The Art of Peace

John F. Kennedy once insightfully observed, "I realize that the pursuit of peace is not as dramatic as the pursuit of war. But we have no more urgent task."

Albert Einstein was a theoretical physicist who felt a strong sense of social responsibility. He became one of the world's leading spokesmen for non-violent conflict resolution and pacifism, and was named Time Magazine's Person of the Century in 1999. He honorably engaged in a ceaseless struggle to achieve peace through international cooperation and world order. These are the hallmarks of a great man, and they are really good ideas!

One of Albert Einstein's greatest realizations: "Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding."

Humankind is certainly at a critical juncture in history where we are in great need of understanding. And we need this understanding in two large senses. First we need accurate, expansive and comprehensive understanding of issues and situations and conditions, so that we can come together to deal effectively with existential challenges that we face, including the need for peaceable coexistence, social justice, and the satisfaction of growing demands of almost 8 billion needy and greedy people on finite reserves of limited resources. And we need to deal not only with the urgent exigencies of the moment, but also with the problems resulting from the twin crises of a rapidly unfolding destabilization of the global climate and the related eternal extinction of many species of life.

And secondly, we need understanding in the sense of compassion and empathy for others, so that we can relate respectfully and engage in reasoned dialogue and civil debate, instead of being pitted at antagonistic loggerheads against each other by divide-to-conquer leaders. Such more enlightened understanding would help us create more peaceable, healthy, inclusive, flourishing and sustainable societies.

Dwight D. Eisenhower bemoaned the horrors of war in an address to the Canadian Club in Ottawa, Canada in January 1946, not long after the end of the Second World War, with these evocative words: "I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can; only as one who has seen its brutality, its futility, its stupidity."

Wars also have big impacts on the welfare of countries in the form of higher taxes, national debt burdens and casualties. So knowing the details of myriad calamities and adversities involved in wars, and their indiscriminate impacts on the lives of those it harms, we should be inspired to join others in working to prevent wars and create the just conditions of peace.

As the respectable Norman Cousins observed, "People who develop the habit of thinking of themselves as world citizens are fulfilling the first requirement of sanity in our time."

Peace movements have become widespread throughout the world since World War II, and their once somewhat radical beliefs are now a part of mainstream political discourse. For instance, on June 12, 1982, one million people demonstrated in Central Park in New York City against nuclear weapons and for an end to the Cold War arms race. It was the largest anti-nuclear protest and political demonstration in American history.

Wikipedia defines a peace movement as a social movement that seeks to achieve ideals such as the ending of a particular war (or wars) or minimizing inter-human violence in a particular place or situation. "They are often linked to the goal of achieving world peace. Some of the methods used to achieve these goals include advocacy of

pacifism, nonviolent resistance, diplomacy, boycotts, peace camps, ethical consumerism, supporting anti-war political candidates, supporting legislation to remove profits from government contracts to the military-industrial complex, banning guns, creating tools for open government and transparency, direct democracy, supporting whistleblowers who expose ware crimes or conspiracies to create wars, demonstrations, and political lobbying for peace."

Elements of the global peace movement seek to guarantee health security by ending war and ensure what they view as basic human rights, including the right of all people to have access to clean air, water, food, shelter and health care. Activists seek social justice in the form of equal protection and equal opportunity under the law for groups that had been disenfranchised.

More leaders should honorably support organizations that seek to merge all peace movements and green organizations, for though they may have diverse goals, they have the common ideal of peaceable and sustainable existence. "A concern of some peace activists is the challenge of attaining peace when those against peace often use violence as their means of communication and empowerment."

A global affiliation of activists and political interests viewed as having a shared purpose and constituting a single movement has been called "*the* peace movement," or an all-encompassing "anti-war movement". Seen from this perspective, they are often indistinguishable and constitute a loose, responsive, event-driven collaboration between groups motivated by humanism, environmentalism, veganism, anti-racism, feminism, decentralization, hospitality, ideology, theology and faith.

Here we are in the 22nd year of the 21st century, inextricably involved in the blessing and curse of the epically interesting times we are living in, and at this critical juncture, powerful forces are at play dividing us into vastly different and discordant echo chambers by those that push twisted spin and propaganda to foment resentments and stoke anger and generally target the worser devils of our human nature to the desperate detriment of our better angels.

The advent of social media has magnified people's negative emotions because it is insidiously designed to engage users attention and get them addicted to their platforms, thereby giving manipulative forces increased power to promote manipulative misinformation, hijack their emotions and exacerbate conflicts and political polarization, and they are sadly succeeding in intensifying people's antagonisms, hostilities, prejudices, stresses and anxieties -- and even hate toward others.

