

Small Wins

Howard Richards’
reply to

From Humiliation to Dignity: For a Future of Global
Solidarity:
The Coronavirus Pandemic as Opportunity in the Midst of
Suffering

By Evelin Lindner

“How must we, humankind, arrange our affairs on this planet
so that dignified life will be possible in the long term?”

Contents

Introduction	1
Cause and Effect	5
Small Wins	21

Introduction

Hopefully, many people will contribute to answering Evelin
Lindner`s question. If you are inspired to be one of them, feel

free to send your answer to info@chileufu.cl. You will have at least one reader.

My answer might be called “the theory of small wins.” I did not think of the phrase “small wins” by myself. Adopting it, I offer reasons for believing that small wins, which organizations, movements, and individuals can achieve, can lead to arranging our affairs on this planet so that dignified life will be possible in the long term.

Every year Gavin Andersson and I teach a course at the Graduate School of Business at the University of Cape Town on Ethics, Macroeconomics and Organization. This year we were joined by Camille Meyer, a conscientious business scholar from Belgium. Our students are mature adults who play leadership roles in the public and non-profit sectors as well as in the private sector. Some were born poor to families that were victims of *apartheid*. Others carry on family traditions of professional success and entrepreneurship. By the time they take our course, which comes last at the end of a two-year Executive MBA programme, the members of a cohort have had many opportunities to share ideas and perspectives. The fifth of six topics they are asked to reflect on in their final paper concerns specifically what you as an individual or as a member of an organization or movement can and should do.

A considerable number describe what they personally, or their organizations, can aspire to achieve as “small wins.” Others make the same point using different words. Just as frequently, like the billionaires expecting The Event that Evelin mentions in the article I am replying to, they doubt whether anything they or their organizations can do can prevent inevitable future catastrophes worse than today’s catastrophes. They are optimists more because of an ethical commitment to encourage small wins for constructive change than because they can articulate paths to happy endings.

I would like to take this opportunity to give reasons why achievable “small wins” can add up to making dignified life on this planet possible in the long term. The life experiences that have informed my academic studies and the views I will present below have been, like Gavin’s, and like those of many of our students at Cape Town, about working with people at the bottom level of the economic pyramid as well as about working with people at its middle and upper levels.¹

¹ Gavin Andersson, Raff Carmen, Iván Labra & Howard Richards (2018) Organisation Workshop. Beyond the Workplace: Large Groups, Activity and the Shared Object, *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 25:1, 86-99; Gavin Andersson and Howard Richards, *Unbounded Organizing in Community*. Lake Oswego OR: Dignity

Every year we find that many, perhaps most, of our students can report on “small wins” they had already been achieving before they enrolled in the EMBA. A student from Zambia, who is now a high-ranking business executive, provides an example. Some years ago, he visited a rural part of Zambia where his ancestors had lived. He found that a priority concern of the people was that they had no school. Consequently, their children lacked opportunities to advance in life. His visit encouraged them to come together to create a school for their children where previously there was none. Over the years they succeeded in constructing and staffing a school that became more than a school. The buildings and their grounds also became a community centre. They provide venues for market days, meetings, ceremonies, worship, and sports. Building their school became an opportunity to strengthen their community bonds. Recently they celebrated the first time one of its graduates enrolled in a university course.

Our student contributed financial support himself and was instrumental in organizing support from the government

Press, 2015. Gavin Andersson, *Unbounded Governance: A study of popular development organization*. Germany: Scholars Press, 2018.

and from other private donors, notably other members of the Zambia chapter of a service club called the Round Table.

This example, small as it is in the great scheme of things, might perhaps also be classified as one of the middle-sized wins already achieved reported by our students at Cape Town. As I develop my theory, I will try to make it clear that the concept of small wins also refers to innumerable smaller contributions already being made to making life on this planet sustainable in the long term. It refers to innumerable wins that are won by humans who do not have the resources and the contacts of a corporate executive.

Unfortunately, the positive innumerable is still outweighed by the negative innumerable. So far, the small wins are not being achieved on a scale large enough to remove humankind and many other animals, and many plants, from the endangered species list.

Cause and Effect

A doctor first, before writing a prescription, makes a diagnosis determining the cause of the problem. Without knowing the cause, or at least making a good faith effort to do

the best human reason can do to determine the cause, it is not responsible to prescribe a cure.

The French philosopher and historian of science Georges Canguilhem, who was like Evelin a medical doctor, stated that every practicing physician knows that to find causes it is necessary to delve beneath the surface and not just to look at superficial appearances.

