

ROOTS FOR RADICALS

Organizing for Power,
Action, and Justice

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with Michael A. Cowan

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The World As It Is and the World As It Should Be

"Out of such crooked timbers as man is made, nothing entirely straight can be fashioned."

IMMANUEL KANT

The Two Worlds

Until we die, we live with a tension under our skin at the center of our personhood. We are born into a world of needs and necessities, opportunities and limitations, and must survive there. No one has the luxury of ignoring these realities. Self-preservation, food, clothing, shelter, safety, health care, education, and work are necessary for everyone. Large numbers of people agonize over these things every day of their lives; many of us think of nothing else. This demanding set of real circumstances, which we didn't create but which we are thrown into, is the world as it is. When people refer to the "real world" in conversation, this is what they mean.

We also have dreams and expectations, yearnings and values, hopes and aspirations. We exist from day-to-day with the awareness that things not only might, but could be, should be, different for ourselves and our children. We know that we don't fulfill ourselves, that there is an ideal, a greater good that matters. We are a mysterious combination of matter and spirit, body and soul, sexuality and power. We aren't born with realized vision and values. We inherit them from our parents, teachers, and the received culture, which is all around us. It's like the air we breathe—we can't escape it. As we grow and move into adulthood, these formative patterns of the good and meaningful life must be acted upon to become real. The guiding ideals that we receive from our culture and predecessors make up the world as it should be. Cynics deride vision and values as irrelevant in the real world, but the fact is that they are indispensable to our sanity, integrity, and authenticity.

"As is" and "should be"—is and ought—are abstractions. They don't exist as such. You can break them apart the way I just did, but only for the purpose of understanding. In real life, the two always exist conjugally. Just as there is no such thing as culture without society, and no such thing as person without family, so it is with the two worlds. Like the encircling polarities of the Chinese yin/yang symbol, the two worlds always function in relationship to each other. Just as good/evil, active/passive, and light/dark have no meaning if you break them in half, so it is with the two worlds. Their reality is their relationship, the tense, constantly shifting interplay between them. The hard existential truth is that from the awakening of our consciences until we lay down in death, we feel an unrelenting struggle between is and ought.

Let's pause for a minute. Is this two-world stuff fair? No. We are crooked timbers by nature, made of matter and spirit, and brought into being by parents nobody asked us about. We are given a short life, one of constant struggle. We are supposed to love ourselves and others. So why in God's name do we have to live in two worlds? Why aren't we born straight instead of crooked, with no in-betweens, no more-or-less? The answer is freedom—to think, to feel, to imagine, to will, and to act. There is the trade-off for being born crooked: In the midst of the tension of living in between the two worlds, our spirit is free.

Having just described the relationship between the two worlds as tense, let me be clear about what I mean by tension. In today's culture, tension is a bad word, always quickly followed in advertising by "relief." The media teaches that tensions mean we're "stressed out" or "uptight" or "wound up"—all undesirable states calling for immediate medication, therapy, or exercise. But the tension I'm naming here isn't a problem to be solved. It's the human condition. It's the gap that people who aren't completely lost in the culture of self-centeredness feel between the reality that surrounds them and their ideals. Philosophers use the word "dialectical" to name a back-and-forth tension between interrelated poles, and I will sometimes use it to describe the relationship between the two worlds.

Whenever I draw attention to one of the two worlds, I'm always conscious that its partner is present, and you should be, too. It's sunup and sundown. One makes no sense without the other. I call the world as it is and the world as it should be *conjugal* concepts. Like all relational partners, they shape and inform each other. You can't understand sexual intercourse by looking at one partner in isolation, and you can't grasp the two worlds by dividing them. The foundational conviction of the IAF organizing tradition is that it is the fate of human beings to exist *in-between* the world as it is and the world as it should be. Reflective people of conscience are constantly and painfully aware

of the gap between our so-called values and the facts of life in the everyday world within which we operate. When these two worlds collide hard enough and often enough, a fire in the belly is sometimes ignited. The tension between the two worlds is the root of radical action for justice and democracy—not radical as in looting or trashing, but as in going to the root of things.

Wind, rain, and fog confronted Carol Reckling, a senior leader in Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD), when she left her office and dashed toward her car on a miserable midwinter dusk in downtown Baltimore. This was the night that BUILD had chosen for an action involving 1,000 leaders with Maryland state legislators in Annapolis.

She recalled that the weather had also been miserable on that night seven years before when she began her work with BUILD. Although she had been aware of the organization since its inception, she had shied away from participating until she learned of a meeting that would focus on a matter near to her heart: schools. The meeting was a caucus of the just-forming BUILD education committee. The subject was not curriculum or funding or the condition of buildings, but something more basic—a lack of supplies. No paper. No pencils. No books. She remembered her feelings—shock, then anger—at hearing that litany. No paper. No pencils. No books. Reckling herself had received a good education in Baltimore elementary and high schools, at Howard University, and in the master's program of Washington University Business School. She had found teachers along the way who worked hard and worked her hard. And she had lived, firsthand, what her parents and their peers had always said: "Education is the key." So she understood full well the whole equation facing too many of Baltimore's children: No paper, no pencils, no books = no career, no future, no hope.

In the years since that first meeting, she had worked hard and well. She had become a driving force in education strategy in Baltimore. She had negotiated with three mayors and many corporate leaders. She had been one of the founders of BUILD's Commonwealth Strategy, which guarantees full funding for postsecondary education or initial employment opportunities to all graduates of the Baltimore public schools who meet specified attendance and performance criteria.

