The Power of Balance: Transforming Self, Society, and Scientific Inquiry

William R. Torbert[1]

Editor's Introduction: We feel privileged to republish portions of *The Power of Balance: Transforming Self, Society, and Scientific Inquiry*. Originally published by SAGE in 1991, the book's copyright has reverted to the author, who wished to share our selection of excerpts as a contribution to this special issue's theme. Torbert's body of work has always been about fostering "the development of politics and the political," at each of the scales highlighted in the book's title, as well as in all of the domains in which he has served. As he wrote in the original preface to the book, the work was 20 years in the making, and now, nearly 20 years after that, we wish for at least some portions of this classic work to be back in circulation.[2]

The "power of balance" as conceived by Torbert represents an integral paradigm of principles, theory, and praxis. Deployed, the paradigm is one that can indeed inform and shape the development of self, society, and scientific inquiry. To explicate that fulsome vision, the book's fifteen chapters develop the themes of three sections: *Theory and Strategy*, *Heart and Practice*, and *Vision and Method*. Here, we have excerpted from several chapters in *Theory and Strategy*, and from one chapter in *Vision and Method*.

This means, of course, that we present but a small fraction of this integral classic, leaving out all of the rich, in-depth illustrations, including the author's learning practice as he first attempted to enact the principles.

Yet, we hope even this abbreviated form of *The Power of Balance* supports at least two goals: to offer deployable insights and practices for developing politics and the political; and to take root as part of a foundational canon for integral political thought, research, and praxis. How we readers deploy these principles in our own actions will determine the degree to which self, society, and scientific inquiry transform.

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Chapter 1. Power and Justice

This book proposes that leaders in politics, business, the media, education, and science can exercise an inherently positive kind of power that can be called "the power of balance." It also proposes that leaders must exercise this "power of balance," if they are to succeed in generating and sustaining organizations that:

1. empower their members;
2. reliably increase their productivity and legitimacy; and
3. transform appropriately in, and responsibly manage their impact on, turbulent environments.

A further claim is that, whereas other types of power corrupt, and require balancing by one another in order to limit corruption and injustice, the exercise of the power of balance generates increasing self-balancing, increasing personal integrity, increasing institutional efficacy, and increasing social justice.

In the final chapter of my previous book, *Managing the Corporate Dream*, I suggested that leaders must be able to exercise four different types of power. I argued that these must be blended differently at different times, with different people, if they are to succeed in cultivating growth and transformation among individual organizational members and in overall organizational strategies, structures and systems. These four types of power I call "unilateral power," "diplomatic power," "logistical power," and "transforming power." The ability to exercise and appropriately blend these four different types of power I call "the power of balance."

In this book, I wish to explore in much greater depth how and why this hypothetical *power of balance* is necessary for achieving personal human fulfillment, for generating reliable organizational productivity under changing conditions, for cultivating social justice, and for conducting a truly informing and responsible social science. I also wish to illustrate in greater depth what the turbulent but dignified experience of personal and organizational search toward the power of balance feels like. For, in order to develop this power, each person, organization, and society must undergo multiple transformations.

We also see societies throughout the world—from the Soviet Union to South Africa—in a kind of turbulence that holds both the promise of constructive transformation and the threat of destructive violence and chaos. On a still larger scale, we see the human world as a whole on the brink of transformation beyond primary reliance on a balance of power among nation states to increasing reliance on international institutions, especially in the area of international finance.

This chapter focuses on several questions about the different types of power, leading toward the question of what kind of power generates constructive transformation. The questions this chapter addresses are:

1. what are the differences among three types of power—unilateral, diplomatic, and logistical?
2. how does each type of power relate to a particular conception of ethics and justice? And,
3. how have political philosophers and administrative theorists before now thought about power and justice?

Unilateral Power

From the first systematic treatise on power of the modern period—Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*—to Nobel prize winner Herbert Simon's *Models of Man*, power has most frequently been defined as unilateral—*as the ability to unilaterally and unidirectionally cause the outcomes one wishes.*[2]

Sometimes, as with Hobbes, the ultimate unilateral power is described nakedly as the physical power to kill another. All men are equal, Hobbes tells us, in their ability to kill one another. Hobbes shows us the most primitive position that 'natural man' can assume. The most primitive position is one in which the basic passion to live, along with the narrowly selfish passion to kill others in order to preserve one's own life, rule. Reason is subordinated to these passions. It serves instrumentally to choose the best ways to preserve one's life.

Hobbes draws this picture, not to defend it as necessary, but rather to highlight its futility and the need for transformation. He characterizes life in this state of nature as a “war of all against all” which renders each individual's life “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

The fear of death motivates people to yield their smaller, problematic powers to a common sovereign. This sovereign uses the much greater collective power to secure an order, which however uncomfortable and unfree it may seem in a given instance, protects the people from the 'war of all against all' and death. Hence, by yielding their power to an omnipotent sovereign, people increase their pleasure and reduce their pain (death and the fear of death). They “maximize their utility,” in the more quantitative and less passionate language of later writers—even if the sovereign is extremely dominative and restrictive.

The sovereign must have absolute unilateral power, according to Hobbes, because any separation of powers increases the likelihood of struggle among the powers and hence of civil war and death. Hobbes carried his argument that the sovereign must have absolute power to its logical conclusion. Absolute executive power precludes an independent judiciary. In a true Hobbesian state, the law is what the sovereign says it is and what the sovereign says it means. The law is, by definition, just. There can be no appeal to a natural law, to philosophical principles, or to a Supreme Court beyond the sovereign, for such appeal undermines the absolute power of the sovereign. In a sense, then, Hobbes presents a philosophical justification for the view that “might makes right.”[3]

Writing amidst the English civil war and the beheading of Charles I during the mid-17th century, Hobbes could find immediate experiential validation for his concern. But to us Hobbes' position almost certainly sounds extreme, perhaps even crude. If this position seemed realistic in mid-17th century England, it hardly seems applicable to late 20th century America. In fact,

however, our city streets sometimes closely mirror Hobbes' state of nature. Today, as I write this, the lead article in *The Boston Globe* begins as follows:

> It was growing dark on a recent winter afternoon when the frightening news swept through a local youth program: the van that usually drove the teen-agers home had broken down. A terrified silence blanketed the room as youths realized that they might have to walk home along the darkened city streets.
>
> "A kid came to me in a total panic," said Laval Brown, program coordinator of the Dorchester Youth Collaborative. "He was terrified. He said, 'I can't walk home, I just can't walk home. Someone got killed on my street. I'll get killed too."
>
> The youth made it home, running all the way. But in the last eight days, three young men did not make it home alive and a fourth was fatally shot through the window of his mother's apartment. And the city's children know it. They know that at a time of mind-bending violence they cannot entirely be children on the city's streets, that they must surrender some of their freedoms to preserve their lives.
>
> Instead, they live by rules no adult ever taught them and recognize boundaries that are on no city map.
>
> "There're just certain places you don't go," explained Brian McKinney, 16, a rangy figure standing on a small porch above an abandoned lot in Dorchester. "You don't take no shortcuts, ever, 'cause people be waiting for you. Sometimes you alternate your route on the way home. Myself, I try not to know a lot of people. You can't trust 'em."[4]

"I try not to know a lot of people. You can't trust 'em." Obviously, a realistic approach to life under conditions such as those just described; obviously, too, a dreadfully impoverished approach to life. Surely, we wish to say, there must be more to social life than this! Yet before we explore how this may be so, we must briefly acknowledge the vast arenas of human experience that are today characterized by such conditions and such a worldview. To take just two examples: whole countries—most notably Colombia—are deeply influenced by the corruption and violence explicitly cultivated by drug cartels and individual drug barons; also, whole countries—most notably Iraq and its president Saddam Hussein—operate in terms of unilateral, threat power both outside (Hussein has threatened to "scorch half of Israel" with weapons of mass destruction) and inside (depopulation of the Kurdish minority and the death penalty for 'insulting' the president). As I make my final revisions, Iraq has just completed the blitzkrieg takeover of Kuwait.

An Ethical System Consistent with Unilateral Power

"Might makes right" and the fear that controls behavior under such conditions is not ordinarily viewed as a serious ethical theory, but rather as the antithesis of ethics. An ethical perspective is usually thought of as providing a basis for decisions other than one's initial desires and fears. Certainly, Rousseau, Kant, and Rawls (whose views on power, justice, and ethics will

be considered below) do not view might as inherently right. Indeed, we will see Rousseau argue precisely that might *cannot* make right.