Canguilhem's reason for making that statement was that in every day clinical experience many of the patients who seek advice believe that their symptoms mean that they are seriously ill, when in reality they are well. Other patients believe they are well, when in fact they are sick.²

More generally, any intentional action presupposes a belief that the action will produce the result that is intended. For example, when one turns on a light, one believes that flipping the switch will cause the light to go on, even when one

² Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological*. New York: Zone Books, 1991. This is an English translation of a work that began as Canguilhem's 1943 doctoral dissertation, went through several versions in French during his lifetime, and has been further developed by followers since his death. For an update see Frédéric Mathieu, *Les valeurs de la vie* (2014), available on Amazon and other sites as an e-book.

realizes that there is a possibility that the light bulb is burnt out, breaking the normal causal and effect nexus, and frustrating one's intention.

In politics and economics, persuading professional opinion and the general public that one diagnosis of cause and effect is valid science, while a competing diagnosis is pseudo-science, is a high-stakes game played by major movers and shakers. The Koch brothers, for example, who controlled the largest privately owned business in the United States, together with a network of conservative donors they organized, funded think tanks, university chairs, print media and electronic media. They were hugely successful in persuading governments and voters that neoliberal diagnoses and prescriptions are rational, while left-leaning diagnoses and prescriptions are irrational.³

³ Christopher Leonard, *Kochland*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2019; Richard Cockett. *Thinking The Unthinkable: Think-Tanks and the Economic Counter-Revolution, 1931–1983*, London: Harper Collins, 1994. Online digital edition, Cambridge University Press 2008.

Now Evelin Lindner, with no funding from the Koch Foundation or anyone else, while devoting herself to caring for her aging father in a small town in Germany, offers a diagnosis and a prescription that are more psychological, and less, or less directly, political and economic.

The diagnosis: “Present-day’s most definitorial systemic humiliation is a world-system that gives priority to profit maximization rather than common good maximization, a state of affairs that sends humiliation into every corner of the world.”

The prescription: “...global care for the common good...”

Before proceeding to sketch a path to making life possible in the long term, answering her question while agreeing with her diagnosis and prescription, I would like to make a point about words, among others the words I am writing on this page in a small town in Chile and the words Evelin wrote on another page in a small town in Germany.

My point is that at any given time and place, and in any given situation, we make choices about which words to use.

Our choices are actions. A discourse, or language game (*Sprachspiel*),⁴ combines speech acts with physical acts.

For Evelin, advocating a care ethic is not separate from caring for her father. Caring for her father is a small win. There is one less lonely and depressed old man in the world, inclined toward suicide.⁵

This point about humans choosing words, can be extended to say that what they are talking about is often unaffected by what the humans choose to call it. It can be further elaborated in the light of Abraham Maslow's seminal 1943 paper, "A Theory of Human Motivation."⁶ Maslow's paper begins as an interpretation and summary of what was then known about human motivation. It turns into a study of human needs. In the notes at the end it defines an ethic, namely: "The 'good' or healthy society would then be defined

⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1958.

⁵ Emile Durkheim, *Suicide*. London: Routledge, 1952. French first edition 1897. Durkheim found empirically that lonely people are prone to suicide, and that suicide was more frequent in the most modern parts of Europe, and less frequent in the more traditional areas.

⁶ Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, Volume 50, pages 370-396.

as one that permitted man's highest purposes to emerge by satisfying all his prepotent basic needs." (p.20)

But Maslow did not switch from one subject to another. It is not as if he started to write about motivation, and then changed his topic to needs, and then at the end ventured into the field of ethics. Rather, his object of study, what he was trying to understand, stayed the same. What changed was his perspective. He drew on more than one vocabulary, employing words with different histories and origins.

Similarly, when I propose moral and ethical education as a key to finding a path to making life on this planet possible in the long term, I am not leaving behind biology, physics, chemistry, psychology, sociology or history. There is no separate class of phenomena studied by a separate science called "ethics." I am recommending a perspective. It is a functional and realist perspective. It is shared with biologists like Humberto Maturana, Francisco Varela, C.H. Waddington, David Sloan Wilson, and — going farther back in time — Charles Darwin,⁷ and shared with many scholars in other

⁷ Humberto Maturana and Gerda Verden-Zöller, *The Origin of Humanness in the Biology of Love*. Upton Pyne UK: Imprint Academic, 2008. Francisco Varela, *Ethical Know-How: Action, Wisdom and Cognition*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992.

disciplines besides biology. The human species is a species that is unable to adapt and survive without cooperating, and it is unable to cooperate without sharing one or another way to distinguish right from wrong, good from bad.

I am recommending *seeing* humankind's main real-world problems and their solutions as “moral”, or, if you prefer, “ethical”. (I omit a discussion of reasons why some people treat “morals” and “ethics” as synonyms, while others distinguish between the two.) Specifically, the catastrophe Evelin identifies as “a world-system that gives priority to profit maximization rather than common good maximization” can be *seen as* a moral catastrophe that requires a constructive and functional moral solution.