Obstacles to Accurate Understanding

In the U.S., healthy understanding is being undermined by politicians using wedge issues and divisive identity politics to polarize the electorate for the narrow purpose of gaining and maintaining power. There is too much disingenuous spin and propaganda from both the right and the left, even though a healthy democracy depends on the informed consent of the governed. Social media platforms tend to encourage people to align their beliefs in self-selected echo chambers, and promote much misinformation and false conspiracies. This is causing countless millions of people to feel riled up and become addicted to being antagonistic toward others.

In authoritarian governments, on the other hand, alternate points of view are often suppressed. Vladimir Putin's regime in Russia, for example, has been known for its propaganda and censorship efforts, and since the start of the war against Ukraine, the situation has worsened dramatically. "Escalating media shutdowns -- imposed by the Russian government and the companies themselves because of the increased sanctions -- have affected news outlets, social media and streaming services."

During Russia's invasion of Ukraine and terrible attacks on military targets and civilians, Russia has blocked Facebook and limited Twitter. By blocking these online social media platforms, Putin is shutting down a last vestige of Russia's independent media, and has made it a crime to refer to the fighting in Ukraine as a war. So the Russian people are unable to get independent or international news about Russian war crimes in Ukraine.

This increasingly harsh Internet censorship and repression of dissent is similar to China's Great Firewall that is used to control its people. "China's information dark age could be Russia's future." … "you can't speak the truth, and you aren't allowed to see the truth."

Arguably, the worst of this censorship hits the press. There have been multiple new laws implemented to prevent

the media from publishing anything divergent from the official "party line" of Putin's government.

There is a big risk in this because there is an "inverse relationship between power and accurate feedback", as Professor Robert Reich explained in *Why Trump, Putin, Xi and other dictators make disastrous decisions*. "Here's the paradox: The higher you rise in any hierarchy, your decisions are likely to have larger and larger consequences. Yet the higher you rise, the harder it is to get *accurate* feedback about your decisions."

Robert Reich elaborates:

"I've worked with several presidents. All have made big blunders. I've also known and written about CEOs of big corporations who have made terrible mistakes. *In every case, they had flawed systems for getting useful, accurate, and reliable feedback.*

Donald Trump (whom I didn't work with but watched his every move) had no reliable feedback. Why? Because he surrounded himself with toadies and sycophants who didn't dare tell him the truth. He demanded that everyone around him confirm his preferred self-image of invincibility. His White House was filled with fawning lackeys (he fired anyone who didn't grovel). He refused to hear bad news. He rejected the validity of negative media coverage.

As a result, Trump made among the dumbest decisions of any American president in history -- suppressing evidence of a potential crime, asking a foreign power for help with his reelection, inciting an attack on the Capitol. Some might say that all this was inevitable; it was built into his character. But his *key* character flaw was his unwillingness to hear anything negative. None of his horrific acts was necessary. Trump could have accomplished any number of goals far more easily had he not kept digging himself into ever-deeper holes. He was his own worst enemy.

Vladimir Putin is in a similar position. He has isolated himself and banned dissenting voices. He has placed obedient lapdogs even in the Fifth Service, which is supposed to provide him intelligence. So, like Trump, Putin has no reality check. According to a new report by a respected independent reporter with sources inside the Kremlin, the Fifth Service was 'afraid of angering' Putin, so 'simply told him what he wanted to hear.'

As a result, Putin's attack on Ukraine has backfired terribly — on *him*. He badly overestimated the Russian military and underestimated Ukraine's capacity to resist. Instead of weakening NATO, his attack has strengthened it. And now that the world's democracies have cut off Russia's access to the world banking system, Russia's foreign exchange reserves have become nearly worthless.

Dictators like Putin are particularly vulnerable to inaccurate feedback. Instead of independent truth-tellers, they're often surrounded by truth-*deniers*. Rather than experts and investigative journalists, their world is filled with pseudo-scientists and propaganda. In place of a free press, they have agitprop and disinformation.

Or look at China's Xi Jinping. Why would he decide to enter into a 'no limits' partnership with Moscow on the eve of Putin's disastrous military campaign? Talk about blunders. Xi's alliance with Russia has undermined China's reputation and aggravated concerns among its neighbors about China's global ambitions. It's already prompted Taiwan to strengthen its defenses and pushed other regional powers such as Australia and Japan to declare their own interests in Taiwan's security.

Trump, Putin, Xi — these men aren't stupid. What's stupid is their *systems for making decisions*. They don't include naysayers. They have no way of eliciting, recognizing, or assessing useful criticism. All are trapped in halls of mirrors that reflect back at them what they want to see and hear.

The inverse relation between how high people rise in a hierarchy and the accuracy of the feedback they receive can be overcome if a leader aggressively seeks out dissenting views. But it's almost impossible to find dissenting views in a totalitarian system where dissent is often punished. One of the great virtues of a democracy is its multiple feedback loops -- its many channels for expressing alternative viewpoints and voicing uncomfortable truths. After all, American democracy stopped Trump from doing even more damage than he did.