There is one ethical theory, however, that corresponds closely to the Hobbesian perspective on power. This is utilitarianism. I have already hinted at this correspondence between Hobbesian might and utilitarian right in writing of people's choice to yield power to a sovereign as increasing their utility.

In utilitarian ethical theory, the right or just decision is that which generates the greatest good for the greatest number. The good is that which increases pleasure and reduces pain for each. To maximize pleasure and to minimize pain is to maximize utility. In this theory, rationality is defined as the instrumental calculation of how to maximize utility—how to satisfy desires, *not* as a criterion for judging the worthiness of one's desires). This is one of the principal correspondences between the Hobbesian theory of power and the utilitarian theory of justice—that both explicitly treat desires as ends and reason as a subordinate, calculative means.

Given this correspondence, the correspondence already hinted at follows. Hobbesian political theory can be restated in utilitarian terms as:

1. the fear of death and the likelihood of actual death are infinitely more painful than any other deprivations; hence,
2. the pleasure of their attenuation by means of the Hobbesian sovereign will outweigh any finite pains the sovereign's particular decisions may inflict.

Because we ordinarily associate utilitarianism with neo-classical economic theory—laissez-faire market theory in particular—and because such economic theory is ordinarily thought to emphasize state interference in individual decision-making, the overall correspondence between utilitarianism and Hobbes is not immediately obvious. But, as draconian as the Hobbesian power equation sounds, it does not require a sovereign who is absolutely dictatorial in all decisions. Thus, the Hobbesian sovereign could choose to cultivate a vigorous market system within a larger framework of executive prerogative.

Over the past generation, Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore may have best exemplified such a correlation of unilateral executive power and utilitarianism. On the one hand, there are real questions about the degree of personal, media, and judiciary independence of expression in Singapore; on the other hand, there is no question about the support for a market economy in Singapore. In 1990, Brazil's new president, Fernando Collor de Mello, is making a similar attempt: to use a strong authoritative initiative, in the form of a “shocking” economic plan, to stop inflation and create a more market-regulated economy.

The deepest correspondence between the Hobbesian perspective on power and the utilitarian perspective on economics, ethics, and justice is that both perspectives *implicitly* require a kind of rationality that weighs, compares, and organizes desires, rather than merely calculating how best to achieve them. How the Hobbesian perspective does this is clearest and most nearly explicit. Simply put, in his theory the omnipotent power of the sovereign is based on a rational contract to which people's desires are henceforward subordinate. Insofar as such a contract is adhered to,

such adherence represents the victory of constructive, framing, long-term reasoning over immediate desires abetted by instrumental, calculative, short-term reasoning.

That utilitarian theory also implicitly requires an omnitient, rational sovereign who organizes the relations among desires is less obvious. Nevertheless, it does. For, in order to calculate the greatest good for the greatest number, one must assume that both individuals and society have a rational capacity that reduces all qualitatively different pains and pleasures (e.g. hunger and loneliness, or chocolate, oat bran, and hearing God's voice) to a comparable, quantitative scale (a lowest common denominator).[5]

In his early book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith explicitly describes such a self-regulating inner observer (he called it "the man within the breast") as existing within each individual. A careful reading, however, shows that Smith is inconsistent: he also recognizes at some moments that such a sovereign inner conscience must in fact be explicitly constituted by each individual and that few individuals actually engage in the work of constituting such a conscience.[6]

Later, Smith would describe, in *The Wealth of Nations*, how a competitive pricing system generates an efficient quantitative scale for comparisons—a lowest common denominator among otherwise-qualitatively-different values. Just as "the man within the breast" purportedly serves a self-regulating function on the individual level, the "invisible hand" of the market pricing system under competition serves this same self-regulating function socially. But a pricing system cannot determine the definition of what is property; hence, the prevalence of Intellectual Property Committees in major corporations today, and the litigiousness of the software industry. Nor can a pricing system determine the value of money, money-making, and money-saving, as compared to leisure or consumption. That is, a pricing system cannot determine how a person should value his or her time (for example, writing earns me no money; consulting earns me a great deal of money; but I value writing much more than consulting).

The trick is that a pricing system can wonderfully *reflect* how people value time. But if persons are not independent valuers of their own time, guided by self-determined aims, they may fall into believing that price determines action, and they may do what pays most or costs least for that reason alone. So, a pricing system can trick people about their own self-interest, especially if it is defined as the primary rational calculus in decision-making. Indeed, Adam Smith showed that he understood that the "invisible hand" might just as likely mislead persons about their interests as serve those interests.[7]

The United States is a country that holds "consumer sovereignty" and "everybody is entitled to his own opinion" as among its highest individual and social values. People are assumed to be rational in the sense of able to calculate how to satisfy desire, but there is little tolerance for the possibility that personal and social decisions require something more than calculative rationality—that they may require the construction of a framing, regulative rationality that related valued aims to valued actions. Religion fills this need for a regulative framework, if it is felt at all, and religion is typically considered to be non-rational—a matter of personal feeling, faith, preference. One result of this atomistic, utilitarian approach is an energetic, individualistic, entrepreneurial approach to life. Another result is a great deal of internecine among regulative

frames (in marriages, organizations, and communities) that people do not regard as being rationally resolvable and that they consequently do not cultivate the skills or proclivities to resolve directly.

If there is in fact a strong correspondence between the utilitarian orientation and the exercise of unilateral power, as suggested in this section, we would expect people in this country to resort to the exercise of unilateral power in the face of unresolved conflict. Hence, we would expect a high homicide rate, a high divorce rate, and a hell of a lot of litigation. All these are true of the United States.

Here, it is worth emphasizing that the exercise of unilateral power need not sound like the physical, life-and-death matter that Hobbes makes it out to be. It may just as well appear in the guise of a rational, impersonal, bureaucratic, even scientific phenomenon. Such is the quality of unilateral power in the work of Nobel prize winner Herbert Simon who has been thinking about organizational bureaucracies during the mid-20th century, Simon says, "For the assertion, 'A has power over B', we can substitute the assertion 'A's behavior causes B's behavior.' If we can define the causal relationship, we can define...power. ...[It is] a problem of giving operational meaning to the asymmetry of the relationship between independent and dependent variable."[8] Again, as with Hobbes, we see power defined as unilateral and unidirectional (asymmetrical). But this time the power may, presumably, be physical force, social attraction, or a cognitive structure such as an organizational chart.

Whether the writer be political scientist Robert Dahl, economist John Kenneth Galbraith, or organizational theorist Jeffrey Pfeffer, this underlying definition of power as causing change in the less powerful, no matter what the will of the less powerful, remains the same.[9] As Pfeffer summarizes, "Most definitions of power include an element indicating that power is the capability of one social actor to overcome resistance in achieving a desired objective or result."[10]

Indeed, so universally accepted is this element of the definition of power that many readers must be wondering why it merits discussion. Nevertheless, this book *does* contest this element of the definition of power. I do not contend that power *never* has an element of unilateral, unidirectional causation that overcomes resistance. But I do contend that other kinds of power can also be exercised, and that power cannot, therefore, be *defined* as the ability to unilaterally and unidirectionally cause the outcomes one wishes.

Another Approach to Power—Diplomatic Power

The second most common approach to power is, paradoxically, the very reverse of the first approach. In this view, power is generated, not by the power-wielder, but by the power-yielder—by the consent of the governed. A century after Hobbes, and in response to his claims, Rousseau introduced an argument against the notion of power as necessarily unilateral causation and in favor of power as consent. In this version of power, a visible leader is successful in exercising power to the degree that he or she has the diplomatic ability to determine what the governed actually want and to present proposals that will gain their consent.

Rousseau proclaimed at the outset of *The Social Contract*,

> If force creates right, the effect changes with the cause: every force that is greater than the first succeeds to its right. ...But what kind of right is that which perishes when force fails? If we must obey perforce, there is no need to obey because we ought; if we are not forced to obey, we are under no obligation to do so. ...Let us then admit that force does not create right, and we are obliged to obey only legitimate powers.[11]

Rousseau goes on to argue that, since coerced consent yields no obligation, legitimate power can only be founded on unanimous, uncoerced consent.

