**KEY NOTES FROM**

Frances, Allen, M.D. (2017). *Twilight of American sanity: A psychiatrist analyzes the age of Trump*. New York: HarperCollins. 326 p.

*Allen Frances is professor emeritus and former chair of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science at Duke University School of Medicine. Dr. Frances was the chairman of the DSM-IV Task Force and a member of the leadership group for DSM-III and DSM-III-R. He is the author of the award-winning international bestseller* Saving Normal *and the reference work* Essentials of Psychiatric Diagnosis.

*(jacket blurb)* Allen Frances, MD—one of the foremost experts on psychiatric diagnosis and past leader of the *American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* ("the bible of psychiatry")—draws upon his vast experience to deliver an unprecedented critique of modern American society's collective slide away from sanity and offers an urgently needed prescription for restoring our collective health and protecting our fragile democracy. More than three years in the making, *Twilight of American Sanity* authoritatively situates the rise of Donald Trump within the context of a nation increasingly gripped by delusion and blind to challenges posed by inequality, technological displacement, global warming, resource degradation, and overpopulation—threats that could doom future generations. "If we want to get sane," Frances observes, "we must first gain insight about ourselves."

 Widely cited in recent months as the man who wrote the diagnostic criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder, Frances has been at the center of the debate surrounding President Trump's mental state—quoted in Evan Osnos's May 2017 New Yorker article ("How Trump Could Get Fired") and publishing a much-shared opinion letter in the New York Times. While Frances concludes the president is sane—and all the more dangerous as a result—he believes Trump's election poses graver questions about the nation's collective health. "Blaming Trump for all our troubles," Frances writes, "misses the deeper, underlying societal sickness that made possible his unlikely ascent."

 Twilight of American Sanity is an essential work for understanding our national crisis—and the way forward.

**Prologue - Trump Isn’t Crazy, We Are**

(p.3) Numerous patriotically worded petitions were initiated. A typical one, garnering more than fifty thousand signatures, declared, "We, the undersigned mental health professionals, believe in our professional judgment that Donald Trump manifests a serious mental illness that renders him psychologically incapable of competently discharging the duties of President of the United States. And we respectfully request he be removed from office according to Article 4 of the 25th amendment of the Constitution."

 I wrote the criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder that first appeared in DSM-III and are still in use in DSM-5, the most recent edition. Trump's amateur diagnosticians have all made the same fundamental error. They correctly note that the disorder's defining features fit him like a glove (grandiose self-importance; preoccupations with being great; feeling special; having to hang out with special people; requiring constant admiration; feeling entitled; lacking empathy; and being exploitive, envious, and arrogant). But they fail to recognize that being a world-class narcissist doesn't make Trump mentally ill. Crucial to the diagnosis of Narcissistic Personality Disorder is the requirement that the behaviors cause clinically significant distress or impairment. Otherwise, many, if not most, politicians (and almost all celebrities) might qualify. Trump is a man who causes great distress in others but shows no signs himself of experiencing great distress. His behaviors, however outrageous and objectionable, consistently reap him fame, fortune, women, and now political power—he has been generously rewarded for his Trumpism, not impaired by it. Trump is a threat to the United States, and to the world, not because he is clinically mad, but because he is very bad.

 I hate it when psychiatric diagnosis is so carelessly misused to mislabel as mental illness every conceivable example of simple bad behavior. I was heavily involved in the preparation of DSM-III and in charge of the preparation of DSM-IV. This burdens me with the responsibility to keep psychiatric diagnosis as honest and as accurate as possible. (4) Most mass murderers are not mentally ill. Most terrorists are not mentally ill. Most rapists are not mentally ill. Most dictatorial rulers are not mentally ill. Most obnoxious boobs are not mentally ill. Most liars aren't mentally ill. Most conspiracy theorists aren't mentally ill. And there's no evidence that Trump is mentally ill. Trump's boorish manners, vulgar speech, and abusive actions make him a national embarrassment and the worst of all possible role models (perhaps there should be a PG-13 rating on all Trump appearances to protect our children from his bad influence). He diminishes America, reducing its greatness. But none of this makes him mentally ill.

 There are three harmful unintended consequences of using psychiatric tools to discredit Trump. First, lumping him with the mentally ill stigmatizes them more than it embarrasses him. Most mentally ill people are well behaved and well meaning, both of which Trump decidedly is not. Second, medicalizing Trump's bad behavior underestimates him and distracts attention from the dangers of his policies. Trump is a political problem, not meat for psychoanalysis. Instead of focusing on Trump's motivations, we must counter his behaviors with political tools. And, third, were Trump to be removed from office, his successors (Pence and Ryan) would probably be much worse—more plausible purveyors of his very dangerous policies.

 But what does it say about us, that we elected someone so manifestly unfit and unprepared to determine mankind's future? Trump is a symptom of a world in distress, not its sole cause. Blaming him for all of our troubles misses the deeper, underlying societal sickness that made possible his unlikely ascent. Calling Trump crazy allows us to avoid confronting the craziness in our society—if we want to get sane, we must first gain insight about ourselves. Simply put: Trump isn't crazy, but our society is.

 (5) I started this book two years before there was any thought that Trump would enter its pages. It was, and remains, a study of societal insanity—our inability to respond meaningfully to the increasingly urgent dangers that threaten human survival—overpopulation, global warming, resource depletion, and environmental degradation. The grave risks we faced then are now greatly amplified by Trump's aggressive assault on our collective sanity. Danger has always been man's fate—we humans have mastered fearful existential crises every single day of our twohundred-thousand-year existence. But previously, the scale of risk was relatively restricted—to the individual, family, tribe, city-state, or nation. Current threats are globalized—our planet has become so small and so interconnected, there is no longer a safe place for any of us (even the richest and most powerful) to hide.

 Einstein famously defined insanity as "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." Previous civilizations have all mindlessly followed the same depressing cycle of rapid growth and sudden collapse. The tragic mistakes they made then are precisely the mistakes we are making now. Learning from the past is the only way to ensure that our civilization will survive into the future. Sadly, facing reality does not come to us naturally or automatically. A wise saying from the Talmud sums up a great deal of what's problematic in human psychology: "We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are." The path to mastery can be walked only by those whose eyes are open—inconvenient truths don't disappear when disguised by Trump's convenient lies.

 We face this perilous tipping point with a psychological makeup much better adapted to the Paleolithic past than to our rapidly evolving present, or extremely risky future. Evolution endowed us with inborn psychological proclivities that worked quite well for our wandering ancestors, ever unsure if they would make it to the next day or where their next meal was coming from. The world, once very big, with seemingly boundless resources, has become small and stretched well past its limits. Survival back then depended on intuitive, short-term decisions—and greed was mostly good. Selfish survival instincts that worked so well fifty thousand years ago now push us to act self-destructively in a world that requires cooperative planning. We have conquered our external world; the question now is whether we can conquer our internal impulses. Maintaining our unrealistic standard of living risks handing substandard living conditions on to our successors.