Carol Reckling had been taught by her parents and her church to appreciate the value of education—so much so, that when she saw large numbers of Baltimore's children being denied its basics, she was moved to act. The con-

stant tension between the world as it is and the world as it should be is the primary motivation leading people like Carol Reckling to seek the common good. What I mean by being moral or ethical is stepping up to the tension between the two worlds. As I hope to make plain in the final section of this chapter, understanding the world as it is while ignoring the world as it should be leads to cynicism, division, and coercion. Concern for the world as it should be divorced from the capacity for analysis and action in the world as it is marginalizes and sentimentalizes morality and ethics. IAF's position is that maintaining a good enough tension between the two worlds is the hallmark of authentically moral and ethical human living. Embracing this tension every day is our spiritual destiny.

In a world conscious of cultural diversity, I need to add a nuance here. The tension between the two worlds is a tension between interpretations. The world as it is and the world as it should be are not raw facts or simple objective realities. We don't have objective, uninterpreted access to either world. People from different histories see the two worlds differently. Any group's readings of what's happening in a situation (the world as it is) and the key values in that situation (the world as it should be) are interpretations from that group's perspective. When we meet in public life, I bring my group's interpretations of the world as it is and as it should be, and you bring your group's interpretations. What you and I can create for our respective groups or institutions and the larger community depends on bringing our respective interpretations together in a better reading of our common situation and obligations than we could do alone, one that enables us to act together with power despite our differences.

Uneasiness in the face of the disparity between the two worlds haunts us throughout our lives. It isn't a problem that can be fixed, or a temporary state of affairs that we can end by getting things right. It's the human condition. It's possible to reduce the tension between the two worlds through consumption, addiction, or just giving in to the frenetic pace of modern life. We can and do numb ourselves to the gap between the social reality we encounter and our best hopes and aspirations. When this numbness sets in, our humanity is diminished; when it takes over, our humanity is lost.

Living In-Between the Two Worlds

It is useful to break down the relationship between the two worlds into four polarities, each of which contributes to the overall tension. The four are represented in the following diagram, which is an abstraction.

Polarities Between the Two Worlds

The World As It Is ← tension → *The World As It Should Be*

Self-Interest ↔ Self-Sacrifice

Power ↔ Love

Change ↔ Unity

Imagination ↔ Hope

Self-Interest ↔ **Self-Sacrifice**

The first polarity between the two worlds is between self-interest and self-sacrifice. Self-interest evokes a range of responses. To realists centered on the world as it is, self-interest is obviously the prime motivator of human behavior. Pursuing self-interest is as natural as breathing. For idealists focused on the world as it should be, self-interest is another word for selfishness. It's an isolating form of individualism with little regard for others. Both of these views convey a partial truth, but miss a deeper one.

Self-interest is the natural concern of a creature for its survival and well-being. It's the fundamental priority underlying the choices we make. Self-interest is based on nature's mandate that we secure the basic needs and necessities of life, and develops further to include more complex desires and requirements. Healthy self-interest is one of the marks of integrity or wholeness in a person. It is the source of the initiative, creativity, and drive of human beings who are fully alive.

The English word "interest" is a combination of two Latin words, *inter*, meaning "between" or "among," and *esse*, meaning "to be." Our interests do not reside inside our skins but in between, within our relationships with others. Philosopher Hannah Arendt writes, "... the language of the Romans, perhaps the most political people we have known, used the words 'to live' and 'to be among men' (*inter homines esse*) or 'to die' and 'to cease to be among men' (*inter homines esse desinere*) as synonyms."¹ To live is to be among people, to have interests. Human beings are interpersonal beings, relational selves.

Self-preservation, self-recognition, self-determination, and self-respect are components of self-interest. Self-preservation is the drive for survival; it's so strong that we can take life to defend ourselves. Self-recognition is the ability to claim our place and space in the world whether others have acknowledged it yet or not. Self-determination is the capacity to expand and deepen our abilities through creative, self-initiated action. Self-respect is recognition of our uniqueness. Self-interest rightly understood includes all of these dimensions. The opposite of self-interest is suicide or self-destruction.

negotiating perspective

numbness

Genuine self-interest is illustrated in the following story.

For thirty years, Sister Mary Beth Larkin has been a member of a Catholic women's religious order. Although interested in religious life, she did not want to teach or work in a hospital. She thought she wanted to do social work, but seven years of experience with providing crisis intervention and direct service for the poor was so frustrating that she nearly left her community. She knew how to help people work the system, but what about getting the system to work for people?

She found a way to do just that. While working in a Los Angeles parish, she became involved in the United Neighborhoods Organization (UNO). She was deeply impressed with the power and effectiveness of the organization in getting real changes for people living in poor neighborhoods. One of her first public actions involved getting up on the stage before the city council and translating a speech for a Spanish-speaking leader. "I was so nervous that I was literally sick. I thought about calling in and saying I couldn't make it. But when the UNO leaders who were present in that hall called the meeting to order and the council members ignored us, I suddenly got very angry, angry for myself and for all those people who deserved better treatment than that. Once I got angry, I was fine. I realized that there is a public person in me that I never knew was there. It was a liberating experience."

Her commitment to religious life renewed, Sister Mary Beth knew that what she wanted was to organize people and work with them so they could get what they wanted. She knew that this was where she belonged, but no one in her order had ever been involved in anything like IAF organizing before, and there were feelings within the order that this kind of work might not be appropriate for a sister. Eventually, she was permitted to take a position as a full-time organizer and went on to organize in Queens, New York, in San Antonio, and in other parts of Texas. As an IAF organizer, she is usually unable to live with her community of sisters in California. She calls that one of the sacrifices she had to make to do the work that allows her religious convictions to have meaning.

