—Chapter Six—

Respecting the Wisdom of Limits

"Oh, it is excellent
to have a Giant strength, but it is tyrannous
To use it like a Giant"

Shakespeare

"How cautious are the wise."

—Homer

"Do not try to live forever. You will not succeed."

—George Bernard Shaw

Of our themes, the next—the need to confront new and often inviolable limits—seems initially most obvious and straightforward. But understood from a mature perspective, its implications are particularly provocative. Much at the heart of today's crisis of purpose and hope ties to questions of what is possible and what is not, and to the often unexpected implications of our answers.

We face an increasing array of constraints that are impossible to transcend in any conventional sense, many of major consequence. Some are particular to our times: newly inescapable environmental limits; social limits such as those to the guidance that conventional notions of leadership, love, or morality can provide. Others are more basic, such as limits inherent to our human capacities and fundamental limits to understanding itself. Easily we keep such limits far at arm's length, and understandably—they can seem to leave us nowhere to go. But confronting such limits and making sense of what they ask of us will be essential—for our future wellbeing and ultimately for our survival.

Inviolable limits should also play a central role in catalyzing the braoder maturity of thought and action the future demands. For many people it is limits that first make the depth of the challenges we face and the need for a something like what Cultural Maturity describes inescapable. The way Cultural Maturity reframes the significance of limits also supports the willingness to embrace them. Cultural Maturity views inviolable limits not as the end of the road, but as an invitation to journey in more full and ultimately creative

ways. Again apparent paradox: Recognizing today's necessary no's makes both comprehensible and possible tomorrow's new yes's.

Some further reflections from the stretching exercise (focusing on health care and environmental limits) get us started:

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Bill (a physician): I have a health care question.

CJ: Sure.

Bill: What kind of health care delivery system do you think makes most sense? A free-market, fee for service approach like we've had? A single payer, more centralized approach? I'm now part of a managed care system. People assumed managed care would increase quality of care and reduce costs. But today I have much less time to spend with each patient than I did ten years ago, and costs have not stopped rising.

CJ: I know few more complex and entangling dilemmas than health care delivery. Health care expenditures are spiraling uncontrollably with no natural end in sight. Escalating costs are nobody's fault.[1] They are a product primarily of modern medicine's great success. Early innovations—like sterile technique and penicillin—were relatively cheap. More recent advances—sophisticated diagnostic procedures, exotic new medications, transplant surgeries, and more—are increasingly expensive and promise only to get more so. But while blame accomplishes little, if nothing changes we face real problems. Somehow we must do things differently.

Bill: And the kind of managed care I've been involved with as a solution?

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[1]   This is not to say that inefficiencies and excesses—on the part of doctors, hospitals, drug companies, and insurance companies—have not played contributing roles. But, while necessary to address, these factors have not been the primary drivers of escalating costs, and correcting them won't provide ultimate solutions.

CJ: Managed care provides some benefits, but as far as addressing cost-containment's underlying dilemma, it doesn't, by itself, do any better than the old physician-centered model. It has been a stopgap measure at best. People hoped that putting decisions in the hands of a third party would reduce costs by eliminating inefficiencies and the most obvious of unnecessary procedures. Short term it often did. But, predictably, costs again have risen and vulnerable populations again put at risk.

Bill: What are we missing?

CJ: A fact that should be obvious, but which stretches us so fundamentally that we do our best to keep it "out of sight and out of mind." Unless we are willing to spend an ever-expanding percentage of national resources on health, we have no choice but to put limits on health care spending.

        Initially that means cutting back on procedures that do not have proven benefit. Studies suggest that one third of health care expenditures relate to serves that don't really help and may ultimately do harm. But while greater attention to efficacy will help, it can't be enough. Eventually, too, we must be willing to restrict care that may benefit, but which is simply too expensive.

        That means confronting the dreaded "r" word—I'll say it, rationing. We have to limit available medical services. While we've effectively rationed care in the U.S. by making it difficult for people who can't afford care to get it, rationing care in the sense of making the conscious choice to limit treatment is something new—and understandably unsettling to contemplate.

        But there is no other option. To deny this fact is simply to have our heads in the sand. It is also to waste our time developing policies that cannot ultimately work. In the current health care debate, neither the Left nor the Right has provided the necessary leadership. The Left claims that what it puts forward won't result in the limiting of care—and unfortunately they are correct. The Right uses the word rationing as a condemning epithet. Both positions not only leave us short of useful answers, they ignore the hard and necessary questions.

Bill: Hmm.

CJ: It might seem strange that we could miss such an obvious reality. A high school student could do the numbers. But in fact it is not strange. Effectively confronting health care limits presents a whole new order of moral challenge. Not providing care when we have effective care to offer at least calls into question modern medicine's defeat-disease-at-any-cost heroic mythology. But that is only a beginning. Rationing care demands a new relationship with life's ultimate limit—with death.

Medicine has always been about life and death decisions. But limiting care demands in effect the conscious choosing of death. Withholding care that might delay death's arrival is different only in name. Limiting care requires a maturity in our relationship with death that was not before necessary, nor, I would argue, within our human capacity to handle.[2]

We've before chosen death for others in a more limited sense. But in times past, the "others" have always been people fundamentally different from ourselves, such as enemies and criminals.[3] Imbedded in our cultural mores has been the assumption—I think accurate—that anything else risked starting down a slippery slope that we likely could not manage (as with Nazi death camp atrocities performed in the name of medical research).

Bill: What you suggest violates the Hippocratic Oath.

CJ: In a sense it does. At least it requires that we expand "do no harm" to include the health of communities and societies as well as individuals.

Bill: I couldn't accept that.

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[2]   Physicians have always had to accept death as part of life. But in the past this has had less to do with what we might choose than how little power we had to forestall death's incursion. Today we have tools capable of dramatically prolonging life. In the future, the death of our patients, in the sense of when and how it is to occur, will become more frequently a question of choice.

[3]   The only exception I can think of is human sacrifice. While the people sacrificed in early cultural times were frequently from other tribes or clans, often they were members of one's own group. However, even when this was so, the person sacrificed was still "other" in the sense that the act of being selected for sacrifice placed him or her more in the world of gods than of mortals.