Yet when people like Trump, Putin, and Xi make terrible decisions, the world suffers. Worse: Putin and Xi have the power to blow up the world."

A Great Story

Reflect on the events that took place 74 years ago in the Central American country of Costa Rica. A group of leaders in Costa Rica had just lost a national election in early 1948, and decided to seize power in a legislative coup. This led to a Costa Rican Civil War that lasted for 44 days, and killed about 2,000 people.

The Costa Rican coffee rancher, politician, agitator and rebel commander Jose Figueres then came to power. He was a "militant socialist" who had visionary views. Despite living in a dangerous region among many countries in Latin America that were ruled by authoritarian dictators, Figueres chose to abolish the country's army. As a result of this courageous decision to disband the army and rely instead on a national police force and international allies committed to rules of law, Costa Rica has been able to save a lot of money otherwise to be spent on the military, and propitiously has used it to fund good public education and excellent healthcare and other social goods and valuable priorities.

Seen from the perspective of hindsight over the past seven decades, one of the greatest aspects of the admirable legacy left by Jose Figueres was his steadfast dedication to democracy and the greater good. Costa Rica today stands apart from the other nations of Central America for its prosperity, safety and peacefulness, and Figueres is arguably more responsible for this than any other single political figure. In particular, Figueres is fondly remembered by many Costa Ricans as the architect of a general prosperity for many years.

Wars are much worse than peace, which can best be achieved through collaborative dispute resolution. Wars generally cause more destruction and economic and social costs than producing desirable advantages. Make no mistake about it: wars are like revolutions, generally unnecessarily harmful to the common good.

Words of war, it should be noted, have all-too-often throughout history become acts of war, so perhaps clearly articulated words of peace may contribute to our societies becoming more peaceful. Let's give peace a chance, as John Lennon lyrically encouraged us to do, and take committed steps to promote peace more wholeheartedly!

"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."

--- Anne Frank

How best to defend a democracy? Costa Rica decided to get rid of its army because the concentration of power in the military can be a threat to peace and security, especially in small countries where military forces all-too-often introduce heightened risks of a military coup and overthrow of a democratically elected civilian government.

To repeat a relevant riff contained in *A Feminine Vision*: "We should strive to resolve conflicts peaceably by talking to each other in respectful dialogue, and through non-violent conflict resolution, diplomacy, negotiation, and seeking win-win solutions and fair compromises. We should respect rules of law, especially international laws that represent the common good for the whole." … "Remember a lesson taught to us by Costa Rica's experiment in demilitarization: a high degree of social cohesion is fostered by peace and generous investments in education and health. This is one reason why Costa Rica is Number One on the Happy Planet Index, and it is also revealingly much higher on the Global Peace Index than the USA (we are pathetically 128th out of 163 countries evaluated).

It is good to be governed by fair-mindedness in our economic and political systems, and by rules of law enacted by reasonable authorities, and by a respected Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Demilitarization in all the countries of Central America would have made the region vastly better off that it is today, and there would not have been such a desperate need for immigrants to seek better lives in Costa Rica.

Support for dictators is treachery against the people of the country being ruthlessly ruled, so it is a strategy based on depriving people of their liberties, not standing up for them. The United States should return to its pre-Trump ideals and stand up for human rights and the rights of working people and women.

Note that, although it is true that Jose Figueres started a Civil War, he did so at least in part to redress crooked elections. Conflict was precipitated by the vote of a Costa Rican Legislature that was dominated by pro-government representatives, and it was done to annul the results of presidential elections held in February 1948. The incumbent party, loathe to give up power and its perks, fraudulently alleged that the triumph of opposition candidate Otilio Ulate Blanco had been achieved by fraud. Figueres led a rebel army against the power abusers,

and quickly defeated them and their allies in the Costa Rican communist party.

Figueres was a true believer in the power of the electoral process, and once he was in power, he refused to act like some of his predecessors by committing election fraud to stay there. He even invited United Nations observers to help with the 1958 election in which his candidate lost to the opposition. His words following the election speak volumes about his philosophy: "I consider our defeat as a contribution, in a way, to democracy in Latin America. It is not customary for a party in power to lose an election", and cede power and control.

Figueres served as President of Costa Rica on three occasions between 1948 and 1974, and after he was re-elected for his third term, he continued to champion democracy and make friends internationally — for instance, although he maintained good relations with the USA, he also found a way to sell Costa Rican coffee in the USSR. He is considered one of the most important architects of modern Costa Rica.

When not serving as President, Figueres remained active in politics. He had great international prestige and was invited to speak in the USA in 1958 after US Vice President Richard Nixon had been spat upon during a visit to Latin America. Figueres famously explained the incident, saying a thing often quoted since then: "the people cannot spit at a foreign policy."

