasks of different complexity, Leven suggests that there is a large

* The common human tendency is to cling to safe old paradigms when situations get more threatening. Argyris hints that the best strategy is to do the exact opposite!

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correlation between the appropriate solver type and the type of organizational task. An example Leven uses of a “Dantzig” task is simplifying a particular piece of

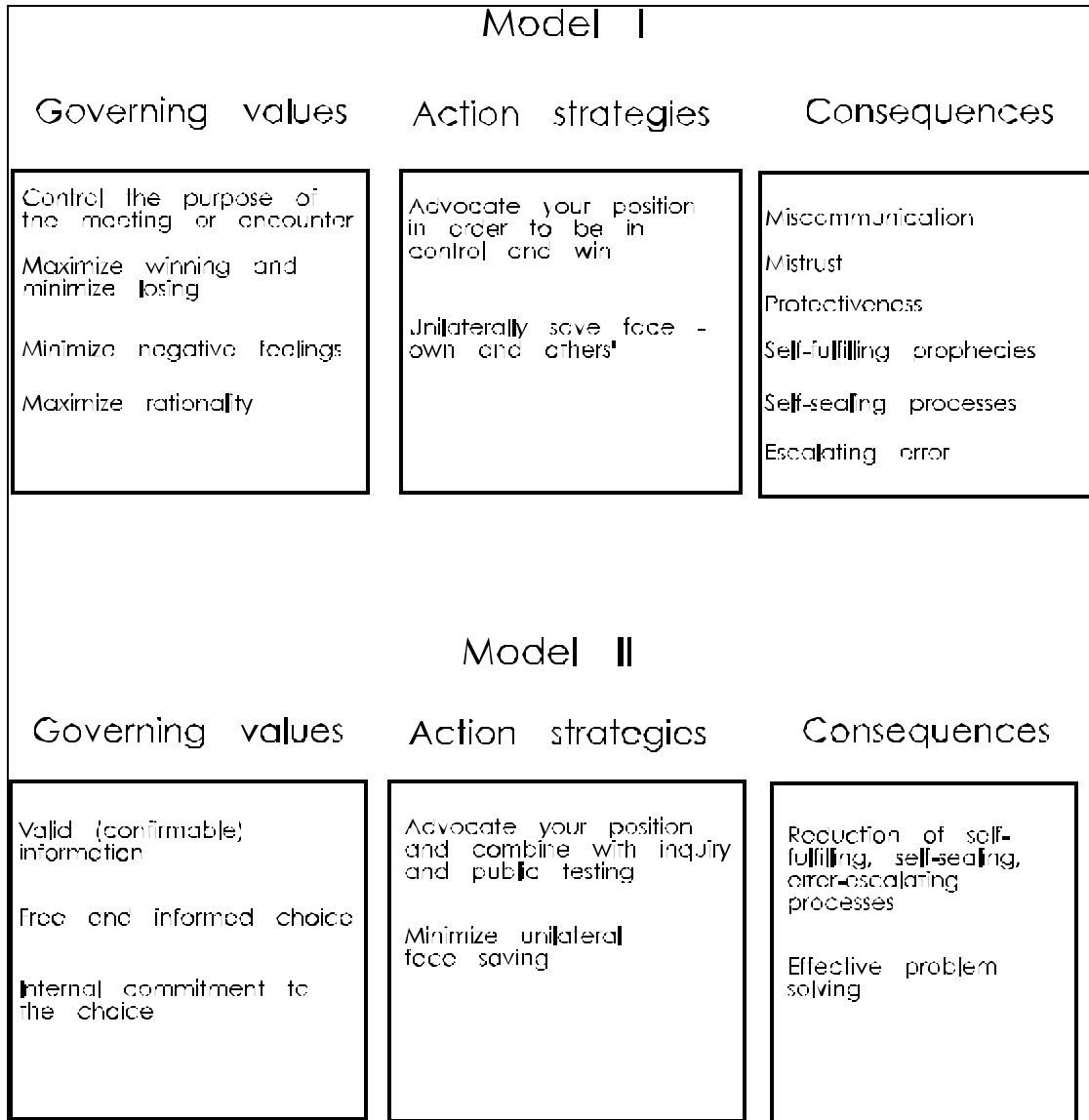


Figure 9.1. Two models for organizational management. (From Argyris, 1985, p. 82 and p. 260; adapted with permission of Pitman Publishing Company.)