CJ: I don't think you have a choice. The question, long-term, is not whether we will limit care, but only how we will do it—how consciously we engage the task, and how fairly we go about making the tough decisions the task requires.

Bill: That is a messier picture.

CJ: Certainly a more limits-accepting, systemic picture.[4]

Bill: I wonder if the extreme rancor in the current health care debate isn't a product of what you are talking about. Health care policy would seem a pretty boring topic, hardly controversial enough justify the name calling we've seen.

CJ: I suspect that is right. We should expect rationing care to trigger the same emotions as more circumscribed death-related controversies like abortion, capital punishment, and assisted suicide.[5] Before we are done, it will likely make them look like child's play.

Bill: If we have to limit care, decisions should not be made by insurance companies.

CJ: I totally agree. The arrangement is ultimately unworkable for everyone—patients, the medical profession, and perhaps most of all for the insurance companies. Insurance companies will find themselves in the crosshairs of increasingly intractable

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4   A key function of traditional cultural narratives has been to shield us from the full meaning of death. Religion teaches that death is about entry into a more peaceful world (if we have not gone inordinately astray). Mechanistic science proposes that death simply returns us to the lifeless world of the inanimate (a final answer, if not a terribly inspiring one). Each view protects us from the magnitude of existential uncertainty and self-confrontation that a mature engagement with death necessarily envolve.

5   None of these concerns can be adequately addressed, or even usefully framed, without a more mature relationship with death. (Chapter Eight examines how neither side in the abortion debate comes any closer to maturely addressing death and uses the abortion issue to illustrate one approach for catalyzing more mature conversation.)

controversy—and facing ever-diminishing profits. Replacing the medieval guild-like model of traditional health care with a more explicitly economic model is ultimately unworkable not just because it ignores economic limits. More deeply it ignores that health care concerns, because they involve the lives of human beings, are moral as well as monetary. Today this means moral not just in the sense of right and wrong, but in the complexly multi-layered sense shared by all emerging moral dilemmas.

Bill: Do you think a single payer approach would be best?

CJ: I suspect a variety of approaches could be made to work. The issue is not what delivery structures we choose, but our willingness to confront fundamental limits. If we let our fears of acknowledging limits win out, confusion and suffering will be the result whatever policies we enact.

A single payer approach could help us face the hard decisions more efficiently and fairly, but it doesn't guarantee the courage to make such decisions. And a single payer approach has its own limitations. For example, a one-size-fits-all system can thwart innovation. Innovation is difficult without diversity in approach. I suspect different countries and locales will choose differently.[6] But, whatever approach we use, the key lies with the emotional maturity the hard choices will require.

Bill: It won't be easy.

CJ: Not at all. But the rewards go beyond just more effective health care delivery. Confronting limits should contribute also to a more mature, creative, and empowered pictures of health care more generally. Start addressing health care limits and pretty soon we begin examining questions that expand the health-care picture dramatically. For example, we might ask "Wouldn't it make sense to spend more of our money on prevention?" And then, "If prenatal care is valuable prevention, what about good nutrition, and if good nutrition is important what about cleaning up toxic chemicals in the environment, and if that is part of it too, what about the effects of poverty, and lack of

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6   While many countries have much more equitable approaches to health care delivery than the U.S., most all are in the same boat when in comes to spiraling costs and a denial of ultimate limits.

housing, and .... today's crisis of purpose and hope?" That perhaps takes the systemic analysis too far, but you get my point. Acknowledging economic limits leads ultimately to rethinking fundamentally. And for today that is "just what the doctor ordered," a fresh, really big-picture look at the whole health care endeavor.

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Beth (an environmental activist): I work protecting salmon. We humans have got to accept that we can't continue to do all sorts of things that in the past we've done as a matter of course. The planet just can't endure the effects we are having on it.

CJ: I totally agree. Is there a question there?

Beth: I was just wondering how protecting the environment fits into the concept of Cultural Maturity.

CJ: Facing the fact of environmental limits is an essential part of humanity's needed growing up. You don't need to hear the sermon. Our current unwillingness to make the environment a priority threatens to turn the world into a most unpleasant and unhealthy place to live—for all its inhabitants. For a rapidly increasing number of the world's species, it turns it into an impossible place to live. And we are not immune from the threat. However clever we may be, nature bats last.

Beth: How do we get people to wake up? I guess part of it is just time. People will support good environmental policy when they experience more directly the effects of our shortsightedness. But by then, for so much of what people like myself are trying to protect, it will be too late. I find it all very sad and frustrating.

CJ: I share your frustration.

Beth: Do you have any advice for the environmental community? Do you see ways that environmental efforts could be more effective?

CJ: A few thoughts. But they require accepting truths that environmentalists themselves tend not to want to look at. They also involve limits, just of different sorts.

Beth: Okay. Go ahead. I'm ready.

CJ: A first piece concerns limits to what even our best efforts can accomplish. You work with salmon. I had a conversation recently with a friend who is helping to coordinate Puget Sound salmon restoration. I asked him what most often got in the way of good policy. His answer left me feeling like I had been hit in the stomach.

Beth: Which was?

CJ: Our taboo against admitting how little we can sometimes do at this point to make things different. Even if we give salmon restoration top priority, he claimed, the best we can hope for in Puget Sound twenty years from now is a couple of showcase native salmon runs and five or six solid hatchery runs. And if we make salmon too much of a priority, we ignore other species that, while less symbolic, are just as important. Who knows how accurate his numbers will prove to be. But he is on target with his claim that ignoring limits to what is likely possible can result in funds being spent unwisely and ultimately counterproductive policies.

Beth: You are right. I didn't want to hear that. Do you have more glad tidings?

CJ: Sure—environmentalists have to face limits to the continued effectiveness of familiar rallying cries. Even the best of environmental thinking has tended to be polar— and often polarizing. It has set political left against political right, environment against business, and, at its extreme, nature against humanity. I'm not critical of this. In the past, ideological passions were often exactly what was needed to get people to pay attention and to motivate action (and sometimes still are). But they are becoming much less helpful. The most forward thinking environmentalists have set aside ready dogmatisms. Increasingly, successful advocacy demands it.