Such a constructive and functional moral solution, as a first approximation and example, might replace Kant's very influential proposal for putting morality and ethics on a rational foundation: the categorical imperative. Kant called on all humanity to act in such a way that the maxim (i.e. principle) of their action could conceivably become a universal

David Sloan Wilson, *Darwin's Cathedral*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011. C.H. Waddington, *The Ethical Animal*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1960. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*. London: Penguin Classics, 2004. (First Edition 1871).

law. The test of whether it can become universal is a logical test. For example — to take the example Kant used most often — it could not be a universal law to fail to pay your debts. If everybody failed to pay their debts, then the word “debt” would have no meaning. A world where there were debts, but nobody ever paid them is inconceivable, a logical impossibility.

I propose as a replacement a rewriting of Kant: Act in such a way, that if everybody acted as you act, then dignified life on this planet would be possible in the long term.

Let me assume now that the rules of the social game set by any given society’s social norms, which it is convenient to refer to as its morals or ethics, have the remarkable causal powers that I, the evolutionary biologists I have cited, and many others, attribute to them. Without such causes, major effects, namely the existence of human beings, their flourishing, their rising to dominate life on this planet, and now the trends which if continued will lead to humankind’s extinction, would never have happened.

Given this assumption, let me try to spell out what it might mean to supersede giving priority to profit

maximization, and to nurture instead giving priority to common good maximization.

The simplest way to approach this complicated subject might be to sketch five common errors and misconceptions. What devoting oneself or one's organization to meeting human needs in harmony with nature *does not mean* might be more easily understood than what it does mean.

One common misconception is that it serves the interests of the rich to keep the poor poor. The truth is that at this point in history nothing would better serve the interests of the rich than an end to poverty and its inevitable sequels uncontrollable violence, irrational exploitation of nature, disease, and despair.⁸

A related misconception is that when, as regularly happens, global agreements to take action to reverse climate change, are violated and shelved, or reversed (as in the cases of Trump in the USA and Bolsonaro in Brazil) the cause of such effects is the “power” of profit-seeking corporations and

⁸ Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level*. London: Allen Lane, 2009.

of the shareholders who pocket their profits. (Let me explain later why I put “power” in scare quotes.)

It would be more accurate to say that at this point in history, monetary self-interest and expectations of monetary gain have become the fuel that drives the system. Accountants speak of ROI, Return on Investment, which is one of the main forms of this driver. Without its fuel the system stops. Nobody is employed. Nothing is produced (except in the many other economies that also exist in the world alongside the dominant system commonly called “the economy”). Nobody eats.

As Karl Marx insightfully viewed capitalist production, production begins when the capitalist enters the market as a buyer, buying labour power in order to use it.⁹ If the capitalists do not choose to invest in starting production — which they will not do if they do not expect profits — nothing else happens. Production does not start. The monthly pay check needed to pay the monthly bills does not arrive.

⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital*. Various editions. E.g. Volume One, Part Three, Chapter Seven, Section One.

Viewed in a larger context, such behaviour by capitalists is the same as everyone else's behaviour when human relationships are uncaring. A single individual can be as selfish as a giant multinational corporation.

Managers of other people's money are not supposed to be selfish personally but are supposed to conform to the rules of a selfish system. They are constrained by liberal ethics to obey the prudent man rule. This means that money managers and corporate executives are required to act as it is assumed the owners of the assets they are managing would act if they were managing their assets themselves. The prudent man is assumed to want more money at less risk. Managers are required to maximize profits and minimize risk, prudently balancing the two. Thus, ethics itself, often hardened into laws enforced by civil liability or criminal punishment, is reframed to serve the default settings of social arrangements that assume and require sacrificing neighbour and nature for a presumed benefit of self. (Today, in the 21st century, everything in this paragraph is being questioned and

modified, as stakeholder capitalism gains ground and shareholder capitalism loses ground.¹⁰⁾

Different authors have tried to capture the essence of what the rules of the game we are playing are doing to us, choosing different words, and identifying different patterns of cause and effect. For Montesquieu¹¹ (1689-1755) and Friedrich von Hayek¹² (1899-1992) and for many others, the classic social arrangements of capitalist modernity are named by the word “Liberty.” For Theodor Adorno, the essence of modernity is captured by the word *Tauschprinzip*¹³. Exchange. Similarly, André Orléan chooses the phrase *séparation marchande*. Separation. Separation identified with deals. The only way I can get what I need from others is

¹⁰ For example, Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret, *Covid-19: The Great Reset*. Geneva: Forum Publishers, 2020.

¹¹ For Montesquieu liberty was the right to do whatever the law permits. Since Aristotle coined the term, ethics has traditionally stood for a third option, the first being freedom to do as one pleases, and the second legal restraint. The third is self-discipline. As Aristotle put it, a well-educated person finds pleasure in virtue, while a badly educated person finds pleasure in vice.