Her work as an organizer has allowed Sister Mary Beth to stay with her commitment to religious life. She expresses her delight with this role by explaining that "religious life is public life. It's about making a difference and doing the difficult work of seeking justice in a society. It's the work of the Gospel—we must take action to achieve justice."

Self-interest defined too narrowly becomes selfishness. This occurs, for example, when self-interest is reduced to how many cars or homes you own, or how large your stock portfolio is. Whether self-interest degenerates into selfishness and meaninglessness or not depends upon how well it is held in creative tension with its conjugal partner.

Self-sacrifice is the counterpart of self-interest. If self-interest involves knowing when and how to assert your concerns effectively, self-sacrifice means being able to suppress your own interests for others.

Self-interest and self-sacrifice are forever joined in a give-and-take relationship. Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and other traditions long ago highlighted the great paradox of human existence: Giving up one's life for another is the highest good. In real life, we are always more or less concerned with self and others. Good parents, teachers, friends, and leaders understand that there are times when their well-being requires curbing or postponing action on their own behalf to take account of others' interests. They also know that there are moments when they must strongly pursue their own interests, but without unnecessary harm to others.

The first polarity between the world as it is and the world as it should be, then, is the tension between self-interest and self-sacrifice. As with each of the four polarities, there is no formula for weighing self-interest against self-sacrifice in particular situations. That balancing act requires seasoned judgment based on social knowledge, which comes only from ongoing action, reflection, and evaluation.

Power ←→ Love

The second polarity between the two worlds is between power and love. Power is a loaded word. Those who call themselves realists take it for granted and try to use it shrewdly in pursuing their agendas. Idealists are prone to see power as negative if not downright evil, as something to be avoided. A cardinal archbishop once said to me, "I have trouble with the word 'power'; I call it truth." He didn't understand that power has a Trinitarian character: I and you create a "we the people," a new reality. Beyond minimal forms like voting or jury duty, ordinary people have little direct experience of exercising power in public life.

Power is the ability to act. Like the capacity to love, it is given to us at birth. Power is our birthright, our inheritance. It is the basis of our capacity to address differences through politics. From one perspective, power is neutral. It may be used for evil or for good. From another, it is ambiguous because any employment of power by finite human beings, no matter how well

intended and successful, will lead to unexpected consequences for self and others. Hannah Arendt was correct in observing that one of the defining characteristics of all human action is the unpredictability of its effects.

In Western culture, power has come to be interpreted and practiced as one-way influence. According to this understanding, one person's power is his or her ability to get someone else to do what he or she wants; the other person's power is the ability to do as that person chooses. In a power encounter, it's one against the other. Whoever ends up making the other move more has demonstrated more power. Here, power means "power over."

Because they have no verb "to power," English speakers have a harder time understanding that power is more like a verb than a noun than do Spanish speakers, who routinely use the verb *poder*, meaning "to be able," "to have the capacity to have an influence," "to power." English speakers not only misunderstand power as a noun, as something that can be possessed and used at will as an instrument, but also assume that it exists in a fixed quantity. Just as there is only so much gold in the world, there is only so much power to go around. If I get some more, you lose it. This is power understood as unilateral and as limited in quantity. But power is not zero-sum.

Power has another face that the unilateral definition prevents us from seeing plainly. Even in its most crass, dominating form, power takes place in relationships. Think about it. Does the concept of power make sense without another to receive our influence? Seeing clearly that every act of power requires a relationship is the first step toward realizing that the capacity to be affected by another is the other side of the coin named power. If you are finding this concept difficult to grasp, it is probably because the unilateral definition of power is so ingrained in you by schooling, the media culture, and pundits.

People who can understand the concerns of others and mix those concerns with their own agenda have access to a power source denied to those who can push only their own interests. In this fuller understanding, "power" is a verb meaning "to give and take," "to be reciprocal," "to be influenced as well to influence." To be affected by another in relationship is as true a sign of power as the capacity to affect others. Relational power is infinite and unifying, not limited and divisive. It's additive and multiplicative, not subtractive and divisive. As you become more powerful, so do those in relationship with you. As they become more powerful, so do you. This is power understood as relational, as power *with*, not *over*.

In January of 1978 New York City's newly elected mayor Ed Koch fulfilled a promise he had made to the leaders of a new and growing force

in Queens politics—Queens Citizens Organization (QCO). During his campaign, Koch had pledged that if he were elected mayor, one of his first acts would be to come to a public meeting of QCO leaders.

At 8:00 P.M., 1,500 leaders were seated and ready at St. Thomas the Apostle auditorium. Mayor Koch was led in by a procession of local school children and followed by an army of TV cameras. As soon as the mayor had taken his seat on the dais, Father Eugene Lynch, co-chair of QCO, took the podium to begin the meeting.

The mayor had other ideas. Rising from his seat, he announced that he had a speech he wanted to give before the meeting went any farther. Father Lynch replied that there was a full agenda of QCO issues and ideas that were scheduled to be addressed, and that Koch would be given a chance to speak near the end of the meeting. The mayor countered that if he were not granted ten minutes to speak immediately, he would walk out.

Father Lynch and the QCO strategy team were confused. They called time-out, caucused, and decided to grant Koch two minutes to speak. Father Lynch announced their decision, but Koch replied that that wasn't good enough. To the boos and hisses of the crowd gathered there, he walked out. As he proceeded out the door, he turned to the pursuing press corps and snarled, "These people don't seem to understand. The election is over!"

It soon became apparent that what at first seemed a terrible blow to QCO would actually turn into a great victory. That evening on the eleven o'clock news and the next morning in *The New York Times* and *The Daily News*, reporters depicted an arrogant politician thumbing his nose at hard-working Queens families. Such words as "emperor" and "arrogant" laced the headlines describing Koch's behavior. Finally, the mayor capitulated, inviting QCO leaders to City Hall to reconcile. With its first major victory, QCO exploded into the New York City political arena with unprecedented fanfare.