 (6) My job as a psychiatrist has been to help patients learn from their mistakes—uncover the irrational in their thinking and end their vicious cycles of self-defeating behavior. Maturity in an individual (or a society) requires substituting reasoned thought for wishful thinking and immediate gratification. Analyzing Trump's psychology makes no sense because it is too obvious to be interesting and impervious to cure. We can't expect to change Trump, but we must work to undo the societal delusions that created him. We risk destroying our future unless we face it realistically—replacing instinct with rationality and favoring our altruistic impulses in preference to Trumpian self-serving. The tough love that helps heal suffering patients may, I hope, also help heal our sick society.

 By lucky nature, I am an optimistic and happy person who loves the present moment and has enjoyed a satisfying past. Still, I can't help but fear greatly for the future. Not my own personal future—I am fully resigned to having not that much time left and feel grateful for the good times I've already had. But, as I approach the end of my life, it saddens me greatly that my generation has been so profligately indifferent to the needs of our children and our children's children. Daily, we privilege our own happiness at the expense of theirs, threatening the future of our species, while also destroying so many of the wonderful life-forms that evolved along with us on this tiny, but dazzlingly beautiful, pebble of a planet. We have enjoyed a rare historical sweet spot, living in the best of times and best of places. Restless human ingenuity, facilitated by ten millennia of unusually stable climate, has blessed readers of this book with unprecedented prosperity; enviable longevity; an ever-advancing array of technical toys; and surprisingly deep knowledge about how our universe works. Previous good fortune has created complacent expectations that each succeeding generation will have things even better than the one before. But, unless we take the difficult steps to make our world sustainable, our kids will be stuck paying our debts. Mistakes made now may bequeath to our grandchildren the worst of times and worst of places. The status quo is not a likely option—we will improve our world or we will destroy it.

(9) **Chapter 1 - Confronting the Facts of Life**

*We met the enemy and they is us*. - Pogo

Ignorance is not bliss. What you don't know most certainly can hurt you, often in the least expected and most devastating of ways. Compelling evidence indicates that our world is marching blindly into a perfect storm of irreversible catastrophes. Absent urgent corrective action, it will soon be game over for our civilization, with no do-overs allowed. It is very long past time that we face reality straight on, roll up our sleeves, and find practical solutions to seemingly insoluble existential threats. Instead, we harbor a whole set of societal delusions that perpetuate the fatal fallacy that the best way to deal with dangers is to deny their existence. The Trump presidency will be either the final straw or a last-minute wake-up call. His personal positions are wrongly and ridiculously retrogressive on every single issue crucial to the survival of our species. He and his henchmen are every day making decisions that bring us ever closer to an environmental apocalypse and societal breakdown. We have placed the future of humanity in the hands of someone indifferent to facts, proud of scientific ignorance, and ready to act deceitfully on whim and spite. Any one person is entitled to be dead wrong without being called crazy—but it is crazily delusional for our country to follow this clownish Pied Piper unto perdition.

 (10) This chapter will subject our most comforting and dangerous societal delusions to some good, old-fashioned reality testing. We will lift the veil of denial and wishful thinking, exposing the false convictions perverting our policies and practices. Not a pretty picture, but ignoring it risks the survival of our clever, but vulnerable species. Delusions die hard. Ideology, expediency, anger, and fear are powerful protectors of even the most unstable and unsatisfactory status quo. The insight that we are digging a deep hole for ourselves is the first and necessary step toward climbing out of it.

 In psychiatry, a delusion is defined as a fixed, false belief that is firmly maintained and resists correction by overwhelming evidence and rational argument. Used as a verb, "to delude" means persuading someone to believe something that is false—what many politicians do for a living much of their time (and Trump seemingly does all the time). We don't label everyone delusional just for believing things that aren't true. It's an inherent part of human nature to create inaccurate explanations that comfort us in the face of life's great uncertainties. Myths from ancient times, when we knew so very little, continue to persist today, despite our now knowing so very much. And we are forever creating new myths to help us confront the discomforts of the present and our fears for the future. Most of us have at least some false beliefs and many of us stick to them in the face of what would seem to be compelling contrary evidence. A third or more of Americans manage still to believe in flying saucers, Bigfoot, angels, extrasensory perception, reincarnation, and astrology, and about an equal number manage not to believe in evolution, the Big Bang, the advanced age of planet Earth, the immensity of the universe, or the value of vaccination.

 It was once perfectly reasonable to believe the world was only six thousand years old; less so now that geologists know with scientific precision that it dates to 4.543 billion years ago. Someone who clings to the belief in a very young world is dead wrong, but is not considered delusional because his incorrect belief is so widely shared by so many equally mistaken others and doesn’t adversely impact his daily life. An individual is diagnosed delusional only when his wrong beliefs are personal, idiosyncratic, and impairing...

 (12) As with individual delusions, societal delusions make us blind to risk, heedless of unintended consequences, passive in the face of crises, and dependent on the misguided faith that the future will take care of itself, without tough decisions in the present. Delusional denial allows us to avoid the painful reality that we have already made quite a mess of our world and must make big sacrifices to clean it up. False beliefs that would cause only limited harm when held by a powerless individual become catastrophic when they allow the world's most powerful country to make disastrously bad decisions. Trump is not delusional because tens of millions of people share his beliefs, but he does enable and embellish the societal delusions that can eventually be the death of us. Denying reality is comforting in the short run, but disastrous in the long. If we don't very soon wake up from our delusional reverie, we will find ourselves living in a world beyond repair.

*(Frances discusses some societal delusions, p.12-50)*:

*Despoiling the Environment:* We don't have to worry about global warming or environmental pollution because God or technology will save the day.

*The Population Bomb:* World population can keep growing without causing drastic resource depletion, irreversible global warming, incessant wars, mass migrations, frequent pandemics, and recurring famines.

*Depleting Resources:* We don’t have to worry about running out of things because there is always a high-tech fix to get whatever more stuff we will eventually need. The proof of this pudding is that commodity prices are still so cheap and the Green Revolution has had no trouble feeding an ever-increasing population.

*Fair Is Fair:* All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others. -George Orwell, Animal Farm. If the rich get richer, the benefits will trickle down to everyone else and the world will be a better place.