This is no mere abstruse principle of political philosophy. In business, Chester Barnard, a twentieth century corporate president, states unequivocally, "There is no principle of executive conduct better established in good organizations than that orders will not be issued that cannot or will not be obeyed... To do so destroys authority, discipline, and morale."[12]

To what kind of social contract would any and all individuals give consent? Only, Rousseau tells us, to an "association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before."[13]

How is such a condition possible, the reader may well ask. Rousseau's great insight, which inspired Kant in turn, was that a person is free only when obeying his rational will, and that since reason is precisely internally consistent and generalizable, everyone's 'rational will' will be the same. Hence, a state governed by rational will—what Rousseau called the General Will—is a state in which persons are simultaneously united with all and free to do as they wish.

The obvious question is how one discovers what truly constitutes this General Will. As one helpful step, Rousseau offered a conceptual distinction between the rational General Will and another quality that he named the Private Will or the Will of All. The Will of All is the sum total of what people desire irrespective of whether it is rational in the sense of being universalizable. In other words, the Will of All can be a version of utilitarianism or 'consumer sovereignty'—those decisions that generate the maximum pleasure or utility among the concerned population, irrespective of their general rationality or universalizability.

For example, if slavery for some and addiction to drugs or alcohol for many is what gives the most pleasure to the most people, then the organization or state should promote these conditions, *if* the state is guided by this version of the Will of All. But since such conditions abrogate the freedom of some and the rationality of many, they will not be consented to by all, they are not universilizable, and, hence, they do not represent the General Will. More subtly, a democratic assembly may refuse to raise taxes to cover budget deficits, and this action may very well represent the wishes of a majority of citizens, and hence the Will of All, without necessarily representing the General Will.

Another, different version of the Will of All is any claim made by a leader that certain decisions and actions represent the historical spirit or future destiny of a whole people,

irrespective of the effect of such decisions and actions on those not included in the definition of that people. Authoritarian leaders like Napoleon, Hitler, Lenin, or a modern corporate chief executive can claim to act in the name of the people, even if a majority opposes them. They can claim, indeed, to be acting on behalf of the General Will, courageously opposing the temporary Will of All, without any clear method for determining whether this is so. In short, this discussion sharpens the question of how one distinguishes the Private Will from the General Will.

Unfortunately, as with Adam Smith's lack of clarity about how to develop an embracing and rational self-observation by "the man within the breast," Rousseau is equally unsatisfying about how to distinguish the Private Will from the General Will. It was part of his genius to distinguish clearly on a conceptual level between these two types of social will. But it was part of his limit not to provide a practical political method for making this distinction in actual cases.

Nevertheless, the notion that there is a kind of power, derived not from the strength of a power-wielder but rather from the consent of power-yielders, has played a central role both in philosophy and in practical affairs since Rousseau. Thomas Jefferson's words provide the most influential expression of this point of view: "Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed."

Perhaps the most obvious arena in which the Will of All exercises power is the realm of entertainment and the media. The media and entertainment personalities who have the mysterious talent to draw mass attention become the source of far flung enterprises. Their power is based on others' willingness to give them their attention. As one player on the Hollywood scene recently put it, "All of Hollywood is parasitic except for true talent." In this formulation, true talent represents legitimate authority because it commands the power (and revenues) associated with the willingness of the population at large to attend to it.

This "diplomatic" type of power has something to do with justice or legitimacy as according with the people's will, and something—but something very much less obvious—to do with the rationality of such a will.

A Third Perspective on Power and Justice— Rational, Logistical Power and the Theory of Rights

Kant responded to Rousseau's enunciation of the General Will by concentrating on the rational element in such a will, rather than on the element of consent. In doing so, Kant did not develop a political or managerial method of determining the General Will; instead, he transformed the idea of freedom as obedience to rational will into an ethical injunction for individuals

"Everything in nature works according to laws," Kant tells us. "Only a rational being has the power to act according to his conception of laws, i.e. according to principles, and thereby has he a will. Since the derivation of actions from laws requires reason, the will is nothing but practical reason."[14] We are free only when we exercise our rational will, not when we are compelled by irrational desires. Hence, insofar as we have will at all, we will consent to what is rational.

Indeed, in Kant's view, as we can see in the foregoing quotation, not unilateral force, not consent, but reason is power. In Kant, 'reason,' 'power,' 'will,' and 'freedom' all directly imply one another.

Kant's 'Categorical Imperative' enjoins each of us (because he believes that, upon reflection, we will find it the only rational way) to act only in ways that are universilizable. This means to act only as we would wish others to act toward us and only in ways that treat ourselves and other persons as ends (never merely as means).[15] For example, Kant suggests that, following the Categorical Imperative, we would not lie, since we would not wish others to lie to us, and we would not commit suicide, since we would not thereby be treating ourselves as ends. Kant is resolutely puritanical in his devotion to the rational:

> The pure thought of duty and the moral law generally, unmixed with any extraneous addition of empirical inducements, has by the way of reason alone... an influence on the human heart... much more powerful than all other incentives... When a righteous act is represented as being done with a steadfast soul and sundered from all view to any advantage in this or another world, and even under the greatest temptations of need or allurement, it far surpasses and eclipses any similar action that was in the least affected by any extraneous incentive; it elevates the soul and inspires the wish to be able to act in this way. Even moderately young children feel this impression, and duties should never be represented to them in any other way.[16]

In this passage, again, we see the identity that Kant makes between reason and power, even in interpersonal relations between adults and children. The resulting political vision is of an ideal 'Kingdom of Ends' (a phrase that Kant uses), wherein each citizen is highly independent and free, never coerced, persuaded only by rational argument, and with the right to be treated with the full dignity of an End. In this approach, legitimate or just action is action that procedurally does not violate another's rights; and just laws provide equal protection to all citizens, regardless of race, religion, or sexual preference. Whether or not the action or the law maximizes utility or is voted as desirable is irrelevant to its justice, according to Kant.

For example, most people may be disgusted by consensual acts of homosexual sodomy among adults. Such acts may be regarded as sinful by certain religions. Indeed, the Supreme Court may rule (as it did in Bowers v Hardwick, 1986) that no “right of privacy” protects one against prosecution for such acts.[17] Nevertheless, any law that discriminates by criminalizing such acts only when they involve partners of the same sex is clearly not a universalizable maxim, and violates the Constitutional provision of “equal protection under the law.”

Insofar as we think of power as unilateral coercion or peer pressure to conform to some irrational Will of All, the purely rational Kantian position and procedure appears to abjure the use of power altogether—to treat power and justice as mutually exclusive. As the foregoing quotation demonstrates, Kant did view these other two types of power as illegitimate. But he also viewed them as ineffectual, and this follows from his distinctive view of what power is. Power is the ability to do something rational rather than being caused to do something by internal desire or external pressure.

Hence, from Kant's perspective, real power and true justice are co-terminus. Put differently, for Kant power and authority are co-terminus: real power is invariably authoritative. Whereas the Hobbesian view of power and justice emphasizes the physical, monarchical, executive function; the Rousseauvian view of power and justice emphasizes the emotional, democratic, legislative function; and the Kantian view of power and justice emphasizes the rational, aristocratic, judiciary function.[18]

This overview of the three approaches to power and justice invites us to question whether there is yet another approach to power and justice that combines all three. Historically, of course, we know that an actual social contract—the Constitution of the United States—based on the combination and separation of these three types of power, was constructed at the same time as Kant lived. But this social contract did not, during its first century, embody Kant's Categorical Imperative. It permitted slavery. Not until after the bloodiest of civil wars and the passage of the 14th amendment did the Constitution more nearly represent a successful blending of the three types of power. And not until political philosopher John Rawls published *A Theory of Justice* in 1972 did we have a more or less complete intellectual explication of this fourth approach to power and justice.[19]

Integrating Unilateral, Diplomatic, and Logistical Power

In his description of child rearing in a just society, Rawls exemplifies how the three types of power we have so far reviewed interact with one another. First, he says, the child will learn the "morality of authority." At this stage, parents unilaterally enunciate and enforce rules of conduct. But, according to Rawls, their unilateral power is not absolute and arbitrary. It only becomes authoritative (legitimate) and only has the power to generate moral development toward principled conduct insofar as parents:

1. make just rules;
2. give the reasons for them in an understandable fashion; and
3. enact the rules they enjoin when the rules apply to them as well.