Beth: So we can get diverse constituencies on board.

CJ: That's part of it. Good environmental policy almost always requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders. But, as much, it is so the policies we craft will in fact benefit us. Proposals that are not sufficiently systemic can point us toward ends that can't be achieved—or worse, that we wouldn't want to achieve. I'm not at all suggesting that good policy means always finding some middle ground between competing desires. Frequently extreme policies are called for—the solution to the disappearance of old growth forest is not to cut down half the trees. I am saying that effective policy requires that we appreciate the big picture, not just our favorite parts of it.

Beth: There are ideological traps.

CJ: Exactly. And they get in the way not just when we disagree on what we should try to accomplish, but also when deciding what to do when we agree. A great place to see ideological traps is to notice people's initial responses upon hearing advocacy for technology-based approaches: bioengineering as an answer to food shortages, nuclear power as an energy solution, or technical fixes as antidotes to rising greenhouse gas levels (as in the suggestion that spraying sulfur dioxide into the atmosphere might provide benefit). I'm not voting one way or the other on any of these methods, just pointing out how often our responses are ideology-based. More "left-hand" sorts tend to reflexively oppose them; more "right-hand" types tend to immediately celebrate them. We need instead to consider all our options and to carefully evaluate each of them in terms of possible benefits, obvious dangers, and potential unintended consequences.

Beth: We have to be okay with a more complex reality.

CJ: And what can often feel like a less sexy reality. But policy that is pragmatic—in the sense of being systemically conceived—not only results in better buy-in and better decisions, it also helps people avoid cynicism and burnout by focusing their attention on things that can be done and should be done. Arguably, in the end, that is even more sexy.

Beth: I'd like to take our conversation off on a bit of a tangent if you don't mind. What you say suggests something beyond just intelligent policy. You seem to imply a different way of relating to nature—and thinking about what nature is. Is that right?

CJ: Great observation. And I don't consider it a tangent. Thinking about nature in new ways will be essential to going forward. In modern time we've tended to view nature from one of two polar vantages. We've treated man as distinct from nature with appropriate dominion over her. Or we've romanticized nature, as is more common in environmental circles. Each view has problems. The difficulties with the first are obvious. Overestimating our ability to control nature leads to naive and dangerous choices. But the second can just as readily result in unworkable policy. If it doesn't outright demonize humanity's influence, it minimizes the importance of human well-being in the ecological picture. Acknowledging limits to past ways of thinking makes clear the importance of more systemic perspective.

Beth: I'm not sure what such a new picture of nature would look like.

CJ: Understandably. We are only just beginning to recognize the question and find useful ways to think about it. I've found help peronally in recognizing how my relationship with nature has felt decidedly different at different times in my life. If nothing else, nature's new picture must somehow tolerate such multi-faceted validity.

When I was young, my relationship with nature might best be described as reverential. Nature was my cathedral, where I went when I needed to nourish myself and reconnect. Part of this was temperament, part my age, and part the Great Northwest where I grew up.

But that isn't the only way I've experienced nature. I also grew up reading journals of my forebears coming over the Oregon Trail. While my ancestors certainly were respectful of nature, and very knowledgeable, they weren't particularly delicate in how they related to her. Nature wasn't an adversary, but the task was to tame her. I don't criticize that. And I can feel some of it in how I relate to nature, in a toughness and

respect that holds an important piece of truth. Certainly some of the decisions we will need to make in the future will require something akin to that toughness.

Nature's role as resource has been no less significant in my life. The modern view that regards nature as something separate from us to utilize for human benefit is a dangerous dead end if we ignore limits. It blinds us to the intricate relationships through which nature works. But I drive a car that uses fossil fuel, live in a wooden house, and benefit from the economic prosperity harvesting of natural resources provides. Ignoring how nature physically serves us is a common causes of naive and counterproductive advocacy.

What then is nature—to me, and ultimately? I can say comfortably that the new picture must somehow find a place for each of these very different relationships. It must also be able to articulate limits each of these views confront as final explanation. It must somehow reflect a more consciously all-the-crayons-in-the-box systemic picture.[7]

Beth: I think a more encompassing kind of picture will be important not just for making good choices in the future, but also for our sense of meaning and rightness—important for our souls. "Mother" nature is our biological home. Right relationship with her—I guess you would say "right and timely"—is critical to our emotional as well as physical safety and sustenance.

CJ: I agree. We can also make a broader observation with regard to limits. Whatever the particular issue, addressing limits expands how we see the world in essential ways. In the end it does so not just for that particular issue. It point toward the more complex and

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7   CST maps how our expected relationship with and perceptions of nature differs as a function of any Patterning in Time or Patterning in Space variable. We can crudely think of these three picture as what we would expect respectively from the more "inspiration" (Early-Axis), "perspiration" (Middle-Axis), and "finishing and polishing" (Late-Axis) stages of formative process. Just putting these various parts together by itself doesn't get us to mature conception any more than only adding together the two sides of a polarity produces systemic perspective. But attempting to consider what a more all-the-crayons-in-the-box picture might look like at least engages us in the right question.

complete kind of understanding on which future effectiveness and meaning depends more generally.

The Fact of Limits

Popular mythology proclaims ours to be a time "without limits." Only try hard enough and anything can be achieved. Indeed, we don't even have to try that hard. Ads for everything imaginable tell us we need only need to buy the right product and the miraculous will result.

It is true that more is possible, today, than ever before. But it true, also, that real limits exist, and always have. It is also true that the implications of not acknowledging limits, today, present dangers we have not before seen. We also confront whole new kinds of limits that before did not need to be considered.

Confronting limits by itself is not anything new. Few themes have more defined the human narrative. In first becoming human, we stood and scanned the horizon, defying gravity's limits and freeing our hands for a whole new kind of life. Later, we grew crops and built cities, confronting the limits to growth inherent to our hunter-gatherer beginnings. Today we send people into space, transcending the very bounds of earthly existence, and communicate with others halfway around the world as if they were standing beside us.