<u>Demagogues and Rogues</u>

Pushers of arms sales are often responsible for destabilizing countries and entire regions by facilitating the rise to power of strong men and autocrats who impose harshly repressive rule and censorship of free expression and dissent on their people. When leaders activate people's fears and frighten them about immigrants or drugs or socialism, or whatever, the people reveal a desire to want to be safe from the threat, and are willing to give up some freedoms to feel safer. This usually doesn't increase their real safety and security -- but it does tend to make people less free.

Molly Ivins: "The impulse to make ourselves safer by making ourselves less free is an old one … When we are badly frightened, we think we can make ourselves safer by sacrificing some of our liberties. We did it during the Joseph McCarthy era (in the 1950s) out of fear of communism. Less liberty is regularly proposed as a solution to crime, to pornography, to illegal immigration, to abortion, to all kinds of threats."

Some say we need to cultivate greater compassion for the human condition, and the experience of others in it. Why not?!

Evocative lyrics of the 1966 song *For What It's Worth* by Buffalo Springfield,
  There's battle lines being drawn
  Nobody's right if everybody's wrong
  Young people speaking their minds
  Are getting so much resistance from behind
  It's time we stop
  Hey, what's that sound?
  Everybody look - what's going down …
  What a field day for the heat
  A thousand people in the street
  Singing songs and carrying signs
  Mostly saying, "hooray for our side"
  It's time we stop
  Hey, what's that sound?
  Everybody look - what's going down ...
  Paranoia strikes deep
  Into your life it will creep
  It starts when you're always afraid
  Step out the line, the men come and take you away …

<u>Dateline October 2019</u>

The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia in October 2019 "for his efforts to achieve peace and international cooperation, and in particular for his decisive initiative to resolve an intense border conflict with neighboring Eritrea." Yay! for peaceful coexistence, and for cooperative attempts to resolve conflicts!

Ironically, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed made a war-like comment soon after he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He said his country could get millions of soldiers ready if there is a need to go to war with Egypt, due to threats by Egypt over a mega-dam being built in Ethiopia on the Blue Nile River. He sensibly added that only negotiation can resolve a deadlock. This type of conflict over water supply issues will definitely be a contentious issue in many countries around the globe in coming years due to water shortages, population growth and a destabilized climate that is making drought worse in many regions.

In fact, a number of agencies of the United Nations reported in a 2015 World Water Development Report titled *Water for a Sustainable World* that there will be a shortfall of 40% in fresh water supplies worldwide by the year 2030. By then, the number of people without access to adequate supplies of fresh water is projected to more than triple from today to over 3 billion people. Woe! The report also indicated that there will be an increase of more than 50% in global water demand by 2050, and a rapid depletion of groundwater in many areas is increasing the risks of widespread drinking water shortages and catastrophic crop failures, as well as an intensification of conflicts over access to fresh water and its usages.

"Water is our most precious resource, a 'blue gold' to which more than 2 billion people do not have direct access. It not only is essential to survival, but also plays a sanitary, social and cultural role at the heart of human societies."

--- UN World Water Development Report 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating effects, and reminded us of the importance of having access to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities. This health calamity has highlighted the fact that far too many people are still without these things.

Water is also at the heart of adaptation to climate change, serving as the crucial link between the climate system, human society and the environment. Without proper water governance, there is likely to be increased competition for water between sectors and an escalation of water crises of various kinds, triggering emergencies in a range of water-dependent sectors.

"Water is the primary medium through which we will feel the effects of climate change. Water availability is becoming less predictable in many places, and increased incidences of flooding threaten to destroy water points and sanitation facilities and contaminate water sources."

According to the UN Water Development Report 2020, "Around 74% of all natural disasters between 2001 and 2018 were water-related and during the past 20 years, the total number of deaths caused only by floods and droughts exceeded 166,000, while floods and droughts affected over three billion people, and caused total economic damage of almost US$700 billion." And 700 million people worldwide could be displaced by intense water scarcity by 2030, according to the Global Water Institute.

Higher temperatures and more extreme and less predictable weather conditions are projected to affect availability and distribution of rainfall, snowmelt, river flows and groundwater, and further deteriorate water quality. Low-income communities, who are already the most vulnerable to any threats to water supply are likely to be worst affected.

Not only will more floods and severe droughts result from a warming climate, but changes in water availability will also impact health and food security, and have already proven to trigger political instability and tragic episodes of refugees fleeing.

"The physical world of water is closely bound up with the socio-political world, with water often a key factor in managing risks such as famine, epidemics, inequalities and political instability."

Since 1900, more than 11 million people have died as a consequence of drought and more than 2 billion have been affected by drought, more than any other physical hazard. (FAO 2013). In some regions, droughts are

exacerbating water scarcity and thereby negatively impacting people's health and productivity. In the early to mid-2010s, 1.9 billion people lived in potential severely water-scarce areas. By 2050, this number will increase to an estimated 2.7 to 3.2 billion people. "Ensuring that everyone has access to sustainable water and sanitation services is a critical climate change mitigation strategy for the years ahead."