This story shows both unilateral and relational power in action. Threatening to leave if you can't have your way and storming out when you don't get it are unilateral-power moves. Attempting to negotiate a compromise on the spot and accepting the offer to reconcile when the time is right are relational-power moves. Unilateral power is interested only in the pursuit of its own agenda. Relational power includes others' interests in its agenda. And sometimes relational power wins. When ordinary people get organized, they can hold powerful public officials—like the mayor of New York City—

accountable. When ordinary people get organized, they become citizens with some power.

Like self-interest, power can realize itself fully only if held in creative relationship with its conjugal partner, which is love. Love is a loaded term. Realists see no place for love in what they call the real world, especially the world beyond family and friendship. Idealists regard love as the ultimate reality, as a force actively working to bring justice and mercy to the world.

People usually take it for granted that the crux of love is focusing on the other, while downplaying or sacrificing one's self. If exercising power means asserting one's self-interest, loving means disregarding it. Love is treated as the opposite of power. This is love understood as unilateral.

But there is a truer dimension to love that a unilateral perspective hides. The mandate from the Hebrew scriptures to love one's neighbor as one's self does not imply ignoring one's self-interest. To love the neighbor as the self is to respect the neighbor's interests and one's own equally. In a similar vein, the basic ethical principle in Western philosophy—the famous “categorical imperative” of the same Kant who brought us the crooked timbers—is that one should never treat a human being only as a means to some end. The relational nature of interests comes into play here. Love means sustaining relationships in which the interdependence of one's own and others' interests is recognized and respected. This is love understood as a mutual, reciprocal process of give and take.

The received culture wants to privatize love, but love is not limited to the private sphere. Love occurs in public relationships when people come together despite their differences to thrash out issues affecting the well-being of their community, not splintering into narrow factions, but holding their differing interests in respectful, creative tension. IAF leaders, like the collective that publicly confronted Mayor Koch in the story you just read, are committed to and practiced in the arts of public discussion, shared action, reasonable compromise, and joint reflection.

Social knowledge drawn from the IAF's experience over the past sixty years in assisting ordinary citizens to organize for power to bring about change in their communities is the source of my judgment that the realist and idealist interpretations of power and love are distortions. In Western culture, “power” means “unilateral power” and “love” means “unilateral love.” So it should be no surprise that Westerners tend to see power and love as opposites, and the right relationship between them as a kind of balancing off of the effects of these two ways of relating. When we “power” someone, we ignore their interests; when we “love” someone, we ignore our own concerns. If you

happen to hold these conceptions of power and love, you are profoundly mistaken, but you are not alone.

Power and love—like self-interest and self-sacrifice—are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary aspects of a conjugal partnership. There can be no creative power without some acknowledgment of the other's interests, just as there can be no healthy love if the self is wholly lost in concern for the other. The love that lays down its life for another is a paradoxical yet coherent act of self-respect. As any good parent, police officer, or team player knows, there are many moments when one's own comfort or convenience or preference is not one's most pressing concern.

The second polarity between the world as it is and the world as it should be, then, is the tension between power and love. Reinhold Niebuhr had it right: “Power without love is tyranny, and love without power is sentimental-ity.” (In power and love, the interests of both parties matter. To power and love well is to respect the other and the self.) In relational power, effects are given and received. Understanding the relational character of power and love transforms the practice of both because both require give-and-take relationships. Power and love are two-way streets.

Change ←→ Unity

The third polarity between the world as it is and the world as it should be is between change and unity. The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, “It is necessary to know that . . . justice is conflict, that all things come about in conflict and in accordance with necessity.” More than 2,000 years later, his keen grasp of the realities of power led IAF founder Saul Alinsky to state the following law of change: “Change means movement; movement means friction; friction means heat; heat means controversy.” Just as in the physics of the material world, so in the realm of “social physics” there is no change without the movement of action, no movement without the friction of competing interests, and no friction without the heat of controversy. There is no nice, polite way to get change.

What led Alinsky to this conclusion? The pursuit of interests always plays out between and among people. The status quo in any particular set of circumstances in the world as it is always gives some groups advantages over others. Initiatives for change will be perceived as threats by those with vested interest, and thus as controversial. “Power,” as former slave turned abolitionist Frederick Douglass rightly insisted, “concedes nothing voluntarily.” There is no change without the friction of interests in confrontation.

In the dynamics of social change, differing interests will surface whenever people organize to change the status quo. Facing these differences and dealing

with them straightforwardly requires that we exercise our ability to negotiate. History teaches plainly that conflicts of interest that are not resolvable through political means will be settled by one or another form of unilateral power, usually violence. All authentic politics deals with differences through constructive compromises, without force or violence.

Unity, a state of harmony or peace, is the counterpart of change. We have a need deep inside of us that cries out for peace and quiet. A mother raising three small children; the executive caught between the boss and customers, trying to please both parties, and pleasing neither; the person with dark skin snubbed with a remark like "the trouble with you people is . . ."; the sixty-five-year-old priest whose archbishop tells him that he is "too pastoral" and eases him out after years of ministry; the parents whose sixteen-year-old son borrows Dad's car for some fun after school with his buddy and proceeds to roll it, breaking his teeth, face, and collar bones, and nearly bleeding to death—all want a world of fairness and repose.

Conflict, friction, and confrontation are what the world as it is serves up. Is it fair? No, but it is the price of free will. We are not made straight but crooked, caught between constant change and our wish for harmony. Fleeting moments of peace and harmony are the most we get in this life. The holy books promise lasting peace, but only when the reign of God arrives. Until then, unity in the real world lasts for thirty seconds or maybe a day and a half. The law of change is incessant, like the tides. The yearning for unity is like the longing for certainty. We want both, but we can't have them in this lifetime.