But what our times ask is often different, and fundamentally so. A growing number of contemporary limits are not conquerable, at least in the old sense. In times past, our task when we encountered constraints was to do battle, to defeat them and move unswervingly onward. Increasingly, today, we face limits which neither force nor cunning can defeat. Some such inviolable limits are specifically new. Others are new primarily to our awareness—mythologized truths before kept them safely out of sight. Whatever the case, these limits defy not just usual solutions, but usual ways of thinking.

The penalties for ignoring inviolable limits can be immense. But such limits leave us in a quandary. Usual ways of thinking give us only two options—victory and defeat.. Today's new limits would seem to leave us nowhere to go. Understandably, with regard to many modern limits, people today often feel defeated.

The key to what we see not being our undoing again lies with Cultural Maturity's changes. Cultural mature perspective confirms that inviolable limits are just that—we can't make them go away. But at the same time it makes understandable how addressing inviolable limits is possible, indeed essential. From Cultural Maturity's vantage, inviolable limits stop being the condemning sentences we might imagine them to be. It will take the chapter as a whole for this to make full sense. But a series of preview-of-coming-attractions claims point toward where our reflections will take us.

Cultural Maturity's contribution with regard to inviolable limits starts with making it easier for us to recognize that such limits exist. Given that many of the most important inviolable limits have their effect at deeper levels than even the best of thinkers commonly recognize (health care limits makes a good example) even just this is significant. Culturally mature perspective also helps us tolerate the fact of inviolable limits when we do recognize them. It teaches us that limits are inherent to how things work. It also teaches us that, in the end, we would not want it any other way. In addition, culturally mature perspective makes it possible to think in ways that better take limits into account. The result, at the least, is more intelligent, complex, and pragmatic decision-making.

And often we see something further, something that makes no sense at all previous to stepping across Cultural Maturity's threshold. Inviolable limits, deeply engaged, can reveal new possibilities—often profound possibilities—beyond their seemingly impenetrable constraints. Of particular importance for our project, the new options that result are often precisely the all-the-crayons-in-the-box kinds of possibilities on which our future depends.

The fact of newly inviolable limits provides some of the most direct evidence that a new human maturity is inescapably necessary. We will see how future possibility depends on a maturity in our relationship with limits that before now would be impossible to comprehend. Again we encounter what might seem like a paradox. But this paradoxical appearance has a now familiar explanation. Culture is a system, and an example of the very particular system we are by virtue of being human. Were this not so, inviolable limits would be the necessary end of us. They very well could turn out to be. But if Cultural Maturity's thesis holds, such an outcome, at least anytime soon, is not inevitable, or even predicted.

Kinds of Limits

I find it helpful to divide today's inviolable limits into rough categories. Five follow, each touched on previously in some form. First, we confront limits to what we humans can do—at least safely. Second, we face limits to what we can control. Third, we come up against limits to who we are and what we can be—both as individuals and larger social systems. Fourth, we meet limits inherent to understanding. And fifth, we confront limits to the continued viability of our familiar cultural narrative (and ultimately any related sort of narrative).[8]

Limits to What We Can Do:

Limits to what we can do concern activities in which we can simply no longer engage, or, at the least, engage in as we have in the past. Cultural Maturity helps us appreciate that what we can do and what we should do are two difference questions.

The now most familiar example concerns limits to acting on the world stage with the reactiveness and impulsiveness that has often before been our way. Increasingly powerful and widely available weapons of mass destruction make anything but the most carefully considered interventions foolhardy. This should be even more the case in the future.

Environmental limits present the most obvious limits-to-what-we-can-do challenges. We face limits to available resources—energy, clean air and water, raw materials, adequate food supplies. The assumption that "there is more where that came from," today, less and less applies.[9] We also confront limits to actions that more directly affect our natural world. Over a fourth of the planet's existing species of mammals,

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[8]   We could cut up the pie of inviolable limits in other equally useful ways. In my popular audience book *Cultural Maturity*, I use more applied categories: physical/environmental limits, economic limits, limits related to leadership and governance, social/psychological limits, and limits inherent to our modern definition of progress.

[9]   Resource pressures are increasing exponentially as third-world countries join the industrialized world.

reptiles, and amphibians are now threatened or extinct. Too, we face more general limits to the earth's carrying capacity.[10] E.O. Wilson said it well in *The Future of Life* : "An Armageddon is approaching at the beginning of the third millennium. But it is not the cosmic war and fiery collapse foretold in the scriptures, it is the wrecking of the planet by an exuberantly plentiful and ingenious humanity."

We've looked previously at a variety of technology-related limits to what we can do. On myriad fronts we face situations where our remarkable inventive abilities, if misapplied, could result in major damage. That the effects of technology can be Janus-faced is nothing new, but the price we could pay for misuse often is. If future innovation is to serve us, we must be keenly attentive to systemic consequences and respectful of the limits they present.

Limits to what we can do also include simple economic limits. Monetary constraints are similarly not new, but again we confront a new sternness in the implications. Both Beth and Bill had to face that future financial limits would result in the need to make deeply wrenching choices. Increasingly we will face economic "resource limitations" that are just as inviolate as the more obvious physical sort. Part of our cultural growing up involves acknowledging this reality and addressing its implications. Later we will look at how economic limits pertain to the whole way we think about wealth, how inevitable house-of-cards financial instabilities follow from the way modern culture has made money itself a form of ideology.[11]

Limits to What We Can Control:

Some limits concern less what is appropriate to do than what is possible—even with the best of efforts. Numerous threats exist for which any idea of ultimate elimination or final control violates their systemic natures. Some such limits are simple products of how the world around us works. In 1969, the US Surgeon General proclaimed, "It is time to close the door on infectious disease." How quickly things change. We are coming to

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10   We expect population to increase by roughly a third before it levels off. Some researchers propose that human beings have already exceeded the earth's carrying capacity (see Fowler and Hobbs article "Is Humanity Sustainable").

11   See Chapter Ten.

recognize, how, when it comes to nature, control in the sense we generally think of is not the right word. Indeed it is generally not the right word whenever our concern extends beyond mechanical processes.