 The potential for insatiable greed seems to be built into our genome—dulled only when there is a lack of surplus stuff to be greedy about. Ants are different. They instinctively develop societies that, with the notable exception of the queen, are egalitarian and provide for equal distribution of resources. We tend toward hierarchical societies with a concentration of wealth in the hands of the very few. The current combination of the cyber revolution and globalization has produced a new gilded age. The richest sixty people in the world now have more assets than the combined total of the poorest 3.5 billion. In 1965, the average CEO-to-worker compensation ratio was 20 to 1; now it's almost 300 to 1.

*Medicine:* The United States has the best health-care system in the world.

*Happy Warriors:* The United States can bully other countries into doing whatever we want.

*Fortress White America:* Our country can only be great again if we build walls around it.

*Man’s Dominion:* Since mankind has been given dominion over the earth, our needs are paramount; the survival of other species need not concern us.

*Big Brother:* It’s worth trading away almost all of our privacy in order to gain security, convenience, and valuable research data.

*Gun Happy:* The more guns the better. Guns don’t kill people, people do. An armed populace is a safe populace.

*Technology:* The technological revolution can do no wrong.

**Chapter 2 - Why We Make Such Bad Decisions**

(70) Having very little real control over their world, our ancestors depended on magical thinking, ritual, and myth to gain the psychological comforts provided by a sense of illusory control. Societal delusions are our own modern-day equivalents...

 (71-77) To mature beyond our stubborn proclivity for magical thinking, we must first understand some of the cognitive biases that fuel it.

1. Short-term bias

2. Optimism bias

3. Pessimistic bias

4. Fear bias

5. Anger bias

6. Statistical bias

7. Confirmation bias: we see what we want to see

 (78) Trump is the worst possible combination of misplaced pessimism, misplaced optimism, anger, and fearmongering. He is off-the-wall pessimistic about the state of our union... He is also equally off-the-wall optimistic about his ability to make everything perfect, better than you can possibly imagine, not by policy but by force of his giant personality... He is off-the-wall angry at anyone who doesn’t swallow his distortions, admire his achievements, or do his bidding.

**Chapter 3 - American Exceptionalism**

(97) The country fell in love with Reagan in a big way. The unrealistic optimism of American exceptionalism feels great while it lasts, but it can never last very long and left us with a big hangover. Sooner rather than later, reality bites and all the accumulated debts come due. Thirty years later, we are still stuck with the bad hand Reagan dealt us.

Trump Exceptionalism

 A portion of our country also managed to fall deeply in love with Donald Trump—a "reality" TV star who maintains an even more tenuous relationship with reality than did his hero, the much more lovable Ronald Reagan. Trump and Reagan have opposite temperaments—Reagan eternally sunny, Trump ever dark, but both sell similar societal delusions. Trump manages to be truculently wrong on every existential question facing humanity—denying global warming, encouraging pollution, promoting resource depletion, enjoying saber rattling, opposing population and gun control, escalating obscene inequality, and trampling on civil rights protections... All the problems that are inherent in American exceptionalism are now very badly compounded by Trump exceptionalism. Trump doesn't qualify for a mental disorder, but he does present with one of the world's best-documented cases of lifelong failure to mature. He is a boy/man who expects everything to go his way and experiences the world as an extension of himself. Other people exist only to do his imperious bidding, admire his great deeds, and gratify his enormous wants. (98) This is perfectly age-appropriate behavior in a young child, but is perfectly inappropriate in a president... Trump is bad, not mad, but we the people are mad for having elected such a terribly flawed person to the most powerful position in the world... No one less qualified to be president has ever won the office. No one so dangerous to our democracy has ever been given its most powerful position.

 Trump is an unlikely messenger bearing an unwelcome message about the sanity of our body politic. He has revealed and unleashed a deeper streak of delusional denial in a larger segment of U.S. society than even I would have thought possible...

 Democracy is a precious, but historically infrequent and perilously fragile method of governance. Athens initiated democratic government, but its brief experiment ended in failure when the people were seduced by demagogues into disastrous decisions. Plato believed democracy to be so unworkable an institution that he banned it from his ideal Republic...

 (99) Likewise, it is too soon to tell whether American democracy can survive Trump's attack on it... He has embodied and unleashed forces that seriously undermine our democratic principles and institutions... Trump markets himself as the law-and-order candidate, but has displayed a regal contempt for law whenever it contradicts his interests, impulses, whims, and grudges. He feels entitled to squash critical press, throttle judges who don't see things his way... Trump doesn't understand or respect the delicate balances built into our constitution and feels no compunction whatsoever in distorting them out of all recognition... To believe that our democracy is secure forever requires blindness to the current resurgence of antidemocratic trends in most of the world's democracies, including our own...

 There are precious few institutional obstacles to a complete Trump takeover. The Republican Congress daily abdicates what should be its primary patriotic duty (providing a check on Trump's autocratic ambitions)... Not surprisingly, Trump's most furious attacks are aimed at the two remaining bastions of American democracy—its free press and its justice-protecting courts...

 Many people fret about Trump's motivations, psychology, and possible psychiatric diagnosis. I think these are irrelevant. It doesn't matter that much whether Trump is crazy, crazy like a fox, or just an incompetent boob who keeps getting lucky—or some combination of all three. What does matter greatly is stopping him—and stopping him now before it is too late. This is a tipping point, a time of trial for the soul of America—we will protect our democracy from Trump's frontal assault or we will lose it...

 (102) American exceptionalism also enables societal delusions that blind us to reality and distort our responses to existential crises.

 Assuming we are wiser than other countries prevents us from learning from them. Assuming we are mightier than we are encourages us in the futile attempt to police the world. Assuming we are morally superior leads to puzzlement when others so often see us so negatively. Assuming we are self-sufficient prevents us from cooperating with other countries on worldwide problems, whose solutions can only come through collective action... We fight only just wars, only for unselfish reasons, and always fight them fairly—ergo, any war we happen to be fighting must necessarily be just, unselfish, and fair. We have a civilizing mission to be the world's teacher, preacher, and policeman. People in other countries appreciate our unselfish altruism and welcome our interventions. The (temporary) end of the Cold War was proof of our righteousness and of our right to tell others how to live. We must create an "American Empire," based on spreading democracy and globalized free trade to the farthest reaches of the earth.

 This "exceptionalist" delusion has gotten us into lots of trouble... After World War II, surveys showed we were at the very top of the world's list of admired countries, and Germany was at the bottom—now our rankings are reversed. A recent BBC poll of 24,000 people in 33 countries found us to be the second most unpopular country in the world—ahead of Iran, but less popular even than some pretty unpopular places, like Russia, Saudi Arabia, Zimbabwe, and China. A Gallup poll of more than 66,000 people in 65 countries asked which country "is the greatest threat to peace in the world today." The United States topped the list at 24 percent, followed by Pakistan (8 percent); China (6 percent); and then a tied score for fourth place featuring Afghanistan, Iran, Israel, and North Korea, all with 4 percent...