Do you think radical organizers and leaders like conflict? No! Some kamikaze movement types do; they live for so-called action. They don't understand that all action is in the inevitable reaction. What counts is not what you do; it's what they do in response to what you do that matters. A creative tension between change and harmony is exemplified by broad-based citizens organizations, like this one in the IAF network.

One thousand black and white Memphians spilled out of the Golden Leaf Baptist Church in North Memphis to kick off the organizing drive in Memphis and Shelby County by Shelby County Interfaith (SCI). Representatives of thirty-five congregations, along with the bishops of the Episcopal and Roman Catholic dioceses and the national president of the Progressive Baptist Convention, had come to commit themselves to the most important organizing effort in Memphis since the civil rights movement. Most significant for this racially polarized Southern city, half the congregations were black and half were white. They repre-

sented nearly every neighborhood of Memphis: the wealthy, the middle class, the working class, and the poor. Those who attended called the new organization the most significant black and white effort in the city's history.

The central message of the worship service was contained in the question that Dr. Alan V. Ragland of the New Fellowship Baptist Church put to the crowd: "Are you ready to work together?" He then challenged those present more pointedly: "Are you white members here tonight ready to hold black hands, even when they want to pull away?" "Yes!" came the response to resounding applause. Then: "Are you black members here tonight ready to hold white hands, even when they want to pull away?" Again, the answer was a powerful "Yes!" accompanied by applause from the entire assembly.

When the worship service ended, black and white Memphians went out to begin a new experiment in democracy in the heart of the Old South. In the city where Dr. Martin Luther King's life had been taken in an act of racial hatred, his dream of an America where character, not skin color, would be the measure of a person's worth lived on.

We yearn for the peace of unity, for moments like the one just described in Memphis, in which blacks and whites joined together to stand for the good of the whole city. The law of change, however, complicates this yearning, since there is no change without friction. How can we reconcile the law of change with our desire for oneness? The unavoidable struggle and friction required for any real change must be understood as a necessary part of the resolution of tensions arising from conflicting insights. In real life, people coming from different histories, like Latinos and Anglos, blacks and whites, new immigrants and established residents in the United States, see the two worlds differently. Strong public relationships require acknowledging differences.

The deeply felt wish for harmony constantly tempts people, especially idealists, to avoid the necessary friction that comes when real differences are faced. Let's be honest. I rarely wake up saying, "God, I hope this will be a controversial, friction-filled day." Do you? But so-called harmony based on avoiding what really divides us is falsely named. In reality, such a limited form of public relationship is a misguided denial of a real building block—our different viewpoints. It prevents the tough talk that leads to half or three quarters of a loaf.

"Civility" and "citizen" come from the same Latin word. Treating someone civilly doesn't mean being polite; it means treating her or him as a fellow

citizen, as someone whose uniqueness must be respected and included, someone with whom one must converse, debate, seek compromise, and collaborate. In public life, politeness is not civility; it's the sin of the middle class yearning to join the ranks of the haves. It is the refuge of those who have not developed their political capacity to the point where they can stand the tension and heat of controversy. The law of change demands that we don't just huddle with our own group, but risk bringing real differences to the common table for resolution. In creating the public actions that the law of change demands, a process unfolds in which we grow in our capacity to be public people, that is, in our ability to stand for the whole.

Maintaining creative tension between change and unity requires that we move beyond isolated politeness into collective public actions that include both the acknowledgment of real differences and the search for workable compromises. The common good of a large and diverse community can be pursued effectively only when a representative collective of institutions is bold enough to stand for the whole. It can be advanced only when real differences are bound up together in a web of relationships anchored in the institutions that bring citizens and people of faith together—churches, neighborhood groups, labor unions, and other associations. Public relationships both require and bring forth the ability to live with the inevitable tensions of common life. A politics anchored in such bonds must be able to bear the necessary uneasiness between the law of change and harmony.

Imagination ←→ Hope

The final polarity between the two worlds is between imagination and hope. Imagination is connected to memory. What we remember makes possible and limits how we understand the signs of our time; how we understand those signs makes possible and limits the future we can imagine. Imagination and memory allow us to recall, reflect, relive, and reorganize.

Imagination is a gift, a unique faculty like good instinct, but it frequently gets lost in our modern worship of intellect and will. Imagination is no less important than our abilities to think and choose. Imagination lets us glimpse a world that has not yet materialized and move mentally back and forth between what was and what is, and what is and what might be. Although dismissed as mere fantasy since the Enlightenment, which sanctified reason and will, imagination is what allows the tension of living between the two worlds to create newness, first in our mind and body, and then, through our actions, in reality. The Russian philosopher Nikolay Berdyaev said, "The faculty of imagination is the source of all creativeness. Without it there can be no

works of art, no scientific or technical discoveries, no plan for ordering the economic or the political life of nations."³

Since Freud, people in the West have been frightened by instinct. But the so-called sixth sense should be honored as a faculty along with intellect and will. My experience convinces me that most people have good instincts but don't trust them. Your instincts are like your intuition and passion—the key to all creative activity. Imagination is grounded in the body, where the human spirit resides and the instrument through which it acts. Everyday, ordinary people figure out how to feed and clothe themselves, make a living, have sex, raise children, and solve problems through the development of their instinctual social know-how.