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computer code. A “Bayesian” task is selecting and applying a technically advanced decision method for, say, economic prediction. A “Godelian” task is figuring out how to adapt a firm’s methods to a changed market or a changed cultural environment.

Leven applied variants of his “triune” decision theory to a wide variety of social scientific disciplines, ranging from child psychology to organizational management to economics. While he carefully avoided saying that any of the three styles is “superior” to the others, it seems clear that the complexities of the Information Age increase the value of the “Godelian,” innovative, intuitive style. This point is made by authors who have described cutting-edge work situations, such as John Naisbitt, Patricia Aburdene, Edgar Peters, and Alvin Toffler.³⁹ These authors stressed the importance of playing hunches and being adaptable, rather than sticking to the tried and true. In the same vein, Argyris suggests that common ethical values such as honesty and trustworthiness need to be preserved as general principles but redefined in their details. These values, he says, can be stretched to include flexibility and openness rather than resolute adherence to a formula.⁴⁰

Just as psychotherapy has suffered from the common nonsense that the main goal of therapy is to reduce anxiety,⁴¹ organization theory has suffered from the common nonsense that the main goal of management is to reduce chaos. By contrast, the current crop of futurists (Peters, in particular) declare that chaos, at the right times, is productive.

What might chaos be good for? For some ideas, let’s return to the mathematics of dynamical systems. Dynamical systems (whether representing the individual nervous system, a business, an economy, a society, et cetera) may fall into one of many attractors (or stable equilibrium states). Figure 7.1 shows that the attractor a system falls into may not be the optimal one. When chaos is forbidden or discouraged, the tendency is to seek and settle into the nearest available equilibrium, even if it is one that is unsatisfying or stifles people’s spirits. By contrast, encouraging chaos might help in ultimately moving the system toward a more desirable attractor.

The idea that chaos can facilitate productive change is supported by the work of the neurophysiologists Christine Skarda and Walter Freeman. Skarda and Freeman discovered electrical patterns in a part

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of the brain (the olfactory area) that appear to be chaotic in the mathematical sense, most of the time.⁴² Moreover, they found that the chaotic patterns change to more ordered and regular electrical patterns as the animal encounters significant stimuli (in this case, odors). These authors conjecture that the role of chaos in the nervous system is to enable variability of responses. Variability arises from redirection of attention to newly significant sensory patterns in the environment.

In both brains and organizations, order is good when a satisfying solution has already been reached. In that case, the organism knows what to attend to, and needs its attention kept in focus. Chaos may be good when a satisfying solution is still being sought, or the organism's attentional focus is in transition. Based on this, a playful pagan religion has arisen in the San Francisco area called Discordianism. The Discordians are devoted to the worship of Eris, the ancient Greek goddess of chaos. They proclaim that "creative disorder, like creative order, is possible and desirable; and that destructive order, like destructive disorder, is unnecessary and undesirable."⁴³ Their religion is meant to banish "the curse of Greyface," which I interpret as conformity or unthinking adherence to known, dull formulas.

Implications for Politics

What do this book's ideas about therapy and self-actualization imply for politics? Again, a synthetic approach to politics is called for. Such an approach will transcend the traditional distinctions of conservative versus liberal but include the best of each. From traditional liberalism it will gather the notion of activist government that openly seeks to promote the welfare of average people. (Later, we will see an analog for this form of government in the individual human brain!) From conservatism it will gather the notion that enduring values and communities are important.