In Rawls' words:

> First, the parents must love the child and be worthy objects of his admiration. In this way they arouse in him a sense of his own value and the desire to become the sort of person that they are. Secondly, they must enunciate clear and intelligible (and of course, justifiable) rules adapted to the child's level of comprehension. In addition they should set out the reasons for these injunctions so far as these can be understood, and they must follow these precepts insofar as they apply to them as well. The parents should exemplify the morality they enjoin, and make explicit its underlying principles as time goes on. Doing this is required not only to arouse the child's inclination to accept these principles at a later time, but also to convey how they are to be interpreted in particular cases.[20]

Obviously, the exercise of unilateral power that Rawls condones in a just society is no mere arbitrary or narrowly selfish use of such power for private or utilitarian ends, irrespective of its impact on others' rights and development. In fact, directly to the contrary, Rawls here advocates a loving and principled use of unilateral power.

Next, Rawls establishes the role for diplomatic power or peer consent in the development of the youth in a just society. As the child becomes a teenager, he or she learns the "morality of association." Through participation on sports teams, the school newspaper, and other such organizations with peers, the youth begins to mold his or her conduct based more on pleasing equals than on obeying superiors. In Rawls words, again:

> Someone attaining...the morality of association...is concerned to win acceptance for his conduct or aims... While the individual understands the principles of justice, his motive for complying with them, for the time at least, springs largely from his ties of friendship and fellow feeling for others, and his concern for the approbation of the wider society.[21]

These experiences of the proper "morality of authority" and "morality of association" gradually lead the youth to realize that positive experiences are associated with the principles of justice behind the rules obeyed and the approbation received. Hence, gradually, as the youth becomes an adult, he or she makes the rational principles of justice fully explicit and gives them allegiance in their own right. Thus the adult becomes committed to a "morality of principle." In this way, all three types of power play a role in human development in a just society, according to Rawls, and they do so in a way that reinforces allegiance to the principles of justice from generation to generation.

What are these principles of justice? Rawls formulates two principles of justice that he believes follow from rational reflection. Interestingly and consistently, these two principles themselves reflect all three types of justice associated with the three types of power. His first principle of justice is:

> Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.[22]

His second principle of justice is:

> Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged…and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.[23]

Rawls' first principle of justice is compatible with Kant's Categorical Imperative. The enunciation of a system of liberties for all emphasizes rationality by the word "system," emphasizes treating each citizen as an end by the word "liberty," and emphasizes reciprocality and universilizability by emphasizing that everyone is entitled to this condition.

Rawls' second principle of justice generates additional conditions that will attract the consent and approbation of citizens and will also generate utilitarian results. Inequalities of position and

wealth (to which those with less would not consent, all else being equal) are to be tolerated *only* as these benefit those with less. In other words, a person may consent to receive less income than another, if the additional income motivates the other to become a doctor and cure the less wealthy person. If persons with less income gain greater utility from being healthy than they would from the additional income, they will rationally prefer and choose this condition over that of having equal income but less health. Herewith, Rawls integrates rationality, rights, consent, and utility in his two principles of justice.

The Gap between Theory and Practice — The Difficulty with Doing Rawls Justice

Rawls' work is a theoretical tour de force. Although it has sustained critiques from all angles of the scholarly spectrum, it has proved remarkably robust on a theoretical level. Its Achilles' heel is the question of practice.

There are three problems of practice, of which Rawls solves only one. One problem of practice is: once a just state is created, will its normal practice sustain its citizens' commitment to just outcomes and to maintaining the necessary institutions? This problem of practice Rawls can claim to have solved by showing how children's upbringing in a just society will lead them to adopt a morality of principle and how this principled morality will lead in turn to the two substantive principles of morality he articulates.

The third problem of practice is: given this gap between current practice and just practice, does Rawls' theory provide a vision and method for transforming the relatively unjust and corrupt society into one that is more just and displays greater integrity? The answer to this question is, again, “No.” Although the very explication of his theory may improve legislative, executive, and judicial decision-making, Rawls does not explicitly present that as a process for transforming a relatively unjust society. Nor does he present any other process for transforming a relatively unjust society.

We should, however, pause to consider the efficacy of explicating a robust theory of justice as a method of social change. We see, first of all, that it is a very Kantian approach to social change. Through his theory of justice, Rawls acquaints us with our social duties and provides us with no inducements to act in a just manner other than “the pure thought of duty.” We will recall that according to Kant, “The pure thought of duty and the moral law generally…has by the way of reason alone…an influence on the human heart…much more powerful than all other incentives.” So, explicating a theory of justice can be defended as a method—indeed it can be defended as the *best* method—for influencing a relatively unjust society to become more just.

But Rawls himself does not believe that the explication of principle or theory alone is sufficient to generate justice from generation to generation, even in a society that is already just. As we have seen, he holds that in a just society parents must exercise their unilateral power over children, and youthful friends their diplomatic power over one another, as parts of a long process of cultivating adult personalities that listen and respond to the voice of reason. Moreover, the parents are to love their children and to act consistently with the ideals they preach, if they are to

attract their allegiance to those ideals. In short, according to Rawls, much more than the explication of pure reason is necessary to sustain an already just society. Unilateral power, diplomatic power, love, and an awareness of incongruities between one's own reasons and actions (a precondition for developing consistency between one's own principles and practices) are all also necessary.

In a relatively unjust society, the dilemma of how to generate justice must be all the greater. Parents are less likely to be enjoining true principles of justice to their children. They are also less likely to display congruity or integrity—that is, to act consistently with whatever principles they enjoin. Also, friends are less likely to exercise diplomatic power in a manner that reinforces true principles of justice.

Hence, in a less just society, children are likely to experience their parents' power as relatively arbitrary, rather than as conveying a rational and admirable morality of authority. Likewise, youths are likely to experience peer groups as requiring conformity to relatively arbitrary norms, rather than as reinforcing their parents' teachings through a rational and admirable morality of association. And adults are likely to experience organizations where superiors and peers also act in relatively arbitrary and internally inconsistent ways, rather than according to a rational and admirable morality of principle. Socialization of this kind breeds fear, distrust, and disrespect for designated authorities and for peers, as well as low self-esteem and little faith in one's own reason.

Under such conditions, superiors are likely to assert their authority unilaterally and without justification, especially under challenge. Subordinates are likely to consent and conform externally, especially under threat. Reasoned discourse is likely to retreat further and further from the political world into specialist, 'ivory tower' or bureaucratic settings.

To transform such a relatively unjust society—to narrow the gap between the actual and the ideal—requires a kind of power that goes beyond the unilateral, diplomatic, and logistical kinds of power discussed in this chapter. It also requires a conception of justice that goes beyond the utilitarian, consensual, and principled conceptions discussed in this chapter.

The next two chapters introduce the developmental process that persons evolve through if they are to approach the conception and practice of this dynamic, transforming type of power and justice.

Chapter 2. From Political Philosophy to Developmental Psychology

Chapter 1 reviews three distinct conceptions of power and justice, as well as a fourth conception that integrates all of the first three types of power and justice. Starting from the most common definition of power as the unilateral cause of outcomes one desires, we next discussed diplomatic power that attracts others' consent, and then described the logistical power of reason to will what is consistent and right irrespective of inducement and desire. Then, we examined the Constitutional and Rawlsian conception of power and justice as including all of the first three.

We saw that the first two types of power and justice—unilateral power and utilitarian justice, on the one hand, and diplomatic power and consent, on the other hand—are rooted in satisfying desires. By contrast, the second two types of power and justice are rooted in a rational, principled conception of individual rights and socially just relationships.

None of the four approaches to power and justice so far examined explicitly shows how relatively unjust settings can be transformed into more just settings. Yet all of them suggest, at least implicitly, that a key ingredient in the necessary political alchemy of transformation is a constructive rationality—a rationality that frames desire. Hobbes gives us a specific rational contract that is to transform the state of nature into civil society, while claiming that no rational distinctions between less and more just societies are possible once society itself is created. Rousseau conceives of a principle whereby rationality can operate continuously in the generation of social decisions—not just once in an initial contract. Yet he cannot give us any specific laws or institutions through which it works. Kant tells us a specific law—the Categorical Imperative—that a truly rational individual would give himself or herself. Yet he does not tell us how any individual develops this degree of rationality, nor how society as a whole encourages such development, nor how such a general principle is to be applied to concrete and unique circumstances.

It is Rawls who first shows how a just society would organize social institutions and families to encourage the development of principled rationality in new generations. But he does not tell us, anymore than the others, how one can transform a relatively unjust, corrupt society into a more just one.