On the other hand, by 2050, rising populations in flood prone lands, along with climate change impacts, deforestation, loss of wetlands and rising sea levels are expected to increase the number of people vulnerable to flood disaster to something like 2 billion. (UNESCO, 2012)

"Water is at the core of sustainable development and is critical for socio-economic development, healthy ecosystems and for human survival itself. It is vital for reducing the global burden of disease and improving the health, welfare and productivity of populations."

Lessons from the U.S. War in Afghanistan

Consider the involvement of the United States in the war in Afghanistan, the longest war in U.S. history. Launched by an invasion in October 2001, less than one month after the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. by a largely Saudi Arabian group of terrorists, the huge cost in dollars spent was tragically exacerbated by the terrible toll of more than 2,400 U.S. troops being killed and more than 20,000 injured over the 20 years the war lasted. And more than 100,000 Afghans, including soldiers, militants and civilians, were killed in this internecine conflict.

U.S. officials have repeatedly and knowingly lied to the American people, as was revealed back during the Vietnam War by the Pentagon Papers scandal. Our leaders frequently told Big Lies about how the war in Afghanistan was going, and whether the war could be won, and made many positive pronouncements about the winnability of the war that they knew to be wrong.   This information has been revealed by interviews conducted by the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction between 2014 and 2018 for a "Lessons Learned" project. When we fail to learn lessons, we are much more likely to be deplorably doomed to repeat them.

These interviews reveal that "a toxic mix of U.S. government policies, under the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, directly contributed to Afghanistan's descent into one of the world's most corrupt countries." … "U.S. leaders have claimed publicly that they had no tolerance for corruption in Afghanistan, but that was one of several topics related to the war effort on which they intentionally and systematically misled the public", according to a trove of confidential government interviews obtained by The Washington Post.

"American representatives often looked the other way at egregious and brazen graft, so long as the offenders were considered allies. Congress appropriated vast sums of money, which were handed out with little oversight or record keeping. The ensuing greed and corruption undermined the legitimacy of the nascent Afghani government, and helped make the ground more fertile for the Taliban's resurgence."

"The basic assumption was that corruption is an Afghan problem and we are the solution. But there is one indispensable ingredient for corruption — money — and we were the ones who had the money," said Barnett Rubin, a former senior State Department adviser and a New York University professor.

This adage is as true in Afghanistan as America: "FOLLOW THE MONEY." Gert Berthold, a forensic accountant who served on a military task force in Afghanistan from 2010 to 2012, analyzed 3,000 Defense Department contracts worth $106 billion. He said they calculated that about 40 percent of the money ended up in the pockets of insurgents, criminal syndicates or corrupt Afghan officials. Berthold said few U.S. officials wanted to hear about the evidence they uncovered: 'No one wanted accountability,' he said. 'If you're going to do anti-corruption, someone has got to own it. From what I've seen, no one is willing to own it.'

Christopher Kolenda, a retired Army colonel who deployed to Afghanistan several times and advised three U.S. generals in charge of the war, said the Afghan government led by Hamid Karzai had "self-organized into a kleptocracy" by 2006. "I like to use a cancer analogy," the colonel told his government interviewers. "Petty corruption is like skin cancer; there are ways to deal with it and you'll probably be just fine. Corruption within the ministries, higher level, is like colon cancer; it's worse, but if you catch it in time, you're probably ok. Kleptocracy, however, is like brain cancer; it's fatal."

The interviews in the Lessons Learned project were revealed so that the American people could see for themselves

what had gone on in Afghanistan. They were disclosed pursuant to an investigation by the Washington Post, which fought a legal battle for three years for this information under the Freedom of Information Act. More than 400 people who played a direct role in the war in Afghanistan, from generals to diplomats to aid workers, were questioned about what went wrong.

War in World Literature

Think about a few of the most famous books about war and peace. *The Art of War* is an ancient Chinese military treatise attributed to Sun Tzu, a high-ranking military general and strategist. The text of *The Art of War* is composed of 13 chapters, each of which is devoted to one aspect of warfare. The treatise, published more than 2,250 years ago, is commonly considered one of the definitive works on military strategy and tactics. Thousands of books about war have been written since *The Art of War* was published, and much could no doubt be learned by a close study of a sample of some of the best of them.

One of Sun Tzu's most famous quotes in *The Art of War* is "All warfare is based on deception." While there are many compelling instances in which this is true in military strategy, it is also generally true that leadership by deception isn't leadership. "It's fraud."

The novel *War and Peace* was published by Leo Tolstoy in 1869, and it is regarded as one of the most important works in world literature. Wikipedia notes that Tolstoy himself, "somewhat enigmatically, said of *War and Peace* that it was 'not a novel, even less is it a poem, and still less a historical chronicle'. Large sections of the work, especially in the later chapters, are philosophical discussions rather than narrative." Wikipedia further informs: "*War and Peace* delineates in graphic detail the events surrounding a French invasion of Russia, and the impact of the Napoleonic era on Tsarist society, as seen through the eyes of five Russian aristocratic families."