The saint of the imaginative faculty is Einstein. His thought experiments, which took place in his own imagination, utterly changed the world for better and for worse. He understood that "imagination precedes implementation." Imagination is the engine of social life and entrepreneurship, an engine with enormous power. All human good and evil might be said to spring from it. Synthetic medicines and satellite pictures from Mars are possible because of human imagination, as were the laws created to regulate slavery in North America and the blueprints and train schedules for Auschwitz. The formidable and ambiguous powers of the imagination are integral to humanity, but subject to devastating distortions if disconnected from the compass of conscience and the memory of grief, suffering, and pain. Hannah Arendt is correct: "Lack of imagination keeps people from existing." It robs them of their power.

In a fast-paced, future-oriented, advertising-driven society, memory is short and selective. The stories of parents and grandparents who struggled to provide their children with the basic necessities and the chance of a better future contain precious, energizing memories for their offspring. When stories remain untold, the compass of conscience and memory loses its power to feed the imagination.

The following childhood story of an IAF leader gives powerful voice to the way that memory shapes imagination.

Ms. Angela Telamantes of Southern California Organizing Committee (SCOC) tells the following story about where her passion for organizing comes from. "When I was growing up as a Hispanic child in an Arizona mining town in the 1950s, the public swimming pool was open only to Anglos from Monday through Saturday. On Sunday we were allowed to swim, and after that the 'dirty' water would be changed. They told us that it was because Mexican kids had sores on their feet,

but I knew better. That memory never leaves me. Hispanic children have a special place in my heart. They're why I organize today as an adult in Los Angeles."

Social imagination grounded in memories like these are dangerous to the status quo, to the powers that be. They have the potential not only to comfort the afflicted but also to afflict the comfortable. That is, if we remember, and if we keep imagination in creative tension with its conjugal partner.

The conjugal mate of imagination is hope, the human capacity to act in the world now on behalf of the world as it should be. When we forget our history and cannot imagine a changed world, we cannot act with hope to bring that world into existence. Hope ignites action when the struggle for justice exposes intolerable gaps between the two worlds. German theologian Johann B. Metz captures the transformative power of imagination tempered by the memory of suffering: "Enlightenment rationality heavily stressing the centrality of intellect and will must be balanced by a remembrance (anamnetic reason) which informs human kind with the suffering of others. . . . It is only with the landscape of memory and expectation that we have a grounded Hope between the two worlds."⁴

For those who cherish democratic ideals, hope is grounded in a belief in the solidarity and sovereignty of citizens. In the moment when despair most gravely threatened the United States, Abraham Lincoln called the American experiment the "last, best hope for humanity." Democratic hope envisions a political community where power, freedom, opportunity, and accountability reside not with elites or experts, but with everyday, ordinary people. It is anchored in the conviction that the political whole is more than the sum of the parts and must include all but be dominated by none.

For religious people, hope rests on the intuition that humans are not the only ones who care about the gap between the world as it is and the world as it should be. In the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic holy texts, the Creator of the universe repeatedly takes the side of the most vulnerable—the widow, the orphan, and the stranger—against political and economic arrangements that disregard and disrespect their legitimate interests. The spiritual intuition that we are not alone in our efforts to narrow the gap between the two worlds is captured in the famous admonition that we must pray as if everything depends on the Creator, and work as if everything depends on us.

The ground of democratic hope is a belief not in a sovereign state, but rather in a sovereign citizenry. Like religious hope, democratic hope empowers citizens to act for the good with confidence that they are part of a larger whole. As people of faith, human beings draw on one set of traditions in

which hope is a core virtue; as citizens we draw on another. Because both of these sources of hope are available, members of religious institutions can stand shoulder to shoulder with those of secular organizations like labor unions, business groups, and civic associations in seeking change in their communities. Citizens and people of faith (and most of you are some form of both) stand on common ground named hope.

In the early 1980s in East Brooklyn, church groups raised seed money and invited the IAF to conduct an organizing drive. The center of the large area chosen was devastated. Its empty, derelict buildings looked more like a bombed-out war zone than anything resembling a community. After some months of organizing work, the sponsoring committee began to grumble, saying "When are you going to do something about these terrible conditions?" In the next training session, the IAF organizer asked those present to put in writing what they would do with the abandoned, vacant land surrounding them if they controlled it. As he read the written responses (some in English, some in Spanish), he found that nearly two-thirds of the black and Latino renters who had responded had imagined homes on the land. Some had drawn modest buildings, some included a backyard barbecue; some had bedrooms for each family member. A seed was being planted, a new beginning was taking root. Two hundred vacant acres were sprouting three-bedroom homes in the imaginations of these people. The spirit of the prophet Nehemiah hovered over these deliberations, urging that Jerusalem's walls be rebuilt. As the ancient text from Proverbs reminds us, "Where there is no vision the people perish."

Under the auspices of East Brooklyn Congregations (EBC), today there are nearly 4,000 single-family Nehemiah homes forming a community of organized people in East Brooklyn. And the Nehemiah approach to creating affordable home ownership for everyone, which was born in the imaginations of working poor people in a church basement amid the desperation of East Brooklyn, has become a model in communities throughout the United States.

It is no coincidence that IAF organizations are often conceived and born in devastated urban locations and written-off rural areas. That's because the demanding work of organizing across the divides of race, religion, and political persuasion is usually initiated only when leaders on the scene reckon that all else has failed. When they realize that no one but them will see to it that their communities develop the political clout and money to change things,

the motivation to organize is born. Hope requires intentional, imaginative moves toward a better future, based on clear and conscious knowledge of what really happened in the past. IAF organizations are founded on and cultivate the virtue of hope, because their leaders and organizers understand that as people's hope for a meaningful life ebbs, the tide of nihilistic despair rises.