¹² Von Hayek visited Chile in 1981 during the Pinochet dictatorship. In a lecture at the Centro de Estudios Públicos on the topic, “The morals of a free society” he argued that those morals have only two principles: liberty and property.

¹³ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970.

to strike deals awakening in them a desire to give it to me.¹⁴ Authors like Adorno and Orléan deserve more attention because they highlight the catastrophic downsides of the same institutions whose upsides are highlighted when they are simplistically identified with liberty or freedom.

A third misconception — here I have an opportunity to explain why I put “power” in scare quotes — is that there exists a power elite which could change the basic rules of the game, and transform them into adaptive and functional rules which would enable all humankind to live dignified lives in harmony with nature now and forever after, if only the power elite would choose to do so. My view is that George Eliot described the true situation better in an evocation of the spirit of the Christmas holidays in published in 1860:

But old Christmas smiled as he laid this cruel-seeming spell on the outdoor world, for he meant to light up home with new brightness, to deepen all the richness of indoor colour, and give a keener edge of delight to the warm fragrance of food; he meant to prepare a sweet imprisonment that would strengthen the primitive fellowship of kindred, and make the sunshine of

¹⁴ André Orléan, *L'Empire de la valeur. Refonder l'économie*. Paris: Seuil, 2011.

familiar human faces as welcome as the hidden day-star. His kindness fell but hardly on the homeless, — fell but hardly on the homes where the hearth was not very warm, and where the food had little fragrance; where the human faces had had no sunshine in them, but rather the leaden, blank-eyed gaze of unexpectant want. But the fine old season meant well; and if he has not learned the secret how to bless men impartially, it is because his father Time, with ever-unrelenting purpose, still hides that secret in his own mighty, slow-beating heart.¹⁵

A fourth misconception is that the poor countries are poor because their productivity is low. This common view seems obviously true if one assumes, as the Washington Consensus assumed, that the way to lead the poor out of poverty is to raise the market value of what they have to sell. The paralyzing mental model behind this view is that the only way out of poverty is to sell your labour-power or to sell something else that you are lucky enough to possess — an accomplishment which is only possible if there are customers able and willing to buy what you have to sell.¹⁶ It is obviously

¹⁵ From Chapter Twelve of *The Mill on the Floss*. (various editions)

¹⁶ This mental model is deconstructed in Howard Richards with Gavin Andersson, *Economic Theory and Community Development*. Lake Oswego OR: Dignity Press, 2021. Chapter Five gives details on its failure in South Africa's unsuccessful post-apartheid war against

false if one expects that existing resources and new resources now in the pipeline of new technologies¹⁷, can be mobilized in ways that cure today's mental and moral paralysis. Gandhi's quip, "there is enough for everyone's needs but not enough for everyone's greed" is true today in spades.

A fifth misconception is that whatever the problem may be, governments can solve it. More specifically, if one starts assuming that most human problems are solved by markets efficiently allocating resources, one can continue by assuming that any market failures there may be can be corrected by government intervention.

But today the sovereignty of nations, whether democratic or not, is crippled by globalization. It is crippled by fiscal competition with each country lowering taxes to attract capital and to prevent capital flight. The state is crippled by unpayable public debts, and by the necessity to stay on good terms with the lenders who refinance short term debt as it comes due. It is crippled by the evasion of taxes by large

poverty. It was refuted in eleven words by Mother Teresa when she said, "Poverty will end when we learn to share with the poor."

¹⁷ Peter Diamandis and Steven Kotler, *Abundance: The Future Is Better Than You Think*. New York: Free Press, 2012.

transnational companies, by tax havens with accounts under secret names. Nobody knows how much their value is or who owns them. In many states corruption and/or violence have virtually dissolved the rule of law, while the rule of law, where it exists, ties the hands of governments with international treaties that cancel national sovereignty in favour of global law in many areas; including intellectual property, foreign investment, credit and debt, and the flow in and out of capital. Already in the 1970s Jürgen Habermas made the case that in late capitalism the market is the primary institution. Governments are secondary; they must adjust to the dictates of markets.¹⁸ More recently, Jeffrey Winters analysed what he called the locational revolution created by the power of wealth to choose which laws to obey by choosing where to locate operations and investments.¹⁹

There is a large literature debating issues raised in the preceding paragraph. Much of it argues that the decline of the power of the state has been exaggerated and emphasizes that who controls state power still matters. Much of it agrees with

¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Legitimation Crisis*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1974.

¹⁹ Jeffrey Winters, *Power in Motion: Capital Mobility and the Indonesian State*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.

Amartya Sen²⁰ and others that concepts of public action must expand to include contributions of non-state actors to solving problems that governments were previously thought to be capable of solving.

My conclusion is that achieving global care for the common good requires working with the causal powers that mainly determine the course of history. Those causal powers are located more in the rules of the game than in its players.