I haven't read these books. *War and Peace* alone is one of the longest novels every written. Wondering about the themes explored and the insights conveyed in *War and Peace*, I referred to *SparkNotes*, to see what the arcane hoopla is all about. SparkNotes laudably provides valuable General Information about many books, along with good summaries of their Context, Plot Overview, Character List, Analysis of Major Characters, and main Themes, Motif & Symbols. A lifetime could be spent exploring important books in world literature, and curiosity and interest could be stimulated with a modicum of greater familiarity.

Tolstoy was born into a well-known family of old Russian nobility. *SparkNotes* elaborates concerning Tolstoy: "His contact with his own peasants led to a heightened appreciation of their morality, camaraderie and enjoyment of life, as evidenced in his celebration of Platon Karataev in *War and Peace*. Indeed, Tolstoy became quite critical of the superficiality of upper class Russians, as we can sense in his portraits of the Kuragin family in *War and Peace*. Ultimately, Tolstoy developed a desire to seek a kind of spiritual regeneration by renouncing his family's possessions, much to the dismay of his long-suffering wife." One can just imagine!

Leo Tolstoy grew from being a somewhat "dissolute and privileged society author to the non-violent and spiritual anarchist of his latter days". The salient influences of his experiences in the army, and of travels to Europe, surely swayed his understanding. He was disillusioned with abuses of power by the Russian government, and he finally reached a point where he declared: "The truth is that the State is a conspiracy designed not only to exploit, but above all to corrupt its citizens ... Henceforth, I shall never serve any government anywhere."

Tolstoy was struck by descriptions of ascetic renunciation as being a path to holiness in religions that include Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism. After reading passages such as the following, which abound in the ethical works of German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, the Russian nobleman chose poverty and formal denial of the will: "But this very necessity of involuntary suffering (by poor people) for eternal salvation is also expressed by that utterance of the Savior (Matthew 19:24): 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.' Therefore those who were greatly in earnest about their eternal salvation, chose voluntary poverty when fate had denied this to them and they had been born into wealth. Thus Buddha was born a prince, but voluntarily took to the mendicant's staff; and Francis of Assisi, the founder of the mendicant orders who, as a youngster at a ball where the daughters of all the notabilities were sitting together, was asked: 'Now Francis, will you not soon make your choice from these beauties?' and who replied: 'I have made a far more beautiful choice!' Yes? 'Whom?' Well, 'La povertà (poverty)': whereupon he abandoned every thing

shortly afterwards and wandered through the land as a mendicant."

These words are scarcely comprehensible to us in our busy, variety loving, mindlessly materialistic and pleasure-seeking 21st century America. Tolstoy, interestingly, was a contemporary of Mark Twain's; he was born seven years before him, and he died in 1910, the same year as Mark Twain. Though the two writers never met, they both share a common legacy of having had a "gargantuan influence" on world literature.

An Interlude of Machiavellian Introspection

In 1532, the famous book *The Prince* appeared in print. Written by Niccolo Machiavelli, this was one of the first works of modern political philosophy. Its general theme was that the aims of "princes" (rulers) include things like glory and political survival, so it is easy to see how they justify the use of immoral means to achieve those overarching ends -- no matter how self-serving and hubris-engorged they may be.

Niccolo Machiavelli was born in 1469 in Florence, Italy. He passed his childhood peacefully, receiving a humanistic education that was customary for young men of the Renaissance middle class. He also spent two years studying business mathematics, then worked for the next seven years in Rome for a Florentine banker. After returning to Florence in 1494, he witnessed the expulsion of the Medici family, the wealthy and highly influential "oligarchic despots" who had ruled Florence for many decades, and the rise of Girolamo Savanorola, a Dominican religious zealot who took control of the region shortly thereafter.

Italy at that time became the scene of intense political strife. The city-states of Florence, Milan, Venice and Naples fought for control of Italy, and so did the Vatican and France and Spain and the Holy Roman Empire. Each of these powers attempted to pursue a strategy of playing the other powers off against one other, and they also engaged in dishonorable practices like blackmail and violence. The same year that Machiavelli returned to Florence, Charles VIII of France invaded Italy. This was the first of several French invasions that would occur during Machiavelli's lifetime. These events influenced Machiavelli's attitudes toward government, and they formed the backdrop for his later impassioned pleas for Italian unity.

Machiavelli wanted to gain political power, so one of his goals in writing *The Prince* was to win the favor of Lorenzo de Medici, who was governor of Florence at the time and the person to whom he dedicated the book. Machiavelli is said to have hoped to land an advisory position within the Florentine government.