 (104) Narcissism, in a person or a country, is adaptive in small doses but disastrous in large. In moderation, national narcissism allows us to feel confidence in ourselves, inspires others to be confident in us, and promotes decisive decision making and vigorous action. But overweening pride usually goeth before a great fall—both in an individual and in a country. American exceptionalism, once a great national asset, has now become an equally great national liability that renders us particularly susceptible to forming comfortable, but dangerous, societal delusions. All the causes of bad decisions discussed in the previous chapter are amplified whenever our narcissism obscures our reality, clouds our judgment, and lends a false aura of righteousness and wisdom to what are sometimes very dumb actions and inactions...

 We must mature as a nation if we are to shed societal delusions, provide leadership to the world, and grow into a comfortable middle and old age. This certainly won't be easy... but necessity is the mother of invention and the United States has always been pragmatically clever at reinventing itself. Perhaps we will not only endure Trumpism, but prevail over it.

Dystopias Have Become Bestsellers

 (106) The three most directly relevant modern dystopias are Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (a scary extrapolation of capitalist America), George Orwell's *1984* (a scary extrapolation of communist Russia), and Sinclair Lewis' still-chilling 1936 novel, *It Can't Happen Here*. In this book, Buzz Windrip, a skillful and charismatic demagogue, gains election to the U.S. presidency by making extravagant promises of miraculous economic gains, by stoking up the voters' anger and fears, and by appealing to patriotism, traditional American values, and hatred of Jews and foreigners. After election, Windrip takes on dictatorial powers, backed by a private militia that resembles Hitler's SS. Lewis based Windrip on the character and aspirations of Huey Long. Trump is an almost exact, if more grotesque, replica of Buzz Windrip—and is the second coming of Huey Long. Like Trump, Long feasted on the adulation of crowds and the excitement of campaign rallies. Like Trump, he masqueraded as a man of the people in the service of personal ambition.

 *Huey Long was a fiery and charismatic populist politician who became governor of Louisiana in 1928, then was a U.S. Senator in 1932 until he was assassinated in 1935. Branded a demagogue and radical by his opponents, and known for turning his back on established processes to gain political victories, Long controlled a vast political machine. In* Freedom From Fear*, historian David Kennedy wrote that Long lorded over “the closest thing to a dictatorship that America has ever known.”*

(111) Making America Great Again Means Making It Good Again

 I haven't given up on America. I love my country deeply, but often lately can't stomach what it says and deplore what it does. I am loyal to my country's noble values, to its breathtaking beauty, to its welcoming people, to its political institutions, to its history. I am forever grateful to America for saving my family of wandering Jews, who had lost almost everything and had no place else to go. America gave us a new lease on life, house and hearth, education, employment, a new culture and language, safety and security. Most important, America gave us optimism, something to believe in—an ideal of freedom in a world of doomed hopes...

 (112) We are a country born in noble aspiration that collides with basic, less noble aspects of human nature... To me, real patriotism can never be “my country right or wrong.” Slavish loyalty is much less loyal than clear-eyed and constructive criticism–railing to identify and correct our country’s wrongs is to let them persist and fester.

**Chapter 4 - How Could a Trump Triumph?**

(116) Trump Exploits American Distress

Freud said that delusions don't occur in the sky—like dreams, they are a distorted expression of an underlying reality. You can't begin to treat a patient's delusion until you understand why he must believe it so strongly—the realities expressed in the delusion and his psychological reactions to them. Similarly, we will never cure societal delusions unless we understand the underlying problems promoting them and provide realistic solutions to replace wishful thinking. Trump is no more than a skilled snake-oil salesman selling quack medicine—but the societal sickness he is exploiting is all too real. He won power because he promised quick, phony cures for the following real problems burdening a significant segment of our population left out of the American dream: (*117-126 discusses problems with jobs, inequality, terror, immigration, government not delivering, rapid change.*)

(127) The Attitudes Trump Is Exploiting

*Follow the Leader*

Theodor Adorno, a victim and sophisticated observer of Nazi Germany, used psychology as one way of understanding why people had so readily succumbed to its fascist takeover. A survey he conducted in the United States revealed that many Americans also have the characteristics of what he called "the Authoritarian Personality." These include strongly defending conventions; being submissive to those above, and domineering to those below; devaluing intellectual activity; overvaluing power and toughness; blaming others; being cynical; and believing conspiracy theories and superstitions. People with this "Authoritarian Personality" obey, rally to, and sometimes become powerful and dominating leaders. And they respond aggressively to outsiders, especially when they feel threatened. By acting tough, Trump displays his own (and plays to his followers') authoritarian inclinations.

 Adorno, writing in 1950, predicted Trump's ability today to peddle his "alternative reality": The conversion of all questions of truth into questions of power not only suppresses truth, as in earlier despotic orders, but has attacked the very heart of the distinction between true and false."

(128) *Overconfidence in a Con Man*

Trump says our world is broken and that he (alone) can fix it... (129) Those who are ignorant in a certain area often don’t know enough to know what they don’t know... I believe this explains a lot about Trump–a man of overweening overconfidence, unchecked by knowledge or wisdom, and unable to learn from his mistakes. It also illuminates why Trump voters were so willing to forgive his mistakes and fiercely attack those who point them out.

(129) *Misogyny*

General misogyny, and specific distrust of women in politics, runs both long and deep in American culture.

(131) *Racism*

Donald Trump’s racism is long-standing and unusually well documented... A black president had been a hard swallow and a final straw for some–giving Trump the cheap opportunity to exploit a defiant white backlash vote

(131) *Social Conservatism*

None of Trump’s extensive catalog of immoralities discouraged most evangelical leaders from enthusiastically jumping on his bandwagon.

(132) *Libertarianism*

Many voters picked Trump because they trusted him to reduce government’s role in the running of our country and their lives... (133) The ultimate irony is that there has never been a bigger threat to American liberty than President Trump’s dictatorial instincts.

(133) *Attitude Toward Truth*

In the no-holds-barred U.S. political wars, bold untruth has become the most powerful of all political weapons... Trump understood that people who feel desperate, anxious, angry, and helpless are not in a mood to listen to rational arguments... The two sacred priorities for honest media are truth and neutrality. Trump made these incompatible... (134) Trump not only fights the media, he cleverly exploits it.

(135) *America First and Great*

Many patriotic Americans... have responded emotionally and gratefully to Trump’s grandiose promise to “make America great again.” ...(136) Trump fancies himself a man on horseback rescuing a diminished America, but he is very much more a blind and clumsy bull in a china shop, trampling on its most previous values and institutions.