Small Wins

By “small wins” I mean:

1. An accomplishment that is possible within the “rules of the game” (also known as social structures) that already exist at a given time and place. Due to global neoliberalism, expressed for example by the rules enforced through the World Trade Organization (WTO), these rules are perhaps more the same throughout the planet than they have been at any previous point in

²⁰ Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze, *Hunger and Public Action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

history; nevertheless they vary a great deal from place to place as well as from time to time.

2. An accomplishment that nurtures the growth of more caring rules (aka structures). Our student's support for building community around a school in rural Zambia would be an example.
3. Thinking of myself, or of a particular reader of these pages, something I, or you, or some organization we belong to, can do.

There are already many caring people in the world. They engage in discourses and practices that, if they were more widespread, would tip the odds in favour of making dignified life possible in the long term. Thinking about what I can do is a matter of thinking about how I might help shift the balance in favour of the positive innumerable.

I have misgivings about using the word "win." It suggests a more adversarial and less cooperative approach than what I have in mind. I keep using it because it resonates with people I talk to. I am open to suggestions from anybody who might come up with a better word choice.

As a next step, I will say more about what I mean by "rule" and "structure" and about why I think small wins can

add up to liberation from the basic rules of the game and the basic social structures that at present hold humankind, and all of life, captive.²¹

I adopt the concept of “rule” proposed by Herbert L. A. Hart (1907–1992) who held the chair of Professor of Jurisprudence at Oxford.²² For Hart the defining features of rules are three in number:

1. A rule is a kind of behaviour generally practiced in a given society or culture.

It follows that if and when our student and his fellow members of the Zambian chapter of the Round Table, generally practice responsible stewardship of the assets they manage, serving the common good, then the rules of the game change, insofar as they are defined by what is customarily done.

²¹ See chapter eight, “The Imaginary World that Holds the Real World Captive” in *Economic Theory and Community Development*, previously cited.

²² H.L.A. Hart, *The Concept of Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961. See also the discussions of rules in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1958: and in Rom Harré and Paul Secord, *The Explanation of Social Behaviour*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1972.

2. Violation of a rule gives others a license to criticize, and in some cases to punish.

It follows that if and when there is general condemnation, perhaps leading to punishment, of putting profit maximization ahead of common good maximization — as is happening now as pharmaceutical companies are criticized for withholding vaccine against Covid 19 from nations unable to pay for it — the rules are changing. A small win.

3. Rules have an internal aspect. People employ them in their own minds and thoughts to guide their own conduct.

It follows that the moral development of persons, and of the groups they identify with (of their “generalized others”²³), changes the rules, insofar as they are defined by each person’s internal moral compass. The EMBA programme at Cape Town, where students learn to practice mindfulness to become more aware of their own feelings, thoughts and bodies, provides examples.

²³ George Herbert Mead, “The Genesis of the Self and Social Control,” *International Journal of Ethics*. Volume 35 (1925) pp. 251-277.

Regarding the concept of “social structure,” I adopt the thinking of Douglas Porpora and Tony Lawson. They will have to speak for themselves regarding exactly what they mean. I can only report on my own takeaways.

Social structures organize material positions constituted by cultural rules.²⁴ The cultural rules of basic structures are typically hardened as laws enforced by the coercive power of the state. The positions are material because they have physical consequences, including separating haves from have-nots. Amartya Sen gave examples in his study of famines. Regarding one famine, if you only read the newspapers or watched TV news, you might have believed that there was a famine because there was a flood. In fact, as in all recent famines, there was food for people with money to pay for it. The flood destroyed the rice seedlings in the fields, leaving poor people who normally eked out a living transplanting rice seedlings with no work, consequently no money, and therefore no food. They starved because they occupied the material position of would-be buyers with no money.²⁵

²⁴ Porpora, Douglas V. Cultural Rules and Material Relations, *Sociological Theory*. Volume 11 (1993) pages 212-229.

²⁵ Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

The concept of social structure is more sociological than anthropological. It fits what Gavin Andersson calls bounded organizations. Its native ground is the modern West. The structures it is mainly about are markets. Following Tony Lawson, the material positions that define structures are themselves defined by the rights and obligations of the persons (or the corporations granted the status of persons by a legal fiction) who are occupying a given position at a given time.²⁶ (It is important to notice that the social structures tend to persist in time, reproducing themselves generation after generation while flesh and blood human beings are born, live and die.) Rights are above all property rights. Duties are few; most problems are “not my problem.”