One of the more promising current syntheses in the United States is the *politics of meaning* movement. Its major proponent, the Jewish magazine editor and activist Michael Lerner, advocates liberalism divorced from two of its attendant pieces of common nonsense. These are "the myth of externality" (meaning the belief that people make political decisions solely on the basis of narrow economic

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self-interest) and “the excessive focus on individual rights.”⁴⁴ Instead, Lerner’s vision is of a participatory political system in which people feel a sense of community and all interest groups engage in mutually respectful dialogue. If small intentional communities,⁴⁵ and the fictional utopian society of Ernest Callenbach,⁴⁶ are accurate guides, such dialogue can become quite emotional and personal as issues are ironed out.

Hence, our prescriptions for politics are an echo of Chris Argyris’ notion (see Figure 9.1) that bridges should be built between opposing positions, rather than each side seeking simply to “win.” In our current global society, strong stands do need to be taken on issues that impact large numbers of people. These include the environment, poverty, and health care. But I agree with the essayist John Saul that the American and European political systems have suffered from too much emphasis on finding definite answers,⁴⁷ even if the answers found aren’t good ones. Presidents and Prime Ministers are criticized as vacillating or weak if they don’t come quickly to decisive action, regardless of the daunting complexity of the problems they deal with. Leaders of the men’s movement, like Mark Feigen Fasteau and Mark Gerzon,⁴⁸ trace this strain in Western politics to images of masculinity that have grown up over the centuries. Political leaders are still predominantly male. Like other men they feel the need to “prove their manhood” by showing they are strong and not weak, even when the action they take to demonstrate their strength is inappropriate. We can hope that the end of the Cold War between capitalism and communism* will encourage the exercise of power by both women and men who don’t need to prove their toughness.

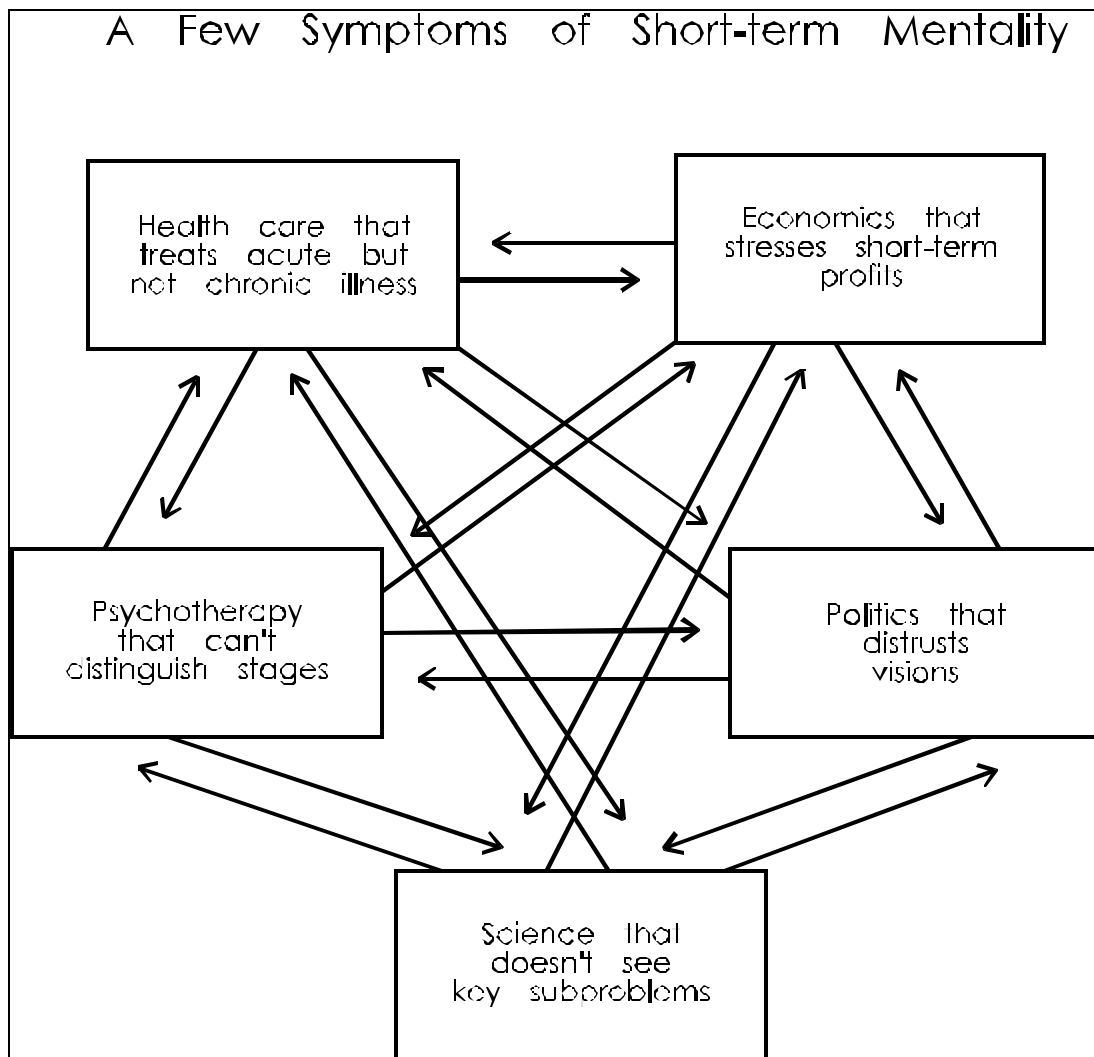
We can certainly see broad visions for where we want to take the world in the next century — some of which I will discuss at the end of this book. But within these visions there should be few preset plans. Rather we need to experiment, as long as we take care that people don’t suffer too much from being “guinea pigs.” In any social experiment, those people whose lives are strongly affected by the outcome should also be participants. Also, we need to complement social change by a long-term outlook that allows