The fourth polarity in the overall relationship between the world as it is and the world as it should be, then, is the tension between our imagination and the inspiration of hope. As with each of the polarities, imagination and hope can flourish only when held in tight relationship to each other. When that tension is maintained, imagination inspires hope for a better world, and hope fires imagination to shape that world.

Being ↔ Becoming

The tension between the two worlds is a whole; you won't find any of the polarities floating around alone, any more than you can find economics without politics or vice versa. Now that I've broken the tensions between the two worlds down into its components for purposes of analysis, it's time to put the whole back together again. Understanding the overall in-betweenness of the two worlds involves recognizing that human beings live constantly in the dialectic between *being* and *becoming*. Being is a mystery that can only become and continue to become forever. Cardinal Newman said it this way: "To live is to change, and to live well is to have changed often."

The modern philosopher Alfred North Whitehead built his whole explanation of reality on the polarity of being and becoming. His vision of what it takes to be real comes down to two points. First, everything that is, is developing; nothing real is static. Second, development only occurs within the context of relationships. Relationships drive development through nurture and challenge. They are the source of our capacity to initiate, to create, to develop our political selves. The web of relationships is the womb of our development through life; without it we do not come into life nor do we grow and change.

Human beings live, move, and have our being in the tension between the two worlds, between being and becoming. What we might become always contends for our attention and energy with the maintenance of what we have already achieved. People dominated by a concern for being hold new possibilities hostage to past accomplishments. Their futures can only be more of the same. Those preoccupied with becoming, with constant novelty, are unable to draw on the meaning and value of past accomplishments to build new futures. Either of these approaches to life robs us of the creativity that is inherent in our political capacity, as it is in our sexuality. Becoming more

fully human requires that we hold what we've already done in proper tension with the new possibilities that imagination brings. The present is where we do that.

Each of the four tensions I described in this chapter is one face of the dialectic of being and becoming. How we deal with all of them determines our overall balance between past accomplishments and future possibilities, between the relentless *is* and the inspiring *ought*. In struggling with the tension between being and becoming, we develop, and we honor those who have gone before us, leaving behind the heritage of vision and values on which we stand, and those who will come after us, standing on our shoulders to create futures that we cannot imagine. The Russian philosopher Nikolay Berdyaev had it right: "The life of personality is not self-preservation of the individual, but self-development and self-determination." Whether we choose it or not, we are always becoming, and radicals realize that.

When the Two-World Tension Is Lost, or The War Over Values

Powerful forces constantly try to undermine the necessary creative tension between the two worlds. When they succeed, we lose our moral compass and are left to choose between two distorted ways to live, so-called realism on one side and so-called idealism on the other.

The Received Culture of Materialism: Domination of the As-Is

The tension between the two worlds may collapse into world-as-it-is values only. Then we get self-serving individualism as a way of life. People become consumers or self-actualizers who dismiss ethics or morality as pious nonsense of no relevance in the real world and operate on the amorality of selfishness and instant gratification.

Self-interest, the prime moving force of human behavior, is distorted into the belief that self-regard and being self-serving are bottom-line winners. The mantra of isolated self-interest is "maximize profits, minimize risk," which shrinks self-interest into selfishness. Real differences don't count, and neither do dreams. Ideals like "E pluribus unum" become empty decorations on monuments and money, as individuals go their separate ways, unable to recognize common interests with others. Public life disappears, as those who can do so retreat into the realm of gated communities, private schools, and independent taxing districts, where each island says to society, "I have no need of you," and "Not in my back yard." The good life portrayed and pushed by Madison Avenue advertising is a shopping mall on a cruise ship. Whoever dies owning the most stuff wins.

Power is understood as domination. Be number one. Use force and violence if necessary. People are objects to be used. Power trumps love. The hard work of resolving difficulties through political engagement is replaced by bribery, coercion, and violence. Instrumental rationality turns people into commodities and colonists, the Earth into raw material, and technology into an idol. Left to itself, the world as it is operates on crass, self-destructive power.

Instant change for its own sake is dangerous. Speed and chaos eliminate distinctions of past, present, and future. No boundaries are allowed in an ever-present here and now. Change is limited to the market-driven fads of entertainment, celebrities, and consumer goods. Reality becomes a kaleidoscope of continually shifting images, in a world where "image is everything." Time and space collapse into an endless here and now in which "anything goes."

Finally, when the tension between the two worlds collapses into materialism, imagination is sacrificed on the altar of high technology and virtual reality. Imagination is reduced to dramatized fantasies, memory to nostalgia for "the good old days" that never were, and hope to putting your money down on the spin of the wheel, the lottery or the online trade. When we forget our roots and traditions, we can't imagine a future worthy of our sacrifices, and are left with only the harried activity of here-and-now consumption.

The world I've just described isn't the real world; it's what we get when we disconnect from our moral center and avoid the tension of the two worlds.

Impotent Idealism: Domination of the Should-Be

A lot of churchy types emphasize the afterlife world. They don't keep the two worlds in balance—in between. They live an otherworldly idealism. These otherworldly types reject the world as it is as corrupt. They hold tight to ideologies, look for miracles, and withdraw from others, especially those different from themselves. Heaven's Gate, the cults of David Koresh and Jim Jones, and those responsible for 9/11 are extreme examples. Such groups long for a make-believe world beyond the present. This is the version of religion that led Marx to indict it as the "opium of the people." Otherworldly leaders make inspiring moral speeches but couldn't organize anything in the real world. The political version of this stance is the cynic who says, "What's the use of fighting city hall? It's all money anyway." "High-road" and puritanical moralities have no tolerance for the messy imperfections and compromises of the world as it is.