Structures change when and if people and organizations voluntarily commit to being more responsible and more caring than the laws require them to be. What Sen calls voluntary public action can pave the way for formal legal structures to adjust later to sums of small wins that have already shaped more functional and more adaptive discourses and practices.²⁷

²⁶ Tony Lawson, *The Nature of Social Reality: Issues in Social Ontology*. London: Routledge, 2019. p. 228

²⁷ Magnus Haavelsrud and his co-authors including Alicia Cabezudo make a similar point at greater length. Education can change culture. Discord between culture and social structure tends to

The more adaptive discourses and practices can be revivals of what has worked in the past as well as social innovations created in the present. Here I would like to quote some words from a memo Gavin wrote for a discussion group of the Unbounded Academy:

Against this model [the model of bounded organization HR] we start to see an older pattern, observed through centuries into the ancient past, reasserting itself. Unbounded organization happens across organizations and hierarchies, in collaborative efforts between organizations, in linkages across sectors (business, government and civil society), in neighbourhood initiatives, in learning circles, and spiritual fellowship. Invariably these efforts address the common good: organizing for life and nature.

The older pattern Gavin sees in present trends is often associated with post-colonial thinking and with cognitive justice. He makes the point that arranging humankind's affairs on this planet so that dignified life will be possible in the long term need not be a leap into the unknown. It can be a return to the tried and true, to practices of reciprocity and

be resolved in favour of culture. Magnus Haavelsrud, *Education in Developments*. Volume Three. Oslo: Arena, 2020. A kindle edition is available on line.

redistribution that have proven their worth for hundreds and sometimes thousands of years. Ancient wisdom is often more in tune with the hardwired tendencies of the human body than today's risk society²⁸ with its long working hours, undependable employment, constant stress, and shattered family life.²⁹

Today we can adopt wisdom from the past without having to repeat the past as it really happened. We can mine the past for gems and disregard the tailings. What worked in the past, but subsequently fell into eclipse alongside what Shiv Visvanathan calls the “defeated epistemologies”³⁰ can now be safely and selectively recovered. From Confucius we can learn about music and rites and sincerity without replicating the status of women in China in 500 B.C. From Aristotle we can learn about becoming a good person by forming good habits — as both western traditions and Islamic traditions have — while deleting his views — which were those of his time, class, and place — on slavery. Meanwhile, the earth story provided

²⁸ Ulrich Beck, *The Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage, 1994.

²⁹ See the beginning of Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam, 1995.

³⁰ Shiv Visvanathan, *A Carnival for Science*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

by natural sciences that are taught in almost every school in the world prepares almost all humankind to hear Greta Thunberg. As Evelin says in her article, now photographs from space show us that we all live together on one fragile blue planet.

The older pattern now reasserting itself, noted is only one source, or one set of sources, of good ideas for making dignified life possible in the long term. Another source is the conversations that have been organized since 2001 through the World Social Forum (WSF) and its affiliates.³¹ The WSF was itself organized as an alternative and a counterweight to the World Economic Forum (WEF), founded by Klaus Schwab, which has been organizing conversations since 1971. And there are many other thinkers thinking hard, coming up with new ideas and reviving old ones, hoping to contribute to systemic transformations that will transform *homo sapiens* into a species with long term viability.

I do not believe that whether dignified life has a long term future depends on the outcome of clashes between incompatible interests, articulated as incompatible starting

³¹ I am an active member of one of them, the one developing a global curriculum in solidarity economics.

points leading to incompatible conclusions . To explain the reasons that lead me to this non-belief, it will be convenient to sketch the six stages of the development of moral reasoning that Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987) and his colleagues, building on the work of Jean Piaget (1896–1980) identified in the thousands of people they interviewed.³²

Pre-Conventional (One and Two)

Stage One — Good and bad behaviour are defined by reward and punishment by authority figures, i.e. by self-interest in being rewarded or punished.

Stage Two — Deals. Quid pro quo. You scratch my back and I scratch yours.

Conventional (Three and Four)

Stage Three — The good boy/good girl attitude. The person wants to be regarded by others as a good person.

Stage Four — The social order maintaining orientation. The person identifies with the need to maintain the social order and to defend it.

Post-Conventional (Five and Six)

³² See the Wikipedia article “Lawrence Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development.”

Stage Five — Scepticism and justification. The existing social order is not automatically or obviously right. Justifications for what it is or should be tend to be found in consent (social contract, elections) and/or in the utilitarian criterion of the greatest good for the greatest number.

Stage Six — Universal ethical principles.

The distinction between pre-conventional and conventional can be applied cross-culturally, not because morals are the same everywhere, but because most Chinese children — unlike Kohlberg's original American interviewees — grow up to be normal conventional Chinese. The validity of the concepts of post conventional stages five and six is doubtful. They are perhaps best abandoned and replaced by the observation that in all or most cultures there are mature thoughtful people who reflect on moral issues.