* This description of the Cold War is merely historical: it is *not* meant to imply that capitalism and Russian-style communism are the two major alternative models for society! The possible future society outlined in the last chapter is far from either.

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for contemplation as well as action. This can be related to a renewal of religious faith, but faith of a more open and fluid kind than has prevailed in the past.

An emphasis on long-term vision would be revolutionary for the Western world. John Saul argues that the West's "dictatorship of reason" has inevitably led to excessive focus on short-term gains, such as quarterly profits of companies.⁴⁹ Figure 9.2 shows other symptoms of the short-term outlook. The two-headed arrows in that figure signify that attitudes, whether constructive



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Figure 9.2. A few interrelated symptoms of Western society's pervasive short-term oriented mentality, in different walks of life.

or destructive, tend to carry over from one walk of life to another. Distrust of broad vision in politics tends to generate distrust of grand theory in science, and vice versa. Both distrusts are related to a "crackpot realism"⁵⁰ that not only worships the here and now, but denigrates any belief that things could be different from how they are here and now. Cynicism, and loss of the will to change things, are the inevitable consequences. Fortunately, the reverse is also true: synthetic, visionary, innovative thinking (i.e., common sense) in one walk of life tends to carry over to another.

We live in a world where the old ways are dying hard. Uncertainty makes people cling to the past in a failed attempt to achieve a stable equilibrium. But an equilibrium or stable state is not necessarily good in itself. People often cling to known but safe possibilities just for security. The stresses and uncertainties of the present are leading to poverty in much of the world, and a very nervous affluence in the rest. This is making many people long for a return to traditional hierarchies and traditional, strong, restrictive religions.

Does this mean we are doomed to submit to rising fundamentalism and tribalism all over the world? No, in opposition to fundamentalism there is also a rise in creative visionary thinking, even if it is still by a minority of people. This chapter has illustrated a few examples of such vision. Our minds have a long way to go to catch up to our technology, but strides are being made. The last section of this book will take the insights of the first two sections, about the brain, neural networks, and self-actualization, and outline the world these insights can help us create.

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