Self-sacrifice is distorted into folks lining up to become doormats, victims, or martyrs. People abandon their rightful claims to human dignity and full

participation. Rather than engage in inevitable conflicts and ambiguous battles with the powers that be, they prefer the self-proclaimed heroism of falling on their swords. The greatest ethical act, to give one's life for another, is distorted into a gesture of self-contempt. Self-giving becomes self-degradation.

Otherworldliness degenerates love into abstract, romantic mush. The inevitable tensions of any authentic relationship are replaced by false, one-sided concern. Trying to live only for others keeps us from loving well, just as trying to live only for self keeps us from "powering" well.

The search for unity or harmony works sometimes in music, but rarely in life. Peace and justice are goals, sometimes approached but rarely realized or sustained. Compromise is dismissed as betrayal of the purity of one's vision and values. Politeness masquerading as middle-class civility prevents us from confronting the rough edges of confrontation and conflict.

Finally, when the tension between the two worlds collapses into false, otherworldly idealism, hope degenerates into selective amnesia about the past and wishful thinking about the future. This world is despised as evil, sinful, and corrupt. Hope is reduced to the fantasy of a better world, somewhere, someday. Whatever awaits us on the other side of death, pie in the sky won't feed hungry children on Earth today, and heavenly mansions won't protect them from earthly cold tonight. Hope disconnected from the dangerous memories of past struggles for change and the realistic imagination of better futures is toothless and hollow.

Keeping the Two Worlds in Balance

People need guidelines for living in the tension of the two worlds. Parents, teachers, and religious leaders call those guidelines *morality*. Without moral guidance we are on the sea of life without boat or paddle, buffeted by the winds of individualistic consumerism and false idealism. The formation that young people traditionally receive in their families, congregations, and schools has stressed the world as it should be ("Treat others as you would like to be treated," "Do good," "Go along," "Obey authority," "Offer it up," "What's worth doing is worth doing right"). While truthful, such teachings convey a simplistic, overly idealized picture of life in the real world. The lessons conveyed by television, movies, and advertising teaches young people quite a different set of lessons ("If it feels good, do it," "Whoever dies with the most toys wins," "Greed is good," "Do it to them before they do it to you," "Image is everything"). The gospel according to Hollywood and Madison Avenue portrays the real world as a materialistic, pleasure-seeking, com-

petitive, and violent rat race, where the name of the game is looking out for number one. Young people whose moral values were formed in the idealism or the absence of family formation, congregations, and schools face a rude shock in their twenties when they discover how rarely the world as it should be is present in public life. Selfishness and materialism coupled with unilateral, coercive power rule the day. Peace and harmony, mercy and justice, are relegated to Sunday islands. The individualistic morality portrayed in entertainment and advertising seems closer to the way things really work.

The massive unilateral power of world capitalism is daily and relentlessly aimed at us and our children through entertainment and advertising, which have been deliberately made harder and harder to separate. Their goal is simple: to create the wants and needs in people that turn us into consumers, beings who cannot be happy without the latest, "hottest" goods and experiences. Consumerism as a way of life prevails when the tension between the two worlds collapses in the direction of the world as it is, and the evil genius of capitalism's marketing includes its ability to steal world-as-it-should-be symbols and use them to sell things in the marketplace. Advertising slogans like "be all that you can be," "reach out and touch someone," and "own a piece of the rock" appeal to important values and symbols from the world as it should be, in an effort to undermine that world by turning human beings into reactors, and wants into needs.

Churches and other should-be organizations usually attempt to counter the materialistic juggernaut by otherworldly means, encouraging their members to come to church, keep their minds on "higher things," and avoid the fray. Or they turn to the enemy's own methods and try to market community and commitment the way others sell perfume or insurance. Is it any wonder that cynicism about religious and democratic institutions abound?

The hard truth is that neither the responsible institutions nor television, movies, and advertising prepare young people for their imminent confrontation with a real world of ambiguity, conflict, mixed motivations, and social sin. Neither a cynical nor a simplistic vision of life can give young people an adequate moral compass for life in the real world. Instead of helping young people to live with integrity and flexibility inside the back-and-forth pull of the four polarities, adults who cannot model living in both worlds and the inevitable tension between them force young people to choose one world and dismiss the other.

Both individualism and idealism are rudderless because they cannot recognize the necessity and legitimacy of "low-road" or pragmatic morality, the demanding, ambiguous ethics of realistic trade-offs in the everyday world as it is. According to the paradigm of the two worlds, immorality is the failure

to connect what we must do to survive and thrive in the world as it is with being true to our vision of the world as it should be. Authentic morality or realistic idealism is holding the two worlds in creative tension.

Effective ideals don't move people to the sidelines of life. They are the stars that guide us, our moral compass in navigating the inevitably ambiguous world of power and self-interest. To be moral is to struggle in the arena of the world as it is while guided by the values of the world as it should be, not to go off shopping or trading online or to sit in pews on the sidelines of life saying, "Ain't things awful?" Operating in reality while ignoring values leads to cynicism, division, and coercion. Holding onto values disconnected from the real world robs morality of credibility and relevance. When the tension between the two worlds collapses in either direction, humanity's integrity collapses with it, because we were created to live in-between.

The great poet Goethe's final letter describes the successful life as a "judicious surrender to the natural rhythm of opposing tendencies." Surrendering to the rhythm of the inevitable tension between the two worlds is the true moral destiny of humanity. To do that requires that we develop the social knowledge, courage, and politicalness to live with others inside the polarities of self-interest and self-sacrifice, power and love, change and harmony, and imagination and hope. Taking responsibility for our destiny means deliberately embracing the fearsome, creative tension that comes when we choose to live resolutely in-between the world as it is and the world as it should be, refusing to be condemned either to materialism or false idealism as a way of life. Living well with the two-world tension is *the* root of true radicalism.