(137) *The Triumph of Fake Populism*

One man’s populism is another’s demagoguery. Real populism should be the stuff of everyday good government–the effort to ensure the rights of the everyman, protecting him from the greed of the powerful elite. Fake populism is the seduction of the masses by demagogues who promise everything before gaining power, but afterward deliver nothing but exploitation...

 (138) Demagogues may be phony, but the problems they exploit are all too real, and common... (139) Radical right-wine demagoguery feeds upon and promotes all our societal delusions–using them as disguise for robbing the public purse.

(139) *Conspiracy-Theorist-in-Chief*

Conspiracy theory, as a tool in our politics, is as old as our country... In uncertain times, scared people seek, and hold stubbornly to, a comforting certainty–especially when confronted by discomforting truth... (141) The only hope against well-publicized, well-funded conspiracy theory is a vocal, unintimidated free press–precisely why the media is Trump’s “opposition party.”

Political Polarization

 On leaving office as our first president, a fearful George Washington solemnly warned the fledgling republic that political polarization was a serious risk to its uncertain future survival: “It agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms, kindles the animosity of one part against another, foments occasional riot and insurrection. It opens the door to foreign influence and corruption, which finds a facilitated access to the government itself through the channels of party passions.” Sounds like Trump’s America.

**Chapter 5 - Trump, Tribalism, and the Attack on Democracy**

(154) Adolf Hitler comparisons are properly denounced as clichéd and out of bounds... Hitler/Trump parallels would be cheap shots if Trump hadn't brought the lines so close. We must learn from Hitler's takeover if we are to prevent Trump from making it happen here. And we must push back against him immediately and in force, before it is too late to push back at all.

 Hitler, like Trump, never won a popular election—his best performance at the polls garnered only 44 percent of the vote. Hitler, like Trump, had only the greatest contempt for democratic traditions, a free press, the courts, intellectuals, human rights. Hitler, like Trump, regarded truth as negotiable, lies as effective weapons, and morality as excess baggage. Hitler, like Trump, was a conspiracy theorist who surrounded himself with subservient "yes men," unwilling or unable to challenge his misconceptions and misjudgments. Hitler, like Trump, was a world-class narcissist. Hitler, like Trump, was despised and underestimated by the political establishment, who felt he could be used and manipulated for their own purposes. (155) Hitler, like Trump, defied the political establishment and remained true (only) to himself. Hitler, like Trump, felt disrespected and treated unfairly, and had many scores to settle. Hitler, like Trump, claimed infallibility, that he was smarter than his generals and advisors, and that his gut instincts were the nation's best guide. Hitler, like Trump, exploited the fear, anger, and resentments of his people. Hitler, like Trump, promoted tribalism and reviled minorities as dangerous vermin. For sure, Hitler was also unlike Trump in some ways. He was much smarter, better read, more mature, better organized, less ignorant of history, more self-disciplined, less distractible, better mannered, less needy, more plausible—and, so far, much more bloodthirsty, ruthless, and deadly.

 Hitler's seizure of dictatorial power was simple, swift, and complete—exploiting a mere constitutional formality to destroy all constitutional restraints on his authority. It was so very easy, so seemingly innocent, so sudden, so irrevocable, so devastating. The vehicle was the euphemistically named *Enabling Act*—an amendment to the 1933 Weimar Constitution that gave Hitler "plenary power" to enact laws without needing the approval of his parliament or judiciary. This allowed him to abolish civil rights and kill off his opposition with no muss, no fuss—it was perfectly legal and required only a cowed parliament and a few strokes of the pen. The scariest lesson for us is that one terrorist act, the Reichstag fire, was sufficient trigger for Hitler's all-powerful dictatorship. "National security" is an effective and convenient excuse for destroying democracy. We will surely suffer more terrorist acts. Trump will seize on them—if we let him. The analogies between Hitler and Trump are all too obvious.

(169) Politics, like most professions, creates its own language, using shorthand buzzwords to impede rational thinking and civil discussion. A "buzzword" is defined as an "important-sounding word or phrase, often of little meaning, used chiefly to impress." Gresham's law in economics says that "bad money drives out the good." Applied to politics, Gresham might have it that meaningless buzzwords drive out rational thought and meaningful discussion. They short-circuit dialogue, appealing to the amygdala while keeping the cortex at bay—a lazy substitute for thinking, deliberately disguising and obfuscating to derail common sense and good judgment. Imprecise and purposely vague creatures of fashion, jargony innuendos are usually invented to make a propaganda point rather than to seek the truth or present viable options. The words used to frame political issues keep us from resolving them and hide self-interest and prejudice... Each color-war political party has its favorites:

**Republican buzzwords**: free market/right to life/entitlements/class envy/states' rights/activist judges/death panels/ welfare queens/liberal elite/latte liberals/limousine liberals/ tax relief/war on terror/anchor babies/communist/socialist agenda/birther/safety in the streets/national security/patriotism/Freedom/Liberty/personal responsibility/Founding Fathers/religious freedom/the elites/the establishment/tax and spend/politically correct/originalist

**Democratic buzzwords**: fairness/fascist/green/islamophobia/leveling the playing field/paranoid/

redneck/social justice/sustainability/blaming the victim/civil liberties/choice/disadvantaged/

diversity/equality/extremist/radical right/marriage equality/misogynist/trickle down/narcissist

(170) "The Extremist Effect" describes the powerful propaganda strategy of calling someone an "extremist" even if what he is saying is perfectly mainstream and commonsensical... You don't have to counter a position with contrary evidence, just vilify the person making it... Truth is not always in the middle of any two opposing arguments—and it is never in the middle when one side espouses an extreme view... We will be able to cure societal delusions only when we recognize that facts are facts, scientific evidence is scientific evidence, and "alternate" realities are self-serving lies, and not realities at all.

**Chapter 6 - Defending Democracy: The Path Forward**

The Prince *was written by Machiavelli for the Haves on how to hold power.* Rules for Radicals *is written for the have-Nots on how to take it away.* - Saul Alinsky

*Those who love peace must learn to organize as effectively as those who love war.* - Martin Luther King, Jr.

(181) Alinsky was in-your-face, abrasive, confrontational; King was inclusive and embracing. But both were uniquely gifted at winning with weak hands and defeating power with truth. Both were broadly inclusive in their populism.