The most revolutionary aspect of *The Prince* is its divorce of politics and ethics. Classical political theory had traditionally linked political law with a higher moral law. In contrast, Machiavelli argued that political action must always be considered in light of its practical consequences, rather than some lofty ideal. It is a practical and amoral guide for a ruler, rather than an abstract treatise of principled philosophy.

Machiavelli's book also distinguishes itself on the subject of free will. Medieval and Renaissance thinkers often looked to religion or ancient authors for explanations of plagues, famines, invasions and other calamities; they considered the prevention of such disasters to be beyond the scope of human power. Machiavelli argues in *The Prince* that people have the ability to shield themselves against misfortune, and he expresses an extraordinary confidence in the power of human self-determination. He also affirms his belief in free will as opposed to a predetermined divine destiny.

SparkNotes notes that people admire generosity, courage, honor and piety in others, but generally do not emulate these virtues themselves. "Ambition lies among those who have achieved some power, but most common people are satisfied with the way things are, and therefore do not yearn to improve on the status quo." Improve on it?! Or, as with the unethically over-ambitious, to subordinate the common good to their selfish advantages.

Knowing human nature, we see that people generally remain adequately content and happy so long as they do not suffer too much injustice or hardship or oppression. Given this fact, ruling elites are wise not to let hardships become too extreme, or oppression too blatant, if they want to protect their hopes and expectations for indefinitely perpetuating their privileged status.

Machiavelli's ideas have been oversimplified and vilified since they were first published. His political thought is usually unfairly defined in terms of *The Prince*. The adjective "Machiavellian" is used to mean manipulative, deceptive and ruthless. But Machiavelli's *Discourses*, a work considerably longer and more developed than *The*

Prince, propounds republican themes of civic virtue, patriotism and open political participation.

Machiavelli also wrote a book titled *The Art of War.* It consists of a preface and seven chapters that take the form of a series of dialogues taking place in gardens built in the 1490s for Florentine aristocrats and humanists as a place to engage in philosophic and political discussions. Let's imagine ourselves visiting these gardens, together, for similar purposes. Let's talk.

Machiavelli developed the philosophy of "limited warfare", asserting that when diplomacy fails, war is an extension of politics. In *The Art of War*, he emphasized the need to have a state militia, and promoted the concept of a valid need for an armed citizenry. He believed that all society, religion, science and art rested on security provided by the military. In *The Prince,* he declared that "a prince should have no other object, no any other thought, nor take anything as his art but that of war and its orders and discipline; for that is the only art which is of concern to one who commands." Civilization has come a long ways since those days; or has it?

My own thinking about war and peace are exhaustively expressed in *Reflections on War – and Peace.* The ideas in all these Earth Manifesto books and essays point the way for expanded reflections on the Art of Peace. This new art should be developed and honed and honored and pursued with much greater conviction and commitment. Powerful incentives and effective disincentives should be established to make peace much more profitable, and to make war a significantly less desirable boon to anyone, especially including those who profit outlandishly from wars.

Personal Reflections

The great American journalist and TV anchor Charles Kuralt once said, "The everyday kindness of the back roads more than makes up for the agony of the headlines." Today's headlines, filled with violent conflicts, scandal, political corruption and public graft make one mutter, "May we live in interesting times, indeed!"

A tsunami of distractions is being broadcast on Fox News and Twitter to hide or cover up an iceberg's depth of worse things, like corrupt dealings to allow fossil fuel companies to maximize their profits by imposing costs on the public, and the sacrifice of healthy ecosystems and clean water and clean air and a stable climate, and amped up assaults on the biological diversity of life on Earth.

After I graduated from college and worked for a year, I spent 15 months vagabonding around Europe and the Near East and North Africa, enjoying many memorable experiences and meeting some generous and kind-hearted people -- all on the cheap, on a budget of about $3,000. When I returned home, I felt more culture shock in America than I had experienced in any foreign culture, and I set about trying to figure out what to do with my life. I ended up working at several temporary jobs, one of which gave me an office for a year where I struggled to help straighten out a colossal corporate accounting mess.

I still have a faded wall hanging that I made and put up in that office. In bold dark blue calligraphy, the words of Tom Robbins from *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* were recorded, and are etched in my memory: "Plans are one thing and fate another. When they coincide, success results. Yet success mustn't be considered the absolute. It is questionable, for that matter, whether success is an adequate response to life. Success can eliminate as many options as failure." Hmmmm.

A Telling Tale

I have an old friend named Sam who once joined me on a vividly memorable excursion to the Eel River in Northern California more than forty years ago. One day along this beautiful stream, in the vicinity of some towering and hauntingly beautiful groves of the tallest living trees (*Sequoia sempervirens*, i.e. coastal redwoods), we were enjoying a lovely afternoon along the river, as high as kites, and we began skipping stones across the river. I would find a nice smooth round flat rock and let it fly, generally hoping to have it skip a dozen times before sinking into the water or striking the opposite banks of the small river, across the riffled pool where we found ourselves. Sam had a different approach; he would hunt around gathering up a whole stash of the best-looking river-smoothed stones, saving them up until he had a dozen, and then he would announce the launch of a fusillade, and he would skip one after another.