Surprisingly, it is the most ancient of Western political philosophers—Plato—who tells us most about why power ordinarily corrupts and about a kind of power that generates integrity and justice in conditions where by no means everyone is committed to justice.[1] Early in *The Republic*, Plato introduces a character, Thrasymachus, who argues that "might makes right." But Thrasymachus is confounded by Socrates' questions. May not sheer strength used unilaterally turn out to have effects different from those initially imagined, Socrates asks. If so, the mighty one will not have succeeded in doing right even from the point of view of achieving his own intention, let alone from any other perspective. For example, by building up German power and starting World War II, Hitler presumably intended anything but his own suicide in a bunker, anything but the governing of Germany by four alien powers, and anything but the creation of the state of Israel.

Not only may there be a great gap between intentions and outcomes, but also between different intentions at different times. Even if Hobbes' sovereign holds all power, his will may not be one across time. Now he exerts power in one direction; now in another. He himself may not recognize the conflict between his different decisions. Nevertheless, gradually, Hobbes' state (or a modern corporation) may begin to lose power as it falls into unintentional inner struggle. In short, unilateral, unidirectional power can generate unintentional effects and system-disintegration over time.

Lord Acton's famous line, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," seems to be based on the intuition that the greater one's unilateral power, the more unbalanced and enslaved to one's irrational desires one becomes, the less one attends to one's effects on

others or oneself, and the less effort one makes to guide and limit one's actions according to any criterion of rationality. This process of feeding desire and avoiding the negative feedback that would feed one's awareness gradually reduces one's awareness, responsibility, rational consistency, and moral integrity, until one is absolutely corrupted.

The question arises whether there is a type of power that *increases* awareness, integrity, and justice? Plato answers "Yes."

A Paradigm of Just Action

We can return to Rawls' theory of justice to begin constructing a more dynamic paradigm of just action, for he provides the building blocks to go beyond his own conception. We saw that Rawls argues that, in raising children who will preserve a just society, parents must formulate rules comprehensible to their children, enact a consistent morality themselves, and gradually make the underlying principles explicit. This is an educational paradigm which depends for its felicitous effects on a parental awareness that embraces the realms of intuitive principles, rational rules, their own actions, and their effects on their children, *and that observes and corrects errors and incongruities in translations from one realm to another* (for no one can be expected to get this right to begin with, or once and for all time). I emphasize this last part because it is this dynamic feedback and correction process that must be present if the process is to become increasingly just, and is the process that Rawls misses.

Rawls enunciates an analogous dialectic for each individual in his recital of the primary goods that all rational persons will want, whatever else one or another may want idiosyncratically. He names four primary goods:

1. intuitive self-respect or self-esteem: "Without it nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them" (p. 400);
2. a rational long-term plan of life given reasonably favorable circumstances... [for] the good is the satisfaction of rational desire" (pp. 92-93);
3. the liberty and opportunity to develop and exercise the action competencies necessary to realize a rational life plan; and, finally,
4. the income and wealth that results from such competent work.

Again, we see the need to cultivate an awareness that embraces the realms of the intuitive whole, the rational strategy, plan, or rules, congruent action, and outcomes (in this case, income), *and that observes and corrects errors and incongruities in translations from one realm to another*.

An analogous, dynamic process of cultivating an embracing awareness of mission, strategy, operations, and the bottom line, *and of observing and correcting incongruities among them*, is necessary for continual quality improvement in business enterprises and other organizations.

As we will explore in Section III, Chapter 13, an analogous dynamic process of cultivating an awareness of paradigm, theory, research methods, and data—*and of observing and correcting incongruities among them*—is necessary for a liberative and responsible social science. In political life, the paradigm of just action is again analogous. That action is just which:

1. gradually explicates the underlying principles of justice;
2. elaborates laws and policies consistent with those principles, as well as internally consistent with one another;
3. duly administers this justice in a way that is both substantively and procedurally congruent;
4. gains increasing voluntary compliance by the citizenry; and
5. *observes and corrects incongruities among principles, laws, administration, and effects on the citizenry.*

Chapter 3: Developing toward Transforming Leadership
First Glimpses of Transforming Power

This is the key "trick" or "secret" of transformation—that it can be generated neither by internal motivation alone, nor by external pressure or opportunity alone. An exercise of unilateral power can force changes in external behavior, but cannot transform the meaning-making structure of a system. Developmental theory tells us that transformation to a qualitatively different and more inclusive way of making meaning requires playful, reciprocal initiatives between system and environments, child and parent, student and teacher, manager and mentor.

Hence, a person exercising *transforming power invites mutuality*—a mutual exercise of power guided by a living awareness of what is currently at stake for the particular systems participating in the transformation. The chick seeking to crack the egg shell from the inside may not succeed alone; but if the mother hen cracks the egg before the chick is ready, the chick will surely die. Only if both cooperate appropriately from inside and outside can transformation occur.

Transforming power cannot be insolently and unilaterally wielded. Instead, it *requires a continual, humble effort—not just to be rational—but to be aware of the present moment in all its fullness.* This awareness effort includes and transcends one's own material interests, emotional preferences, and intellectual theory about the situation, as well as those of the others and the institutions involved. This effort also transcends the narrowness of the present and experiences how the past is growing into this moment and the future is growing out of it.

In order to avoid such outcomes [as were discussed in a section not included in this excerpt], *transforming power* is not merely open to, but *actively seeks, challenge and contradiction.* Indeed, properly appreciated, each moment of potential transformation is such a challenge, since the person seeking to exercise transforming power is relating to systems that do not initially share an understanding of what is at stake.

The person seeking to exercise transforming power must seek challenges to his or her approach in every way possible—by taking on dilemmas of increasing complexity or social scope, or dilemmas that go more deeply to the heart of the culture as a whole, or by discovering new ways of conducting inquiry that better show the negative consequences of his or her perspective and action.[8] The active search for such challenge is essential precisely because the Strategist perspective is likely to be a powerful one that permits one to exercise significant influence—even transformation—in the wider world. The Strategist's perspective can therefore

easily outshine and subordinate other perspectives. It can generate ego-inflation and an associated blindness and lack of living awareness that can make the very strength of the Strategist demonic. To confront and thwart this tendency, transforming power must be understood, to put it in the strongest form possible, as self-mortifying. It would rather *not* influence than inappropriately influence. This is how far transforming power goes to seek challenge and contradiction.

As the foregoing paragraphs also imply, *transforming power is nothing if not timely*. A distinguishing feature of a Strategist stage theory—and of developmental theory in particular—is that it explicitly draws the attention of the person holding the theory to the question of timing in action. However, any theory of development and transformation, such as this one, clearly has general, universalistic elements to it, and may be applied "in general" without specific attention to the uniqueness of the given situation. This, again, is a danger of the Strategist who tends to identify with the theory. In fact (or, more precisely, in *act*) transforming power is never properly applied in general, but always in response to the unique circumstances of particular situations and systems—always in response to a living awareness that revivifies and revalidates (or else disconfirms) the general categories of the theory.

Put differently, transforming power is not enacted in a deductively logical fashion. It does not deduce a specific action from general principles. Instead, *transforming power is enacted analogically*. It seeks analogies between a general theory and an independent apprehension of the present situation, felt from the inside as a participant in it.[9]

Finally, *transforming power empowers all who come within the radius of its influence, including those who oppose its influence*. The exercise of transforming power is intrinsically a cooperative 'positive-sum' game, not a competitive "zero-sum" game. It generates greater power—a greater range of awareness, control, and influence for each person or organization that transforms to a later stage of development. Also, because it seeks challenges, tests the feedback received for validity, and defers to validated negative feedback rather than defending against it, the exercise of transforming power empowers opponents as well. As stated above, transforming power invites mutuality; the more others are empowered and the closer they come to exercising transforming power themselves, the more nearly mutual occasions of influence become.

[Chapter 3's] Conclusion

There must be a "power of balance," I felt (though I gave it no name then), that was less coerced and coercive in the realm of diplomatic power. There must be, I felt, a power of balance that anyone, living an outwardly ordinary life in familial and organizational settings, could embody. This power of balance would have room for Pope John's unilateral coercion of Monseigneur Tardini, and for the logistical subtleties of the Motorola vice-president's "octave" meeting-strategies, and even for Gandhi's forms of diplomatic power on occasion, just as it would also have room for the transforming power that both Pope John and Gandhi most clearly exercised [referring to illustrations not included in excerpts]. But the power of balance would, precisely, *have* each subordinate type of power (including transforming power) rather than *being* (fully identified with) any one type of power. It would exercise each type of power occasionally and intentionally, not always and assumptively. And, the power of balance would always be

exercised in the service of increasing mutuality, development, and inquiry, no matter which of the subordinate forms of power it displayed at a given time.[34]

Only a theory and practice of this type of power can ultimately generate a more just organization or society from a relatively unjust beginning state. Only this kind of power is self-limiting and self-legitimizing because its aim is to support the development and empowerment of others and because its practice is to challenge itself and publicly test whether it is in fact accomplishing this. Hence, only this type of power generates genuine authority—authority based not on unilateral power or custom and longevity, but rather on just action (defined in Chapter 2).