Many important limits to what we can control relate more directly to ourselves. Limits we confront in our efforts to address drug abuse and terrorism make good examples. We can affect these scourges considerably—and must. But it is in their natures that can never wholly eradicate them. Mature decision-making requires that we be willing to recognize when efforts have been less successful than we might have hoped. It also requires better distinguishing what we can control from what we cannot. Miss the difference, and at best we misspend valuable assets chasing the impossible, at worst we create situations more dangerous than those we hoped to avoid. This has always been true. But the magnitude of many new threats makes the need for a new humility in the face of such limits increasingly essential.

Limits to What We Can Be:

Limits to what we can be—or more precisely, limits to the usefulness of past ways of understanding who we are—include limits to what we can be as individuals, limits to what we can be for each other, and limits to what we can be as a species, to our role in the larger scheme of things. A primary function of mythologized beliefs, whether they have elevated or denigrated, has been to protect us from ultimately inescapable limits to what we can be both for ourselves and for anyone else.

Limits to what we can be start with the need to better acknowledge basic human fallibility. This can be hard. Part of being human is idealizing our human capacities. But like it or not, we human creatures who pride ourselves on our insightfulness frequently do very dumb things—very bright people and trusted leaders included. We also have an immense capacity for denial even in the face of irrefutable evidence.[12] If we are to make good future choices, we need to do a better job of factoring in human imperfection. In the end, it is much less likely that the human experiment will come to an end from an act of malevolence than from an act of ignorance or self-deception.

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[12]   Given a conflict between ideology and evidence, it has tended to be the evidence we sacrifice.

I've touched on limits to what we can be for each other repeatedly using different language. We've seen how the possibility of Whole-Person love means that making another person our answer will less and less provide rewarding connection. We've seen, too, how the surrender of parental images of authority makes leadership of all types more humble. We've also seen how beliefs that mythically elevate one's own kind make us less safe instead of more. Consciously acknowledging such relationship limits is essential to moving forward. Certainly this is the case if we are to make good choices. But the effects are frequently more subtle. I suspect today's crisis of confidence in leaderships often has less to do with failed leadership, than with confronting limitations that are simply parts of being human but which before now would have been too scary to recognize.

Each of these relationship examples presents a dual challenge that can at first seem like a paradox. Cultural Maturity requires that we accept our separateness, and thus limits to our ability to be an answer for others. And at the same time it requires that we confront limits to individualism's grand promise—to "going it alone" as a workable alternative: Mature perspective reminds us that "no man is an island." Again, there is really no contradiction. What we see simply follows from the systemic nature of our task. Limits exist to either polar means of escape from mature identity.

This dual challenge extends to who we are as a species, to our larger relationship with humankind as a whole, and also our relationship with the natural world. On both fronts, limits often exist to what we can do, even at our best. At the same time, planetary scale tasks make the need for broad cooperation between the planet's people inescapable. And as far as nature, while we may debate whether or not we are God's special progeny, there is no question but that we must learn to act with a newly God-like compassion for the rest of creation.

Limits to What We Can Know:

The most immediate place we confront limits to knowing is familiar from Chapter Three's look at uncertainty: how rarely prediction, at least in any final sense, is possible. Even with the best of information, hidden variables and wild card events can leave our prognostications far from the mark. Benjamin Disraeli took things a bit far in writing that, "What we anticipate seldom occurs; what we least expect generally happens." But

natural limitations to what it is possible to anticipate will have growing significance in a world where small missteps can have increasingly dire effect. In times ahead, we will ignore the law of unintended consequences only at great peril.

The limits that have gotten greatest attention in these pages concern limits to now-outmoded ways of understanding. We've examined how past cultural absolutes cannot work for the future. We've also observed how polar depictions of truth (whether left-hand, right-hand, or some splitting of the difference) leave us short of adequate understanding. We've looked, too, at how no one part of creative complexity however we frame it—no single crayon in the box—gets the last word. Within a mature systemic reality we find no final intelligence into which all others are imbedded; no one aspect of progress—economic, environmental, social, political—that by itself measures culture's bottom line; no one personality style that appropriately reigns over the others; and no single discipline—philosophy, science, the arts, religion—that circumscribes understanding as a whole. Each of our chapter's primary themes have focused on particular ways such partial truths ultimately come up short. Here we look at how such truths have each in their own ways argued for limitless. In a world of real limits they necessarily fail us.

More deeply we confront limits that pertain to knowing itself. Our look at the workings of conscious awareness revealed the impossibility (and undesirability even if possible) of realizing the Enlightenment ideal of bringing experience fully into the light of awareness. Later in this chapter we will look closely at what I've called the Dilemma of Representation, how picture and language both predictably fail us when it come to culturally mature description.

Many theorists would make knowing's limits even more absolute. I've made reference to Heisenberg and his claim that uncertainty is inherent to measurement. Physicist Max Plank expressed the extreme limits-to-knowing interpretation this way: "We have no right to assume that any physical laws exist, or if they have existed up to now, that they will continue to exist in a similar manner in the future."[13]

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[13]   CST is happy with Heisenberg, but doesn't go as far as Plank. It agrees that knowing in any final sense in not an option. But at the same time, it argues that it *is* possible to recognize patterns and that doing so produces results that are ultimately of greater value than knowing absolutely.

Limits to Narrative as We Have Known It:

We could think of our last kind of limit as embracing all those previous. We face limits to our familiar cultural narrative. In the end we face limits to any related sort of narrative. I've introduced this conclusion in several different ways and will return to it for deeper reflection. In introducing the notion of developmental/evolutionary perspective, I described how neither going onward as we've conventionally thought of things or going back provides useful imagery as we look to the future. In teasing apart our developmental metaphor, I described how, while first-half-of-life maturity effectively describes the best in culture to this point, we must draw on our more "maturely mature," second-half-of-life, definition of maturity if we wanted guidance for the future. In the last chapter we looked at the way any notion of progress than can effectively take us forward must more consciously address the whole of our human complexity. In the next chapter, we will examine this encompassing quandary more directly along with its big-picture implications for how we think and act. Here we examine more specifically, how, as with more particular outmoded beliefs, our familiar narrative face limits because of its claims for limitless. This is most obvious with its "onward and upward" aspects. But the same conundrum applies to our traditional narrative more generally.