The success of any given toss is strongly correlated to the quality of a stone's shape, as well as the skill of the throw, yet there were always times when a perfect stone thrown just right would catch a riffle in the river and

plummet straight to the bottom. My friend had enlisted in the military for a brief spell back in the 1970s before the harshness of the discipline compelled him to leave a Texas Boot Camp for a decades-long stint in the Coast Guard Reserves. So when he declared, "That rock had an attitude problem!", I suspected that the observation had a deeper subtext of chagrin-engendering antecedents.

All these years later, in a quite curios contrapuntal echo across more than four decades, I am the one today who has saved up these written salvos rather than being the type who blogs them out or tweets them spontaneously on Twitter all the time, and they are on the cusp of a launch of themes so broad in scope and so cacophonously potentially harmonious that I have no clue how the resulting splash will really play out. Like Ishmael undertaking a journey that eventually led him to a Great White Whale, I proceed.

"God willing", and with the passive collaboration of the first million readers, this broad fusillade could continue skipping across the surface of human consciousness indefinitely into the future, and "make all the difference", like a road taken by the poet Robert Frost. Visualize the poet, and imagine his conundrum when presented with choices of many possibilities that diverge before us in the undergrowth of our lives. Who's to say?

Ishmael is the narrator and one of the main characters in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. The name Ishmael sets the stage for a Biblical allegory, because in Genesis, the biblical Abraham's first son Ishmael was banished to wander in the desert wilderness, while in *Moby Dick,* Melville's Ishmael wanders upon the desolate sea. Both Ishmaels experience a miraculous rescue, the first from thirst, and the other as the only crewmember to survive after the great white whale rammed the whaling vessel *Pequod,* causing an epic whirling vortex to drag the rest of the whaling boats and crew down with it.

Ishmael famously postulated that mankind lives out a "story", which each person knows by the time they are "six or seven," a story that covers all areas of life including race, politics and nationality. The story is so ingrained in culture that it operates like background noise and nobody actually hears it, even though it plays continuously. Ishmael tried to learn to discern this voice of "Mother Culture", and he would hum the story to himself deep in the recesses of his mind, always remaining conscious of it, and was thereby alienated from the people around him to a certain degree. Ishmael established a vocabulary that had to be used in order to avoid abstraction, so he suggested that the world's "civilized" people be called the "Takers," and the "primitive" people be called the "Leavers". No matter where they live, Takers are united by their desire for civilization, and their embrace of it, while Leavers are united in their eschewal of civilization, as if wanting to absquatulate.

Ishmael defines a "story" as a scenario that connects and explains the relationship between mankind and the world and the gods. People "enact" a story by living so as to make it a reality. "Culture" involves a people enacting a particular story. Ishmael introduces this idea of a living mythology in which a civilization enacts the story it believes. Ishmael asserts that Takers regard the Earth as a life support system, and since they consider themselves to be the central entity in the Universe, they expect it to be subservient to them. The creation myth of Mother Culture assumes that the gods created planet Earth solely to engender and support mankind. Ishmael suggests the dangerous extension of this premise: man is entitled to treat the Earth however he wants. This story essentially allows human beings to blame everything on the gods, since it was they who gave man dominance, and if the Earth is being destroyed, that must be what the gods intended.

A curious aspect of the overarching mythologies by which human beings tend to see themselves is that, despite having existed for a relatively short amount of time, humans assume we are the very pinnacle of life. In doing so, we ignore the certainty that a million years from now, evolutionary change will have altered that perspective just as it has radically changed the perspective of a dinosaur 75 million years ago that might have regarded itself, if consciously aware, as being the pinnacle of creation at that stage in the evolution of life on Earth. We shall see.

Thinking and Writing Big Picture Thoughts

Pliny the Elder was a Roman writer and natural philosopher (AD 23 – AD 79), as well as a naval and army commander of the early Roman Empire, and a personal friend of the emperor Vespasian. He died while attempting to rescue a friend and his family by ship from the violent eruption of Mt. Vesuvius on August 25, in the year 79 CE. "Fortune favors the brave," he declared as he approached the unfolding disaster on the Italian coast in a Roman fleet of galleys, where fortune dealt him a cruel blow and he died of asphyxiation or a stroke or heart attack.

His nephew Pliny the Younger sent memorable words about his uncle to the historian Tacitus: "For my part I deem those blessed to whom, by favour of the gods, it has been granted either to do what is worth writing of, or to write what is worth reading; above measure blessed those on whom both gifts have been conferred. In the latter number will be my uncle, by virtue of his own and of your compositions."

Truly, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
First published May 2015, latest revision April 1, 2022