Chapter 5: Exercising the Power of Balance in Middle Management

Creating Liberating Structures

I and my associates have been experimenting with such "liberating structures" in business, governmental, and educational settings for the past twenty years and have adduced eight essential qualities of liberating structure. The following pages first explicate these eight qualities briefly and then illustrate them by references to a particular organization.

Before offering this rather complex definition of liberating structure, I want to offer some simpler heuristics that I use to create such structures and some brief illustrations to give the idea some life. The more complex set of eight essential characteristics derive from after-the-fact analysis of such structures. They are helpful for testing whether an invented social structure is a liberating structure; but I suspect that they are far too ponderous to help in conceiving a liberating structure.

The simplest heuristic for creating a liberating structure is to list all the limiting conditions (e.g. lack of money, employees without the right skills, etc.) that prevent one from accomplishing some desired goal; and then set about inventing a structure that recognizes and even uses these limits to reach the goal. In principle, this is no more than the old saw: "turn problems into opportunities." But this cliché is as rarely enacted as it is regularly espoused, especially in the domain of creating social structures for doing tasks. The reader may recall the description from the previous chapter of the initial meetings of the MBA core team at Boston College. The problem was that faculty groups typically argue themselves into terminal depression and withdrawal rather than agreeing to anything.

Rather than attempting any number of complicated and covert means to overcome this limiting condition, we simply recognized it and made a game of making fast decisions. Once several decisions were made, the limiting condition no longer existed, so the elaborate structure temporarily set in place to make fast decisions was no longer necessary either.

A second simple heuristic for creating a liberating structure, which the foregoing illustration also exemplifies, is to create a structure which, if it works, will become unnecessary. The most fundamental reason why liberating structures are necessary in the first place is that few human beings today operate at the late stages of development where they can follow the interweaving of the four territories of experience and can exercise mutuality-enhancing transforming power, such

that they take full executive responsibility for the effects of their actions and treat one another as true peers. The most fundamental aim of liberating structures is, therefore, to cultivate the development of subordinates toward the later stages (never forgetting that development cannot be forced). Hence, if liberating structures succeed, organizational members will increasingly take executive responsibility, will increasingly treat one another as peers, and will increasingly create their own liberating structures.

A third simple heuristic for creating liberating structures is to ask oneself how to maximize both of two apparently opposite values, such as power and justice, or inquiry and productivity. Usually, we think we have to sacrifice one of these for the other, or else compromise between the two. Totally new solutions to such dilemmas begin to suggest themselves if we disdain our competitive assumptions and seek counterintuitive solutions. Thus, for example, the previous chapter illustrated how project groups in the BC MBA program are required to engage in unusual levels of mutual inquiry and evaluation; yet this inquiry unleashes rather than paralyzes productivity (because of the details of how it is organized).

The Eight Essential Qualities of Liberating Structure

One quality of liberating structure is deliberate irony. The leadership (at whatever level) recognizes that most subordinates will initially interpret the organizational structure and particular events based on a different model of reality (a different stage of development) from the one inspiring the leadership. Moreover, subordinates will not tend to interpret the resulting conflicts as caused by the different developmental frames, nor will they be inclined to examine or test their own frame. The leadership must at one and the same time succeed in "speaking the subordinates' (developmental) language" and introducing them to a "new language" (e.g., the theory and practice of mutuality-enhancing power).

The new "language" will motivate exploration of basic assumptions about reality by constructing tasks wherein members feel the limitations and self-contradictions inherent in their, relatively self-restricting view of reality. Organizational structures and leadership actions that meet these demands are deliberately ironic: they both acknowledge and bridge a gap in developmental stages and worldviews.

A second quality of liberating structure is the definition of tasks that are incomprehensible and undoable without reference to accompanying processes and purposes. Ordinarily employees or students treat tasks as meaningful in themselves or as meaningless except in terms of external rewards, masking the operation of their own interpretive scheme (at whatever their stage of development) as the source of meaning. By contrast, liberating tasks are epistemologically transparent: the product and the process congruently embody and reflect the purpose. Members cannot successfully complete liberating tasks unless they challenge their usual ways of doing these tasks without awareness of process and purpose. Consequently, and ironically, liberating tasks will initially seem opaque, strange, and disquieting to many organizational members since they are unaccustomed to such tasks, even though what is strange about them is that they are actually epistemologically transparent and that they encourage awareness of this fact.

A third quality of liberating structure is premeditated and precommunicated structural evolution over time. Such evolution reflects the movement by organizational members as they move toward conscious appropriation of the process and purpose territories of reality and thus toward the possibility of collaboration in the search for shared purpose, self-direction, and quality work. Such pre-communicated structural evolution also counters the tendency to treat a given structure as the ultimate substance of an organization and encourages the search for a continuing thread of meaning—for a shared purpose beyond structure. The premeditated and precommunicated phasing of this evolution helps to persuade members that some discoverable rhythms underlie even the most fundamental transformations.

A fourth quality of liberating structure is that its tasks are so structured and its leadership so functions as to provide a constant cycle of experiential and empirical research and feedback on participants' different ways of constructing reality, on their changing relations to one another, and on the quality of their work.

A fifth quality of liberating structure is the use of all available forms of power by the leadership to support the first four projects. Instead of attempting either to hoard power or to give it away, the leadership uses the logistical, diplomatic, and unilateral powers granted it by its institutional status and by its members, as well as the transforming power granted by its own experiential authority. It uses all these powers to perform a kind of psycho-social jiu-jitsu whereby the members experience both more discretion and more direction than usual. These conditions can lead the members gradually to question their own assumptions about the nature of power and begin to experiment with the creative power to constitute a new world. In so doing, the members increasingly join the leadership in a community of inquiry. The leadership does not use power manipulatively—that is, covertly and in order to maintain unilateral, exploitative structures. Instead, it uses power openly to create increasingly collaborative conditions.

A sixth quality of liberating structure is that the structure at any given time is open, in principle, to inspection and challenge by organization members. The organization requires the vigilance of all its members to determine whether its purposes are hazy and whether its specific structure, implementing behaviors, and products or services are congruent with its purposes. But members' charges of organizational incongruities may well be untrustworthy so long as the members themselves are unaccustomed to searching for incongruities among their own presuppositions, strategies, practices, and effects. Thus, especially initially, charges of organizational incongruity by subordinates may mask an unwillingness to face personal incongruities. The attentive leadership will turn such conflicts into educational opportunities. To state this idea another way, the openness of the leadership is made possible by, and is limited to the service of, a principle of inquiry more fundamental than any particular structure.

A seventh quality of liberating structure is that the leadership becomes vulnerable, in practice, to attack and public failure as soon as it behaves inauthentically when its tasks, processes, and purposes become incongruent and it refuses to acknowledge and correct such incongruities. By promising much, designing unconventional (and therefore often uncomfortable) tasks, and inviting full inspection, a liberating structure sets the stage for members' disillusionment. If the leadership exerts power in manipulative and defensive ways, members will become disillusioned with the leadership. If the leadership shows appropriate

strength, vulnerability, and integrity from moment to moment, members will shed various illusions about themselves, about organizing work, and about the nature of reality, and will develop toward later stages.

A final quality of liberating structure, implicit throughout the foregoing discussion, is a leadership committed to, and practiced in, seeking, recognizing, and righting personal and organizational incongruities. The leadership leads other organizational members in learning while improving quality and in creating social settings that encourage simultaneous learning and quality work.

Chapter 13: The Vision of Action Inquiry

The Hierarchy of Political Principles in the Action Inquiry Paradigm

Because action inquiry is simultaneously a type of inquiry and a type of action—a type of science and a type of politics—it is appropriate to end this chapter with a consideration of its ordering of political principles. The action inquiry paradigm embraces and orders the three traditional political principles—Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity—and adds two more principles that have not heretofore been treated as political—Quality and Inquiry.