This chapter's introductory dialogues each confronted all five types of limits. Bill's questioning of managed care confronted financial constraints at the first level; limits to what either government or the marketplace can accomplish at the second level; limits to what a doctor can be for her patients at the third level; death, life's ultimate unknowable and final limit, at the forth level; and, at the fifth level, limits to health care's traditional heroic—death defeating—mythology. Beth's desire for good environmental policy engaged physical limits at the first level; limits to what we can often make happen environmentally at the second level; limits to familiar ways of thinking about nature at the third level, limits to polarizing strategies at the forth level; and limits to our modern concept of progress at the fifth level.

All of these limits are inviolate. A person might legitimately argue that great obstacles to advancement have always initially appeared insurmountable. But, by all

evidence, this time the limits are real. The earth has only so much surface area to inhabit. Leaders and lovers will most likely appear more mortal and less mythic in the future, not the reverse. And trying harder has no effect on either Heisenberg's uncertainty or our loss of once reliable cultural absolutes. Like it or not, effective future action, meaningful future human relationships (with others and with ourselves), and useful future understanding all depend on a fundamentally new relationship with limits.

<center>Confronting the Inescapable</center>

Acknowledging the fact of real limits is where we appropriately begin—and by itself is important—but not enough. This list is easily overwhelming. And conventional ways of thinking provide few good answers. Restricted to a traditional understanding of limits we are at best left dangling, at worst disoriented, estranged, and void of purpose. Inviolable limits would seem only to mark the end of the road. Without something more it is hard to think of a reason to proceed.

Indeed without something more it is hard to imagine the willingness to acknowledge such limits in the first place, however obvious they may seem. Just avoiding pain, even when long-term consequences are inescapable, tend not to provide the needed motivation. To this point, we have more often chosen denial and short-term pleasure. To engage limits effectively we need perspective not provided by usual notions of what limits are about.

To gain such perspective, it is important that we be as clear as we can be about the challenge such limits present, know our quarry and distinguish it from things it is not. I've described the limits we face as inviolable. We need a solid understanding of what this means before we can turn to the question of what such limits require of us.

A basic recognition sets the stage: Life presents two fundamentally different sorts of limits each of which requires a wholly different sort of response. Our first sort of limit is much the more familiar. Such limits are made to be challenged. Roger Bannister broke through the mile's previous four-minute barrier. The Wright brothers offered that we might, like birds, transcend earthly constraints. Limits if this first sort call for an heroic response. They are adversaries to overcome. We appropriately celebrate if we succeed, see ourselves as failing if we do not.

<center>20</center>

In contrast, inviolable limits cannot be overcome for a simple reason: they are inherent to how things are. Given this fundamental difference, they clearly ask something different from us. Bring a heroic worldview to any of the limits just listed and we will not only fail to address them, we will make the dilemmas they alert us to much worse. A response that for the first kind of limit would be bravery, for the second becomes its opposite: at best ignorance, at worst, denial and cowardice.

This recognition in itself doesn't provide a solution. We are left with the question of what, then, today's new limits ask of us. I've described how usual thinking only gives us two options—victory and defeat. But I've also implied something else. Cultural Maturity's changes provide a third option. Observations already at our disposal help us begin to make sense of how a third option might be possible.

I've made a series of claims with regard to how culturally mature perspective should alter our relationship with inviolable limits. To start, I've claimed that at least we might more readily recognize inviolable limits and better tolerate their presence. Given previous reflections, these changes should not wholly surprise us. Part of the purpose of past belief has been to protect us from how demanding reality can be. Certainly the fact of real limits represents one of experience's most demanding aspects. It is reasonable that Cultural Maturity's changes might make as more acknowledging, even accepting, of real limits, as we have seen them do for uncertainty, responsibility, change and uncertainty.

A recognition that we will look at closely later in the chapter provides more direct conceptual support for this conclusion. Past narratives have protected us from the fact of limits. Ideologies, by their natures, hide myths of limitless. Certainly this is true for conclusions particular to our most recent chapter in culture's story, such as the extreme individualist and material values that have marked our Modern Age, the Enlightenment belief in an ultimately objective work ordered by rational principles, or our modern onward and upward story of progress. But, as we shall see, in the end this is true for conclusions of any sort—and from any time—that have their foundations in systemically partial assumptions.

I've also claimed that Cultural Maturity's changes help us think in ways that take limits more directly into account. At the least, culturally mature perspective makes obvious that myths of limitless, while they may once may have served up, can now only

get in the way of good decision-making. But its vantage also affirms that more encompassing—and with this more limits-acknowledging—ways of understanding are not just possible, but predicted. It should not surprise us that an Integrative-Meta-Perspective provides the conceptual tools needed for making our way in a world where real limits prevail.

The additional claim I put forward—that effectively confronting inviolable limits can point us toward otherwise hard-to-grasp options—requires more of a stretch, but it too follows from what we have seen. Integrative Meta-Perspective alters understanding in a specific, now familiar way. It offers the possibility of all-the-crayons-in-the-box systemic perspective. Confronting any inviolable limit at least challenges us to engage such possibility. We witnessed this outcome with both our introductory conversations. With Bill's look at the health care limits, we saw it in the resulting "just what the doctor ordered," more systemic picture of personal and cultural health and wellbeing. With Beth's look at environmental limits, we saw it in the possibility of a new, more complete, and ultimately useful, picture of nature and our relationship to it.

This analysis is sufficient if our concern is limits to past ways of understanding. But some of the inviolable limits I've described represent more concrete inescapablities. Just thinking differently won't make them go away. This is the case certainly with physical limits, but it is also true for limits to what one person can be for another, and limits to what we can control or know absolutely.

Does this brief analysis remain sufficient? In part it should for the same reason that limitations more generally become more acceptable. I am specifically not claiming that culturally mature perspective makes limits less absolute, only more understandable and tolerable. We should expect Cultural Maturity to make the fact that limits exist feel more like common sense wherever kind of limit we need to consider.