In retrospect, perhaps the greatest importance of Kohlberg's work is that the concept of a care ethic was first formulated in response to it. When I think of small wins today, I think of small wins for a care ethic. Carol Gilligan first formulated the idea as an objection to Kohlberg's finding

that women usually finished their moral development at stage three and did not advance to higher stages.³³

But an ethics of care, while it corrects gender bias, also facilitates another important achievement. As an ethics founded on attending to needs and responding to needs, it corrects libertarian ethics that set individual utility maximization in stone, set the rules of the game of free market economics in stone, and consequently set giving priority to profit maximization over common good maximization in stone. It bypasses 18th century European jurisprudence, not abandoning justice as fairness, but placing it in a less mythical and more realistic context. A care ethic fits well with emphasizing the roles of women in the history and prehistory of the species. It puts coping with the crises of the 21st century in a broader context, opening closed doors and closed minds.

Hoping to open some doors and some minds, I would like to suggest a novel idea: The long term prospects for humankind depend mainly on augmenting the numbers of people at stage three or above, in other words on augmenting

³³ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.

the numbers of people displaying normal forms and degrees of good will and rationality.

Where good will and rationality prevail, it may still be possible for people with incompatible mental models to reach consensus on how to deal with an existential crisis like climate change or economic collapse. If they cannot reach consensus they can reach a pragmatic compromise. When, as in Germany in 1932,³⁴ a growing proportion of the population is driven by unreasoning anger and bogus hate narratives to engage in anti-social violent behaviour³⁵, hope dims.

Recent events in Chile, the United States, and South Africa motivate my thinking.

Consider Chile. In October of 2019 a rise in subway fares triggered mass protests. More than 1.2 million people crowded Plaza Baquedano in Santiago, with corresponding numbers protesting throughout the country. As I heard their

³⁴ Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1941. Fromm is another author who highlights the catastrophic downsides of the same institutions whose upsides are highlighted when they are simplistically identified with liberty or freedom.

³⁵ Arie Kruglanski et al, *The Three Pillars of Radicalization: Needs, Narratives and Networks*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. (Studies of the socialization of terrorists).

message in the demonstrations where I was present, they were saying “We can’t live” as George Floyd said “I can’t breathe.” We can’t pay the light bill, or the water bill; we run out of food at the end of the month. A rise in subway fares may be nothing to you, but to us it means we can’t get to work. As one placard read, *Luchar hasta que vale la pena vivir*. Struggle until life is worth living. (My hearing of what their placards and chants were saying might have been influenced by a then recent presentation by a Chilean economist analyzing the incomes and expenses of the poor at our dialogue home. Whether or not “We can’t live” was what they meant to say, it was true. If I had paid more attention to their words, and less to what I knew about their budgets, I would have been more focussed on their demands for dignity.)

The immediate response of the non-poor general public was to agree with the demands of the protesters. Public opinion polls showed overwhelming support for reinventing Chile.

Then came the spoilers. First the professional thieves. They were not poor. They had trucks. They used them to move stolen refrigerators and big screen TVs to their warehouses, as businesses were looted before they were burned to the ground. Then the unprofessional police. They

repressed demonstrators with levels of brutality that seasoned observers from the UN found shocking. Violence escalated on both sides; leading to 36 deaths, over 500 businesses destroyed in Valparaiso alone³⁶, over 12,000 injuries and over 28,000 arrests. Wanton violence included destroying stations and tracks of the metro, shutting down the mass transit facility where a rise in fares had triggered the crisis. But it was not violence committed by majorities symbolized by the 1.2 million people who had crowded Plaza Baquedano. In Chile violence is, and hopefully will continue to be, an option of minorities. Among the 28,000 arrested, virtually all had numerous prior arrests.³⁷ A tragic result was polarization. Millions are unable to forgive the violence of (some of) the police. Millions are unable to forgive the violence of (some of) the demonstrators.

Faced with a national crisis, the political right and the political left quickly agreed on a pact for social peace, including a process for writing a new constitution.

Somewhat similar, although far from identical, accounts could be given of the January 6 insurrection in the United

³⁶ The only city for which I have a number.

³⁷ Press reports did not specify what the prior arrests were for.

States, and of the July 2021 insurrection in South Africa. In each case it is plausible to assume that the majority of the adult population is made up of normal conventional human beings, who if tested would fall in Kohlberg's categories three or four.

Nevertheless, the massive humiliation Evelin describes in her article, and other factors studied by other authors,³⁸ appear to be creating massive shortages of good will and rationality; as climate change is leading to massive wildfires, heat waves, high winds and floods.

I am tempted to add two more "stages" to Kohlberg's six, making a total of eight.³⁹

"Stage" Zero. Defies authority. Angry. Irrational, but often composing or consuming bogus pseudo-rational and pseudo-moral claims or narratives.

³⁸ See Habermas and Goldman cited above, and Douglas Porpora et al, *Post-Ethical Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

³⁹ I put "stages" in scare quotes because they are not moral reasoning stages as Kohlberg or Piaget define stages.