 (184) Alinsky published his legacy book, *Rules for Radicals,* in 1971, shortly before his death... this reads just like Machiavelli, only the advice he gives was meant to help the common man, not the Prince. Here’s a summary of his recommendations:

1. You have as much power as your opponent thinks you have.

2. People power can fight money power.

3. Keep within your expertise and push your opponent outside his.

4. Ridicule can diminish your enemy.

5. Tactics that are fun to do are more likely to be followed and to work.

6. Keep the pressure on.

7. Stay one step ahead—as the opponent figures out defenses, change tactics.

8. Violence on the other side wins you friends.

9. Pick a target and personalize it.

10. People fold faster than institutions.

 Alinsky devoted his life to the righteous cause of helping the powerless defend against the depredations of the powerful. The tragic irony is that his techniques have since been systematically copied by the powerful to gain even more control over the powerless. .. King's nonviolent populism was based on an overriding morality. Alinsky's techniques were practical, tactical, utilitarian, and equally usable by both sides in every conflict... When King was killed in that awful moment of racial hate fifty years ago, no one would have predicted that a black man would so soon be elected to the presidency of the United States. This was a redeeming moment in American history and seemed to offer a great opportunity for further populist progress—but it turned out to be an opportunity mostly lost... The irony was that fake populism could so easily overwhelm the real populism of a president who prided himself on skills as a community organizer.

(206) To win and govern effectively in the future, Democrats must learn to be better psychologists and better salesmen... The essentials of a therapeutic alliance in psychotherapy are equivalent to the essentials of an effective political alliance. Here are some of the cardinal rules:

• Be genuine and encourage genuineness.

• You can't help patients unless you form a strong tie with them.

• Speak the patient's language.

• Listen carefully and learn as much from your patients as they learn from you.

• Let patients know that all your efforts are focused on them.

• Empathy and trust are the most essential ingredients.

• Encourage patients to freely express their pain, fear, anger, disappointment.

• Determine their needs and how they want them filled.

• Discuss realistic goals and expectations.

• Don't be judgmental.

• Instill hope.

• Metaphors, images, and parables are more effective than facts and figures.

• Be aware of your own feelings and use them effectively.

• Everything doesn't equal everything else—less than 10 percent of what's said in psychotherapy accounts for more than 90 percent of change. Always be alert to, and do everything you can to leverage, the potential tipping points.

Wherever you see "patient" above, substitute "voter." Great politicians are born, not made.

(207) When two people are together, they are not two but six. What each one is, what each one thinks he or she is, and what each one thinks the other is. And what is true for people is also true for countries and organizations. One of the roles... when dealing with the different key actors in each scenario is to bring these six into two. That the misunderstandings disappear and the false perceptions disappear. Perceptions are essential in politics... The crucial political task of the future will be to bring together the people within nations so they can act as one in solving national problems and to bring together the nations of the world so they act as one in solving the world's problems.

A Contract of, for, and by "We the People"

 When it comes to finding commonsense solutions to concrete problems, we the people are better, wiser, and more united than the politicians who represent us. The platforms of the political parties are drawn up to satisfy the entrenched self-interests of their most rabid members and therefore emphasize differences, rather than commonalities. In contrast, opinion polls consistently find broad majority consensus among the American people even on seemingly contentious issues that are stuck in the gridlock of Washington polarization. It is the great failure of our system of representative democracy that it is no longer accurately representative—the people are far less polarized than the politicians who purportedly represent them. (208) And the difference has increased dramatically with time. Fifty years ago, polarization among the populace and polarization among the politicians were about equal. Polarization in the public has increased just a bit since then, but polarization among politicians has gone straight through the roof. We can, and must, force politicians to better reflect what the American people want and need, not what big money can buy.

 We are still, and hopefully will remain, one people—once you eliminate all the divisive propaganda, ideology, and obfuscating rhetoric. The vast majority of us are practical, and want problems solved in a less ideological, more bipartisan way. Congress should be representing the general will of the people of the United States (as measured, albeit imperfectly, by opinion polls) rather than the narrow self-interests and radical ideologies of aggressive minorities (as measured by campaign contributions). Surely there are differences in how goals are to be achieved, but these are much smaller than meets the eye once we get past jargon to discuss concrete facts. The following "We the People Contract" reflects what nonpartisan pollsters find to be the American majority's view on crucial issues. The exercise reveals that the Trump platform serves only a minority interest and is far out of sync with what most of us want and need.

We, the people, want our government to:

• Accept the reality of climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions

• Emphasize alternative energy over oil and gas

• Raise taxes on wealthy individuals and corporations and eliminate tax loopholes to ensure that they pay their fair share

• Follow policies that promote a more equal distribution of wealth.'

• Protect Social Security

• Develop a simple, single-payer health insurance system modeled after Medicare.

• Preserve Medicare. Government has the responsibility to ensure health coverage for all.

• Negotiate lower prices for prescription drugs

• Reduce government waste and deficits

• Initiate campaign finance reform

• Be less partisan and gridlocked

• Improve the educational system

• Raise the minimum wage

• Lower tax rates for businesses and manufacturers that create jobs in the United States

• Put people to work on urgent infrastructure repairs

• Enact a federal jobs creation law that would spend government money for a program designed to create more than one million new jobs

• Establish stricter policies to prevent people from overstaying their visas

• Allow those born in the United States to illegal immigrants to remain here

• Establish a way for most immigrants currently here illegally to stay legally

• Keep unqualified illegal immigrants from receiving government benefits

• Not build a wall between us and Mexico

• Take in carefully vetted civilian refugees escaping from violence and war

• Encourage more highly skilled people from around the world to immigrate to the United States to work

• Lower health-care costs

• Support continued federal funding for Planned Parenthood

• Keep abortion legal

• Reduce the prison population

• Decriminalize drug addiction and mental illness and provide adequate treatment for them.

 (210) Having a wide consensus on broad goals doesn't mean that it will ever be easy to reach consensus on how to get there. But we must avoid "solution aversion"—denying problems exist because we disagree on how to solve them... If we are to confront realities disguised by societal delusions, we must avoid jargon, buzzwords, stereotypes, innuendos, and other distractions. The fact that compromises on solutions may be tough to forge doesn't justify running away from the problems that need fixing.

 One of the most polarizing attitudinal differences between "conservatives" and "liberals" is how they understand the balance between individual effort and life circumstances in determining our fate. Many of my conservative friends share the conviction that they have earned their success and that people who are less successful just haven't worked hard enough. Most of my liberal friends and I are likely to feel we were more lucky than deserving, and would have done much worse had fate dealt us a poorer hand. We must bridge this gap. Success comes from working for it, but it also comes from the luck of birth and circumstance. Everyone deserves a fair deal but no one should expect that "society owes me a living.”