But for our answer to be complete, we need a further observation. Most any time we confront limits of the concrete sort, limits to past limits-denying stories also play a role. Recognizing how this is so, and, with it, how past stories need not be the last word, can often provide important insight for moving forward. Each of this chapters lead examples illustrate.

In the conversation with Bill, I proposed that the inevitable breakdown of health care delivery systems is a product of increasingly expensive treatments. This is true. But the culprit is just as much how our heroic health care mythology has made defeating death and disease its ultimate calling—no matter what the cost. Recognizing this more ideological contribution to the health care delivery crisis helps us see options that otherwise might not be visible to consider.

With Beth's look at environmental limits, we recognize something similar. We could easily assume that the need to address environmental limits is a product simply of our great success as a species. But as much it reflects the effects of a now outmoded narrative. In times past, we comfortably treated the natural world as a resource that existed to serve us—all we had to do was take from it. Different ways of thinking about nature make advancing in useful ways more an option.

We could turn equally well to early dialogues. Chapter Three's look at war and peace described the great potential for dangerous conflict that comes with a globally interconnected world. But it didn't stop with ascribing the dangers only to uncomfortable proximity and lethal weaponry. We saw how, in times past, the elevating of one's own kind and the denigrating of some "other" has been necessary to collective identity. This further factor invites us to contemplate strategies that might not otherwise come to mind. Going forward will not be easy—it will require not just new policies, but new ways of understanding who we are and why we have relationships. But at least going forward becomes something we can envision.

Chapter Five's examination of limits to our modern definition of progress made reference to many of the concrete constraints observed here. But it also observed that progress is a story, and an evolving story. Recognizing this fact helps us consider how further possibilities might lie ahead— not just by idealized options we might dream of, but new cultural chapters that are predicted if we can bring to bear the needed maturity of perspective.

Ideological factors most always play a role when it comes to inviolable limits, even the most concrete. Appreciating how this is so at least alerts us to how easily efforts to address limits can be ambushed by outmoded beliefs. But it also alerts us that further options exist. And it does something more. It affirms that the "antidote" to the most

concrete of inviolable limits is the same as for inviolable limits more generally—the greater capacity to hold complexity that comes with culturally mature perspective.

The same maturity of perspective that makes it possible to appreciate complexity, change, responsibility, and uncertainty in more "living" terms also makes possible a new felt relationship to limits. Limits, in end, return the favor. None of the limits I've listed can be escaped. But far from being the end of us, they point us toward the greater creativity and completeness of experience a culturally mature reality makes possible— and necessary.

This new picture applies to each of the five kinds of inviolable limits just listed. Facing our first kind of limit, limits to what we can do, brings perspective to our tool-making capacities, helps us learn to act and invent wisely and live in ways that are most ultimately healthy. Confronting our second, limits to what we can control, teaches us about options more interesting, effective, and rewarding than control. Addressing our third, limits to what we can be, reveals more fully vital and creative ways of being and relating. Accepting our forth, limits to what we can know, reveals more humble, but ultimately more powerful ways of knowing. And taking on our last, limits to narrative as we have known it, opens the door to the only kind of narrative that can, in fact, lead us effectively forward.

We might appropriate ask what inviolable limits ultimately teach us. If these observations are correct, what, in the end, inescapably limits teach us about is the more vital and complete reality that becomes common sense once past Cultural Maturity's threshold.

Limits and Maturity

Our analogy with maturity in individual development again provides assistance. It helps us see how Cultural Maturity might make us more accepting of limits. At least a bit, it also helps us see how confronting inviolable limits might support the complexity of understanding going forward requires.

No theme more pointedly defines the developmental imperatives of life's second half than new limits, and limits that cannot be overcome in any traditional sense. Midlife, and the second half of life more generally, presenta layer upon layer of new constraints.

We face new physical limits—to our strength and agility, to how young and beautiful we can appear. Life demands that certain of our dreams, often dreams closely tied to our sense of identity, need to be, if not surrendered, at least tempered. And of greatest consequence, it places before us, with an immediacy that would have overwhelmed us prior to this moment, the fact of our mortality. We have certainly before reflected on death, but midlife is the time when we first really "get it," first fully grasp our own death's inescapability.

What do the inescapable limits so prominent in life's second half require of us? This sudden barrage of new limits can seem to present no good options. Deny their implications and our lives become increasingly absurd—thin caricatures of youth. But the task is no more the opposite; to give up life's good fight is only to become defeated and cynical.

We don't have good words for what such limits ask—an expanded sense of proportion and perspective, a new humility, a fresh appreciation for contradiction, a deepened connection with the unfathomable. I've proposed wisdom as the term that best captures the task of life's second half, and confronting such limits certainly requires wisdom. We could also turn to earlier reflections about maturity-related changes in our relationships to uncertainty, responsibility, change, and complexity.

The important recognition here is that while maturity's new limits at first feel not at all welcome (and many often never do), if we can meet them creatively they make us more. Confronting limits to our physical strength teaches us about more subtle, and ultimately more important, kinds of strength. Confronting limits to youthful beauty reveals to us more enduring kinds of beauty. And confronting what may not be possible reminds us about what is essential. The second half of life is as much or more about growth as the first, and it is limits that often most mark growth's path.

Acknowledging our mortality confronts us most deeply. Certainly death presents life's most inescapable limit (taxes get equal billing only in humor). I like how Aeschylus' words capture the power of that impenetrability:

> Of all the gods, Death only craves not gifts,
> Nor sacrifice, nor yet drink—offering poured
> Avails; no altars hath he, nor is soothed
> By Hymns of praise. From him alone of all

The powers of heaven Persuasion holds aloof.

Commensurate with this ultimate status as final limit, death is the limit we most keep at bay. We can think of every kind of denial as in the end a denial of death. But in keeping also with this final status is how much more the confronting of death does than just take away. Death represents life's ultimate teacher—certainly of meaning.