“Stage” Minus One. Socialized to participate in organized anti-social violence⁴⁰, or psychopathic due to physical defects of the brain either from birth or due to subsequent accidents.

In 2021 humankind’s fate is to confront complex existential threats like climate change, handicapped by the complex psychodynamics of growing mass insanity like Trumpism. I am defending the thesis that small wins can add up to global care for the common good. I close listing seven opportunities to achieve small wins.

1. I may be able to achieve a small win wholly within my own control by reconsidering my budget. Do I have any more discretionary surplus to contribute to the common good ? Any that should be reprioritized ? Surplus of time. Surplus of money? Surplus of something else? This is important because if we are going to advocate sharing surplus we have to practice it.

⁴⁰ Kruglanski et al, cited above. Patrick Forscher and Nour Kteily, "A Psychological Profile of the Alt-Right". *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. Volume 15 (2020) pp. 90–116.

2. Proposing a similar analysis for the budget of a family or an organization I belong to.
3. For many reasons, the future is calling us to help make people feel secure in the present. To feel the basic trust Erik Erikson ascribes to a healthy newcomer to this world. And to feel appreciated. People are more likely to restructure their thinking to meet stage three standards if they feel that their efforts to be a good person are acknowledged and appreciated by others. Many opportunities to affirm other people are opportunities for many small wins.
4. But our verbal reassurances, and even hugs and kisses, are just bla bla when relating to people have no money in their pockets and no food on their plates. Empty pockets and plates can be experienced as rejection, or as a generalized hypocrisy committed by the generalized other; as lying hatred deserving hate in return. Volunteering to cook or serve community meals may mean attending to glum and embarrassed people who do not look you in the face because they do not want to be charity cases, because they do not want to be there and wish you were not there either. But at least it proves, even to the most resentful, that their

worst fantasies about their social status are not true. A small win.

5. We need small wins in university classrooms and in public policy debates too. We must deconstruct the illusion that development defined as economic growth will lead to the populations of the developing world enjoying the same (non-existent) happiness already imagined to be enjoyed by all Europeans and all Americans. Growth will not. Caring will.
6. We must deconstruct the illusion that training more and more people to qualify for employment will result in more employment. Further, it is not possible to pay everybody wages out of wage funds created by the sale of the products their labour contributes to making.⁴¹ More generally, one person's purchase is another's sale; total purchases must equal total sales; therefore it is impossible for everyone to win the economic game by selling more than they buy, thus ending up with more cash than debts; therefore in market exchange where making money is the objective, there are

⁴¹ For a more detailed treatment of this and related points see Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*. London: Routledge Classics, 2003. First German edition 1913.

losers.⁴² Dignified employment (or more generally dignified livelihoods) for all requires sharing surplus, e.g. profits and rents. John Locke's principle that a person deserves to be paid the market value of what she or he produces, which was the basis for Smith's theory of wages and for orthodox wage theory ever since, must be abandoned and replaced by Martin Luther King Jr.'s principle that we are one human family living in one world house.⁴³ Job training will not solve the problem. Sharing will.

Getting this point across in a classroom or a public policy debate is a small win. Putting it into practice is a middle-sized win, perhaps a big win.

7. The transition to stage three may fail because of getting off to a bad start in life a decade earlier, because of trauma and neglect in early childhood.⁴⁴ To serve the cause of augmenting the supply of rational

⁴² That the resulting mountains of unpayable debt are inherently unstable was demonstrated in a series of books and articles by Hyman Minsky.

⁴³ For details see *Economic Theory and Community Development*, previously mentioned.

⁴⁴ Kohlberg made this point when I took his summer school course at Harvard. I do not know whether it appears in his published writings.

people of good will, and for other reasons the love of early childhood caregivers matters. Playing beautiful music for the unborn child still in the womb is a small win. According to a traditional African custom, the pregnant mother composed a song for her yet unborn child, which would become her or his song from birth all through life and would be sung at his or her funeral.⁴⁵ Reviving this kind of custom, the kind that celebrates every life of every person, and strengthening them where they already exist (as in celebrating birthdays), would be a series of small wins. A glorious welcome to the world for the newborn at the moment of birth is a small win. When due to drug or alcohol abuse or for some other reason the mother is incompetent, grandma or papa stepping in as a reliable caregiver is a small win, and the more so if grandpa is reliable too. When the mother is competent, she needs support, especially if she works, hopefully including support from a devoted father, and

⁴⁵ Another African tradition worth remembering was that the land was thought to belong to the tribe, while the tribe was defined to include its now deceased ancestors and its future members not yet born.

ideally including support from outside the household because the household itself is supported by what M.L. King, following the American philosopher Josiah Royce, called a “beloved community.”⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Martin Luther King Jr, *Where Do We Go From Here? Chaos or Community*. Boston: Beacon Press. 1967.