Impeaching Trump Is Not the Answer

 (211) Trump is just a superficial symptom, not the underlying disease... He would not have been elected president and would not be kept in office now were our country not so polarized by destructive color-war politics. Many Trump haters and Trump fearers entertain the seductive hope that Trump will self-destruct—get impeached ... With Trump conveniently out of the way, Pence and his coconspirators would function much more effectively to dismantle our governmental institutions; destroy the climate; rob the many to enrich the few; and assert white male, nativist hegemony. Trump got the Tea Party into the throne room, but Pence and Ryan would conduct themselves more plausibly while driving its same agenda.

**Chapter 7 - Sustaining Our Brave New World**

Sustainability depends on the interaction of just four variables: population, consumption, technology, and cooperation. Multiply world population by per capita consumption and you can estimate levels of resource depletion and waste generation. Technology determines how efficient we are at producing things and at getting rid of wastes. And cooperation will be necessary if we are to control population, equalize and tame consumption, and use technology to help rather than hurt sustainability.

 At present, all four trend lines are going in just the wrong direction, converging on ever more unsustainability. In the past thirty years, world population has exploded by two billion,' while the number of people living in poverty has been reduced by one billion. More and more people moving up the economic ladder means an enormous growth in overall consumption. So far, technology is doing more harm than good—by increasing the efficiency of extraction of irreplaceable commodities, it has promoted continued population growth, increased consumption, resource depletion, and waste accumulation. And the world seems to become less, rather than more, cooperative as there are more mouths to feed from a shrinking pie. There is no one grand solution to our sustainability challenge; there must be tens of millions of interacting small solutions.

*(216-229 discusses population, consumption, technology, and cooperation)*

 (233) Without question we can and must reach sustainability, but it remains frighteningly uncertain whether we will. Current policies could not seem less promising–materially unsustainable, morally bankrupt, incredibly dumb.

Meaning, Acceptance, and Gratitude

 (252) Aristotle presented the first and best philosophical analysis of human happiness. He asks, "What is the ultimate purpose of human existence?" He answers: "Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence." Aristotle's definition of happiness (*eudaimonia*) includes our fleeting pleasures, but far transcends them. He saw purpose everywhere in the world and man's natural purpose is to virtuously live up to our full potential. "One swallow does not make a summer, neither does one fine day; similarly, one day or brief time of happiness does not make a person entirely happy." For Aristotle, being happy meant a lifetime devoted to doing good. Good advice then, still good advice now. Aristotle would of course be appalled by Trump, but he would also despair of our societal proclivity for fleeting pleasures at the expense of rational thought and grown-up responsibility.

 (253) Accepting life gladly, and on its own terms, is a daily challenge to all of us and a central theme of most religions. My favorite Christian acceptance quote, from theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, has become the motto for Alcoholics Anonymous: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." Taoism speaks of "wei wu wei": literally "effortless doing"; loosely translated into American basketball lingo as "let the game come to you," doing what is natural to the time and place rather than striving for the impossible. Confucius offered: "Everything has beauty but not everyone sees it." My favorite from Judaism: "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die." Mahatma Gandhi, a Hindu, famously observed, "An eye for an eye only winds up making the whole world blind." My favorite from Buddhism comes from the Dalai Lama: "I do not judge the universe."

 (254) Grateful people tend to lack envy, be generous, not depend so much on material goods, and deal more gracefully with the aches and pains of everyday life. It is my clinical experience that successful psychotherapy is furthered by, and results in, a dramatic increase in the person's gratitude and appreciation for all the little things that make life wonderful, or at least bearable. All of us have lots to be thankful for, and not just on Thanksgiving Day.

 "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Sounds corny, but it turns out to be empirically true. The cynical view of human nature is that we are selfish takers. Experience confirms this to be true of all of us some of the time and some of us all of the time (think Trump). But we also have within our instinctual hard wiring a genetic apparatus for altruism that exerts a powerful influence on our social behaviors and our satisfactions...

 (255) How nice to know that we are happiest when we make someone else happy – genetically programmed to be generous and good, not just selfish or evil.

What Counts

 (266) When you have lived a long life, you learn what counts and what doesn't. The things that make me happy are immediate, mostly almost free, and easily accessible. Feeling the sun on my skin and the wind in my hair. Summarizing the morning paper to my wife. Discussing history with my older grandkids and playing basketball with the young twins. Watching old movies. Learning new facts. Rereading the books I have loved. The deeply satisfying pleasure of an afternoon nap on the beach. Visiting a strange new place or revisiting a beloved familiar one. Pizza. Seltzer water. A Snickers bar. The fact I can still walk and swim and hit a tennis ball. A hug, a joke, a family meal, a puppy, an orange sunset, the satisfaction of having done the right thing, the giggle of a child, a pretty turn of phrase or shape of ankle. Being only halfway demented. Making love.

 Things don't make you happy. People do make you happy. With a little luck, I will hold on to the people I love, help them along when I can, and not become too much of a burden.

 We are living at a time of unprecedented plenty, long life, personal security, relative peace, low crime, clear air, clean water, and technological marvels. Compared to historical norms, this is the best of times for most people in developed countries. It is relatively easy to feel satisfied when the sailing is smooth, but none of us can expect happiness to mean a future free of sacrifice. All of us must learn to live less for possessions, more for people.

 We have no reason to despair and no excuse for feeling sorry for ourselves. It has never been easy being human and our current challenges, difficult as they may seem, pale in comparison to the black plague or the Thirty Years' War or biblical droughts. Our civilization, and perhaps species, can survive only by downsizing selfish expectations and upsizing altruistic cooperation. This will require a major shift in our behaviors and institutions—but it is comforting to know that our future is completely in our hands, to preserve or destroy.

 Societal delusions protect things that are not worth saving, nonessential to real happiness and well-being. The human species still has an excellent hand to play, if only we wise up soon enough and use our cards well. We humans have a long tradition of resilience when confronted by crisis—we have repeatedly risen to challenges and certainly have the strength within us to deal gracefully and effectively with the sacrifices now required of us. I still have faith that we can not only endure Trump but prevail against him—and the societal delusions he represents.

(270) Community responsibility is, and always has been, as American as apple pie. Cooperation expresses our decency and is essential to our success..."E Pluribus Unum" became the motto of the United States on the very first Independence Day, July 4, 1776. "Out of many, one"—a paraphrase of Cicero: "When each person loves the other as much as himself, it makes one out of many." Two hundred and twenty-eight years later, Obama raised the same inspiring banner: "There is not a liberal America and a conservative America—there is the United States of America. There is not a black America and a white and a Latino America and Asian America—there's the United States of America. . . . There are no Red States and Blue States, there is the United States of America." (271) It's now the people's job to counter Trump's divisiveness and make America whole again. We certainly can't trust our politicians to bring us together—too many are enslaved by the financial and ideological conflicts of interest that drive us apart...