- *Inquiry*—the aim of creating existential communities of inquiry—is the primary political principle.
- *Peerdom* (Fraternity and Equality, without the sexist connotation of Fraternity) is the secondary political principle. True Peerdom is only approached as a peer culture or community of inquiry is created.
- *Liberty* is the tertiary political principle. Liberty is only approached in the context of a system, community, or culture that encourages peerlike inquiry and that grants equal rights—only in the context of Peerdom.
- And *Quality* is the quarternary political principle, approached only in the context of the commitment, attention, and skill cultivated through ongoing practice of the first three principles.

Presented so briefly and so abstractly, the interdependencies among these four political principles are hardly obvious. I attempted to state these principles and their interrelations for myself fifteen years ago. Although the language remains abstract and the tone of voice comes out more missionary, as a public utterance, than I am altogether comfortable with, I share it here:

The Politics of Inquiry

If I am to inquire into the meaning of human being as I act—if I am to act humanly and not automatically—I wish immediately to share this inquiry with all human beings. The meaning of human being is not some answer worked out by one for many. The meaning of human being is revealed in the response of each to each as we engage together in world transforming inquiry-in-action. There is no genuine community of inquiry that does not include the entire species because no one's imagination can encompass another's reality—can encompass the full meaning of

human being. As one wishing to inquire, I speak of my respect for you, of my esteem for you, yes, even of my love for you, when I address you as a stranger. As I address you in this way, and you reply, and our familiarity grows, you become stranger and stranger, until at moments I come to appreciate your Infinite Strangeness (my Infinite Strangeness), your individuality (my individuality), your craftiness (my craftiness).

As our mutual value thus appreciates through fraternal inquiry, so does the value of our works. Indeed, as we come to appreciate the full mystery and majesty of human being, we begin for the first time wholeheartedly to seek to craft goods —products, services, and celebrations in—formed by the openness, discipline, and inspiration of living inquiry. All craft—whether verbal or manual—requires an inquiry- in- action repeatedly reawakening us to the matter and the moment at hand. As initial author of the words above and below, I can say, after thirteen years of increasingly independent questioning, that I experience their truth. I experience how these ideas found my questioning. I experience how they sculpt me. The call of these ideas so obviously animates, interpenetrates, and illuminates my daily life alone and with others (to the small degree that I can bear illumination) that I feel increasingly as though they are staking their life in me. (To say that I am willing to stake my life in them would be to treat them as contingent and myself as capable of choosing other foundations—which is not how I experience the situation.)

I believe these ideas are fundamental to a just and inclusive world community and I believe that all persons can come to experience their truth through inquiry. Thus, I do not urge anyone to believe what I say, but rather to join in the inquiry. Yet so few find their way even that far: to join in the inquiry. Indeed, this is the great mystery: how to generate a politics of inquiry. In the past, three great political principles have been propounded —liberty, equality, and fraternity. No state has ever attained all three. Indeed, none of the three has ever been attained alone, though some states have approached one and some another.

What some persons regard as the path toward just practice, other persons regard, equally assuredly, as the path toward hell. We are missing a fourth political principle—a principle never before recognized as political—the principle of inquiry. The only political principle that invites the potential transformation of everyone's perspective is the principle of inquiry.

Quality results can never occur so long as persons have no genuine felt sense of individual liberty—so long as persons do not experience their visceral power to craft. In the absence of the voluntarily-assumed, empowering discipline of craft, people are reduced to the status of consumers, requiring more of the same thing than another in order to imagine themselves better than the other, since they cannot really feel good about themselves. A positively empowering sense of individual liberty can only rarely occur, in turn, so long as groups, organizations, and nations do not create equality of opportunity, equality before the law, as well as genuinely friendly atmospheres where each seeks to meet the otherness of others. Only meetings under such conditions encourage and challenge persons to set their own goals, to risk for the sake of quality, and to grow in response-ability, rather than simply to conform externally to narrow norms of appropriate behavior.

But such a genuine peer culture—an inclusive atmosphere that actively encourages quality, liberty, and equality can, in its turn, never develop except in the service of the questions and dilemmas which face the human species as a whole. Any sense of fraternity rooted in specific answers must be implicitly, if not explicitly, elitist and imperialistic. (Which is not to say that a community of inquiry has no place whatsoever for answers: the strong declarative quality of the foregoing paragraphs may illustrate that foundational questions generate many answers in time, but answers that are rooted in and enliven inquiry rather than ending it.)

Not only is the development of a worldwide community of inquiry unlikely (all organization is, after all, improbable by definition), but the process by which it develops must be doubly unknown. If achievement of the community of inquiry comprising the species as a whole is the condition for full appreciation of the unknowns at the center of human being, then the fact of the unknown itself remains largely unknown during the process by which some promote evolution toward the community of all. Doubly unknown, this process of introducing the unknown can nonetheless certainly be characterized as ironic and as unlike any political process we have witnessed heretofore.

That I wish to share the inquiry into the meaning of human being with all human beings and that a liberating peer culture requires such shared inquiry—these facts do not, of course, imply that anyone else in the world, much less everyone else, wishes to join in such inquiry at the outset. Indeed, the very glory of our civilization—its development of production technologies and information systems that make global material welfare feasible—distracts our attention from the less tangible realms of liberty, peerdom, and inquiry, making the development of a community of inquiry all the more unlikely.

[Chapter 13's] Conclusion

Modern science is characteristic of a prolonged era of human history during which the principle dynamic has been the effort to elevate human communities from a reliance on custom to a reliance on reason. As custom ceases to glue people's interactions as reliably, their behavior oscillates between guidance by reason, by custom, and by market exchange or terror. Such is our world today.

On the brink of the twenty-first century, the United Nations struggles to find some principle and practice that can, without destroying local initiative, supercede national law in weaving a global community. It has yet to discover the primary potential source of its power. Not arms and unilateral force; not diplomacy; nor law will be its primary instruments of power, if it is indeed to contribute significantly to global development, global productivity, and global justice. Cross-cultural, cross-paradigmatic, transforming inquiry in the midst of ongoing practice must be the kind of power that the United Nations cultivates, if it is to play a truly constructive leadership role in the coming centuries. An Inter-Cultural Inquiry Corps could dispatch multi-professional, six-person teams throughout the world to relate to specific organizations and communities, to provide leadership training to individuals, and, on behalf of a not-for-profit investment consortium, to identify businesses that deserve micro-development capital investments. The degree to which nations contributed to and invited the presence of such an Inter-cultural Inquiry

Corps would provide an immediate measure of their openness as a polity to inquiry and self-transformation.

Such experiments in personal and social transformation will be fraught with risk and difficulty, as have been the ones described earlier in this book and in the next chapter. Everyone will be reaching beyond themselves at the same time, for few are now dedicated to questioning their own assumptions in the midst of action by widening their attention, while continuing to act. Few explicate the frames they are assuming, the advocacies they mean to make, the illustrations that influence them, and the inquiries that would test and validate or invalidate their current direction of action. Still fewer are prepared to create, implement, and recreate liberating structures. And fewer yet are prepared to joust creatively and non-violently with deeply ambivalent and at least semi-hostile superior cultures as they do so.

Notes:

Chapter 1

1. Torbert, W. 1987. *Managing the Corporate Dream: Restructuring for Long-Term Success.* Homewood IL: Dow Jones-Irwin. [This book will hereinafter be referred to simply as MCD.]

2. Hobbes, T. 1960, reprinted from 1651. *Leviathan* Oxford, England: Blackwell. Simon, H. 1957. *Models of Man.* New York NY: Wiley.

3. This is not strictly true, for Hobbes bases the sovereign's claim to absolute power on the prior social contract by which he claims citizens can be supposed to have granted the sovereign such power as the only sure means to preserve peace and hence life. In the strict sense, then, Hobbes argues that right makes might, and so begins a process in Western political philosophy and political history whereby sovereign power is seen to emanate from below - from the citizen - rather than from above - from God.