 Progressive populism has succeeded because people were willing to struggle for something they strongly believed in. The most meaningful happiness comes from working for a better world and for our children... There is no better way to "Make America Great Again" than to engage people for the common good and to stop all the damned divisiveness. We must stand up for right and back down on might, in all the places it is being misapplied.

 I take heart in the achievements, small and large, of past populism. Here are some of my favorite examples. They inspire me and I hope they will also inspire you. Every mighty river starts with just a few small drops of rain.

*(272-285 discusses examples of changing things: dog poop in the streets, littering, moving back to breast feeding, seat belts, tobacco, the ozone hole, acid rain, civil rights)*

(291) There is also comfort in knowing that the step toward becoming good earth citizens is a natural one, requiring no more than extending the definition of our pack. And as Aristotle put it: "A common danger unites even the bitterest enemies." We certainly face a common set of self-inflicted dangers and must be united if we are to overcome the existential threats we have created. We can control our fate only if we can control ourselves.

Can We Learn from History?

 "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake." James Joyce's despair is understandable, but must be avoided...

 My head tells me that this is a selfish, blind, and stupid world unable to act responsibly on its all-too-obvious problems... My head is a realist fearing the worst.

 (292) My heart prefers Santayana's more optimistic position that those who don't know the past are doomed to repeat it—hopefully implying that those who do know the past can perhaps avoid its pitfalls. Fatalism is a dangerously self-fulfilling prophecy—if we feel trapped by our past, we will be passive in rewriting our future. And our past is also filled with useful messages and hopeful models, not just depressing reminders of blown opportunities. We can learn from our previous triumphs, not just blindly repeat our past mistakes.

 Mark Twain had it right when he said that history doesn't repeat itself, but it sure does rhyme. The contingencies are always too complicated to predict exactly how things will turn out. Historical forces created a Trump, but his winning or losing an incredibly consequential election was very much a function of fickle chance (assisted by the meddling of Vladimir Putin). Things even out in the long run, but there isn't always a long run. I trust in humanity enough to believe it inevitable that we will finally wise up to our problems and create clever political and technological solutions for them. I have much less trust that we will awake in time from the nightmare of our history. The world's problems escalate in difficulty the longer we neglect them. I fear the worst, but hope for the best.

Do You Believe in Miracles?

 It is perhaps my personal delusion to think we will face reality, overcome our societal delusions, and save the day. I like long shots and we have no choice but to bet on this one. And sometimes I believe in miracles. In the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York, the U.S. men's hockey team was coached by Herb Brooks, a stern taskmaster unpopular with his players, mostly college kids in their early twenties. The U.S. team was good enough to make it to the Olympic semifinals, but was given absolutely no chance against their next opponent, the perennial world champion Russian team, consisting of some of the world's best players, who had been together for years and were in the prime of their hockey lives. Just two weeks before, the Russians had overwhelmed the Americans 10-3 in an exhibition match that was even more lopsided than the final score. No one except Herb Brooks believed in his untried and much less talented U.S. team. In the locker room before the game, he told his kids: "Great moments . . . are born from great opportunity. And that's what you have here, tonight, boys. That's what you've earned here tonight. One game. If we played 'em ten times, they might win nine. But not this game. Not tonight. Tonight, we skate with them. Tonight, we stay with them. And we shut them down because we can! Tonight, we are the greatest hockey team in the world." And they were, achieving a ridiculously implausible comeback win. As the clock ran out, the announcer Al Michaels shouted passionately: "Do you believe in miracles?" Usually I don't, but sometimes they happen. We all need to believe in the miracle of Team Earth.

(**Epilogue - Whither Mankind?**

*(295 talks about the remarkable civilization created on Easter island, then its collapse.)*

 (296) The tragedy of Easter Island is shared by many past civilizations, in all epochs, in all parts of the world. The pattern is depressingly familiar—a rise to great heights followed by collapse, always caused by overpopulation, resource depletion, and climate change. Historians and journalists generally ignore the underlying causes and focus only on the surface results (the civil wars, the invasions, the political intrigues). These make for more dramatic narrative but miss the real story that demography and climate are destiny. Every great civilization has run the same cycle—ultimately doomed by its own success in breeding and technology. We push our limits until our environment is degraded, our natural resources are dwindled, and the rains stop falling. If our civilization doesn't soon come to its senses, archaeologists of the future will wonder how we could have been simultaneously both so smart and so dumb... We learn from Easter Island or we repeat Easter Island.

 There are two possible scenarios for our next half century—our species will either come together or tear itself apart. Our biological makeup and social structures are completely compatible with either result...

 (297) *Worst case*: Water and energy resources are depleted. Overpopulation and climate change make parts of the world unlivable. Tribal entities arm themselves to the teeth and fight to the death in near-perpetual wars to steal or defend bigger slices of an ever-shrinking pie. There is spiraling anarchy, chaos, famine, disease, and an inability to respond to increasingly frequent natural and man-made disasters. This scenario has been repeated over and over again as the endgame for collapsing great civilizations. And we have had, and are having, many recent and current foretastes of this possible bleak future.

 *Best case*: The big economic powers—the United States, China, and the European Union—realize that they are in the same sinking boat and must cooperate closely and fully on the major problems facing humanity. They drastically shrink military budgets to fund the infrastructure programs intended to reduce waste and pollution and to restrain population growth. Together the Big Three provide adult supervision and a model to the rest of the world—pulling along cooperating countries with financial incentives and technology transfers and pushing away noncomplying countries with tariffs, sanctions, and boycotts. They, along with the less wealthy and developed countries, join a worldwide parade toward a sustainable planet. This is not as pie-in-the-sky as it may sound. There is every reason to expect this will happen, because, in part, it already has happened—just too little, but hopefully not too late.

 We will either join together to help solve the world's problems or we will worsen them with the war of all against all. The future is being written now and the current chapter could not possibly seem more bleak—the United States deeply immersed in its most dystopian dark age. Trump may well be a tipping point—presaging either future worldwide democratic decay and environmental catastrophe, or the crisis before the fever of societal delusion finally breaks. The contingencies of history are often precariously balanced and very evenly matched, the results of the endgame uncertain and unpredictable. Trump has taken away any middle ground—you are either for him and support societal delusion or you are against both. This is no time for responsible people to hide behind passivity or fatalism.

 I am fully aware that no single book can do much to save our brave new world, but we all have our small roles to play in achieving a saner society. As Edmund Burke put it: "Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little." I think we must approach the future with open eyes, open minds, and open hearts—fearing its worst, but working with all our might to bring out its best. We owe no less to our children and grandchildren and their children unto the generations. Imagine the day when your grandchild may ask: "What were you doing when Trump destroyed our world?"

 Rex Mitchell, last modified 9/2/2018