4. Jacobs, S. 1990. As streets turn deadly, youth revise their survival code. *Boston Globe* 2/24:1.

5. For detail, see Rawls, J. 1972. *A Theory of Justice* (pp. 167-187). Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

6. Smith, A. 1969, reprinted from 1759, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Indianapolis IN: Liberty Classics. “The man of real constancy and firmness who has been bred in the bustle and business of the world has never dared to forget for one moment the judgment which the impartial spectator would pass upon his sentiments and conduct. He has never dared to suffer the man within the breast to be absent one moment from his attention. With the eyes of this great inmate he has always been accustomed to regard whatever related to himself (p 246).” These powerful lines argue that particularly people bred in “bustle and business” are ethically self-regulating - an argument particularly difficult to accept uncritically in the post-Boesky, post-Bakker, post-North era. In another place, Smith offers a quite different sense of our relation to the impartial spectator. He acknowledges, for example, that practice under conditions of hardship is necessary

to awaken the man within the breast, and that no one willingly undergoes such hardship (255-256). At still another point, Smith acknowledges the almost superhuman difficulty of operating amidst passions and hardships while remaining awake to the impartial observer within the breast; to become impartial in reflection is a wholly different challenge from being impartial in the midst of action: "When the action is over... and the passions which prompted it have subsided, we can enter more coolly into the sentiments of the indifferent spectator... But our judgments now are often of little importance in comparison of what they were before, and can frequently produce nothing but vain regret and unavailing repentance, without always securing us from like errors in time to come. It is seldom, however, that they are quite candid even in this case... He is a bold surgeon, they say, whose hand does not tremble when he performs an operation on his own person; and he is often equally bold who does not hesitate to pull off the mysterious veil of self-delusion which covers from his view the deformities of his own conduct (262)."

Obviously, there is considerable tension between Smith's two views: the one of an impartial, omnitient spectator who, almost by birthright, dwells within our breast and whom we never dare to forget for one moment; the second of an impartial spectator to whom even the most capable of us may never awaken at the crucially decisive moments of our lives. As the foregoing quotations show, Smith gives ample attention to each of these dichotomous perspectives. Yet, surprisingly, he never directly acknowledges the tension he illustrates. Instead, the main line of his argument is based upon the powerful presence of "the man within the breast" as an ethical regulator of conduct. Recently, Amartya Sen has shown that the rationality construct within utilitarian theory is itself not unitary, that it in fact is open to multiple interpretations of what self-interest in fact is. This brilliant opening of economic theory from the inside indicates a path along which modern economic theory may be reconciled with the developmental theory presented in this book, which emphasizes the enormous significance of just these different interpretations of what is in one's self-interest. See Sen, A. 1982. Choice, Welfare and Measurementÿ Cambridge MA: MIT Press; Sen, A. 1987. On Ethics and Economics London, England: Basil Blackwell; Klamer, A. 1989. A conversation with Amartya Sen. Journal of Economic Perspectives 3, 1:135-150.

7. Smith was quite explicit, in passing, in The Theory of Moral Sentiments that the invisible hand can be interpreted as a form of deception. Our attraction to wealth and to utility as means to happiness, Smith tells us, is not really due so much to: "the superior ease or pleasure which (the rich) are supposed to enjoy, as of the numberless artificial and elegant contrivances for promoting this ease or pleasure (p. 302)... From a certain spirit of system... from a certain love of art and contrivance, we sometimes seem to value the means more than the end (p. 306)... If we consider the real satisfaction which all these things are capable of affording, by itself and separate from the arrangement which is fitted to promote it, it will always appear in the highest degree contemptible and trifling. But we rarely view it in this abstract and philosophical light. We naturally confound it in our imagination with the order, the regular and harmonious movement of the system, the machine or the economy by means of which it is produced. The pleasures of wealth and greatness, when considered in this complex view, strike the imagination as something grand, and beautiful, and noble, of which the attainment is well worth all the toil and anxiety which we are so apt to bestow upon it. And it is well that nature imposes upon us in this manner. It is this deception which arouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind (p. 303)."

8. Simon, H. 1980. *Models of Man*. P.5.

9. Dahl, R. 1963. *Who Governs?* New Haven CT: Yale University Press. Galbraith, J. 1983. *The Anatomy of Power*. Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin. Pfeffer, J. 1981. *Power in Organizations.* Marshfield MA: Pitman.

10. Pfeffer, op.cit. p. 2.

11. Rousseau, J. *The Social Contract* Bk I, Ch 312. Barnard, C. 1938. T*he Functions of the Executive* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press. p. 167. Barnard's reference to "authority" and the frequent reference to legitimate power as authority together raise the question why I am here calling this phenomenon "diplomatic power" rather than "authority." Chapters 2 and 3 will discuss the relationship between power and authority, so the full answer will come then, but, briefly, consent alone does not assure legitimacy and authoritativeness. To be truly authoritative, I will argue in Chapters 2 and 3, requires that power—whether diplomatic, unilateral, or otherwise—be exercised in a fashion that is rational, timely, and conducive to the development of those affected.

13. Rousseau, op.cit. Bk I, Ch 6.14. Kant, I., Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals p. 23

15. ibid.

16. ibid. p. 22. At certain "teachable moments," Kant's educational advice is no doubt true. Influenced by him, I have sought moments to present duties to my children in this stern and confronting manner. But at other times I explicitly bribe my children to do something good (and once one of them refused the bribe!). For there are times when austere rationality makes no contact with our attention; a humorous exaggeration may awaken a corresponding gleam in the child's eye, wherein the parent may imagine lurking an appreciation of the rational. And it is not only children who fall away from the rational from time to time. Some readers have no doubt fallen to sleep at some point during their attempt to read the previous pages, rather than finding themselves elevated to a higher wakefulness. I myself could not even bring myself to read an entire book of Kant's until my forty-fourth year.

17. Bowers v Hardwick 106 S. Ct. 2841 (1986). Justice Blackmun's dissent in the 5-4 decision best articulates the right of privacy doctrine that had been evolving over the previous twenty years, since the contraception decision in Griswold v Connecticut 381 US 479 (1965). Patrick Devlin propounds the 'Will of All' perspective that what disgusts 'the man in the street' may be criminalized in The Enforcement of Morals. H.L.A. Hart responds from a 'General Will' perspective in Law, Liberty, and Morality. I am indebted to Morris Kaplan for organizing these arguments in his March 5, 1990 address at M.I.T. on "Lesbian and Gay Rights: Privacy, Equality, and Community."

18. Some familiar with Kant may object that his approach was "legislative" rather than "judicial" because he spoke of persons as ideally legislators in a Kingdom of Ends (indeed, since every citizen is, presumably, King in a Kingdom of Ends, one might argue that Kant's vision was "executive"). This confusion of the three branches is to be expected in a theory that sees all human action as subordinated to reason, but since he himself recognizes his discussion of the Kingdom of Ends as idealistic, and since relations among the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court

may come as close to instantiating this ideal as those of any other historical governing body, it seems to me fair to summarize his thought as judicial and aristocratic in nature.

19. Rawls, op.cit. See also my fuller treatment of these issues in Torbert, W. 1974. Doing Rawls justice. Harvard Educational Review 44, 4: 459-469.
20. ibid. 465-466.21. ibid. 472-473.22. ibid. 302.23. ibid.24. Kohlberg, L. & Turiel, E. (Ed.s). 1973. *Recent Research in Moral Development* New York NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Chapter 2

1. Pitkin, H. 1972, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, Berkeley: University of California Press. As Pitkin has so carefully argued, the very structure of *The Republic* wherein Plato assumes a fixed class structure and a need for a 'noble lie' (rather than a direct explanation) to 'keep people in their proper place,' in effect provides a very tough test of whether one can generate justice in unpropitious conditions—conditions in which few are, by the nature of their relatively fixed worldview, prone to seeking out and enacting justice (the dialogue does not assume an altogether fixed class structure; indeed, parents and leaders are specifically prompted to be on the lookout for youths who ought to be in a different class from that into which they are born).

Chapter 3

8. For example, Chris Argyris has, over the past quarter century, devised a variety of techniques for publicly testing the validity of social observations and inferences among the very participants in a social situation where there are different and conflicting perspectives. His most recent publication on this topic is Argyris, C., Putnam, R., & Smith, D., 1985, *Action Science: Concepts, Methods, and Skills for Research and Intervention*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

9. See my discussion of analogical thinking in Chapter 9 of *Managing the Corporate Dream* and in my description of Pope John XXIII in “Leading Organizational Transformation” (full cite, footnote 10). See also Alan Watts, *Nature, Man and Woman* (New York: Pantheon, 1958) on feeling inside.

34. Nielsen, R. 1990. “Dialogic leadership as ethics action (praxis) method,” *Journal of Business Ethics*, 9: 25-43. In this article, Nielsen offers an unusually rich synthesis of theory and actual leadership cases that demonstrate these characteristics of transforming power, and the other characteristics mentioned earlier in the chapter.