Throughout life's second half, death's image confronts us in one way then another with purpose's final question: When I reach the end of my days, what will I most want to say about my brief time on this planet? Each imperfect attempt to answer that question—and to provide its answers form—gives our lives a new maturity of focus and makes us a bit more complete. I am reminded of Montaigne's assertion that "philosophy is no other thing than for a man to prepare himself for death." Words from Samuel Johnson bring the observations a bit more down to earth: "Depend upon it, Sir, when a man knows that he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully."[14]

While we can't conquer such second-half-of-life limits, effectively grappling with them makes us rich in new ways. Images of being "over the hill" fall away to reveal newly mature and ultimately more fulfilling pictures of possibility. Our relationships with others—and with ourselves—become more complexly appreciated. And how we experience everything around us becomes more nuanced and immediate, more fully an expression of all of who we are. When we confront the inescapable incorruptibly, our lives become newly vivid, and robust—for no other reason than that human life is these things.

All of this is not to idealize or romanticize life's latter years. The limits inherent to life's second half can present particularly arduous challenges and often produce as much pain as possibility. But maturity well-lived is very much about becoming more. At the

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14   This confrontation with purpose can be even more ultimate. Death brings us up against whether our brief time has meaning at all. In *My Confessions* Leo Tolstoy asked: "Why should I live? Why should I do anything? Is there in life any purpose which the inevitable death that awaits me does not undo and destroy?' Death imagery is often closely associated with wisdom in culture's early stages. The Tibetan and Egyptian "Books of the Dead" offer particularly striking illustration. The wisdom challenge with Cultural Maturity is different—its focus is societal rather than personal and its reality comes from a different cultural stage—but we can still learn from such references. (Chapter Seven looks more closely at these distinctions.)

least it offers certain harvest from life's toils. I am reminded of Robert Browning's plea: "Grow old with me/the best is yet to be/the last of life for which the first was born." More, if we are lucky, it—and the confronting of ultimate limits it entails—brings to meaning a consummating fullness.

Personal Maturity makes inviolable limits in our personal lives more acceptable and understandable. Inviolable limits in our personal lives also turn the table and teach us about maturity. We return to the question of what the more encompassing inviolable limits we face today teach us about. What they teach us about, ultimately, is what it means to fully growing up as a species.

Creative Maturity More Generally

Our more generic creative picture helps further fill out these reflections. In particular, it makes more understandable how confronting inviolable limits might support the future's needed more complex ways of thinking.

In also addresses a valid objection. A person might appropriately argue that much in this linking of the developmental metaphor with limits ties to phenomena that are particular to a human lifetime—predictably diminishing capacities and the inescapability of death the most obvious examples. Neither, we would hope, will be part of culture's new story. Creativity's more encompassing picture puts these conclusions in a larger context.

We tend to think of limits and things creative as almost opposite concerns, but this is not at all the case. Any mature understanding of creativity recognizes that the topics are inseparable. Certainly this is so with artistic creativity. I am reminded of G.K. Chesterton's famous epigram—"Art is limitation; the essence of every picture is the frame." The limiting "frame" includes both limits inherent to the creative process itself and limits that follow from the creative process's relationship to the cultural world in which it takes place.

I was a sculptor before starting my medical training. A good part of my initial attraction to sculpting came from how it seemed an ultimate expression of unbridled possibility. Time taught me how deeply possibility is only part of it. Some of sculpting's limits are meant to be fought with; this is how one's skills grow. But many of the limits

imposed by a piece of stone are of a more fundamental sort. Stone can only be made to do certain things and any particular piece of stone, by virtue of its texture and grain, holds unique constraints. One violates these limits only at one's peril. The beauty and importance of anything created is always as much an expression of the impenetrability of inviolable limits as it is the limitlessness of initial imagination.

Any artistic process is a conversation between possibility and limitation. How we feel about ultimately inviolable limits depends on when you catch us—specifically at what stage in the creative process. Each stage in the first half of formative process tells a somewhat different story about ultimate limits. Second half perspective produces a whole different kind of story.

With the often-naive bliss of initial inspiration (Early-Axis) we may pay them little heed. With creativity's perspirations stage (Middle-Axis) we are more likely to deny they are inviolate (then a positive thing as it can keep us from collapsing in the face of their implications). Or, if they impose themselves, we will tend to feel cursed by their imposition and rail against them. Later, during creation's finishing and polishing stages (Late-Axis), while we may like limits no more, we may simply not give them great concern, our attention occupied with less limits-related tasks.

With formative process's second half, our relationship to inviolable limits changes. We become both more conscious of them and more accepting of their presence. As we prepare to put the work into the world, we become better able to stand back and see the process of creation in perspective. Such perspective helps us more deeply appreciate the limits that engaging the work has always involved. We also become aware of a kind of absolute limit that, while always present, has not so much before stood forefront. It concerns the relationship of the piece to the larger world. Like it or not, we have no way of knowing (and little way of controlling) what the fate of our efforts will be.

Creative maturity—the mature stages of any particular creative process and, more broadly, the mature stages of a person's creative life—brings a new relationship to ultimate limits. Ultimate limits become more consciously accepted, eventually even embraced. We better appreciate that beauty—the real stuff—makes no real sense separate from limits. Fantasy and wishful thinking appropriately ignore limits, but art derived from such sentiments is trivial at best. In the end, beauty that moves us is something else.

It is about seeing what *is* clearly—including life's limits. Great art endures because it appreciates what is with a special clarity.

A creative frame suggests we should be able to apply a parallel point in any formative dynamic to the task of understanding fundamental limits. Any formative process has a point where ultimate limits make their presence inescapable, and where we begin to grasp that not lonely do that have a creative role, that role is essential.

Let's turn to the less obviously creative formative dynamics of relationship. I've spoken of the need to confront limits to what one person can be for another in terms of cultural midlife. In a more limited way it is inherent to the developmental midpoint of any human connection. Early on in intimate relationships—whatever the cultural stage— we find infatuation's mythologized images supporting love's yet fragile structures. And at a certain point the situation turns around. (How fully is a product of cultural stage, but whatever the stage this shift fundamentally reorganizes experience.) Greater acceptance of fundamental limits becomes essential to that relationship's continued growth. Moving forward requires the surrender of other as answer. If anything defines a relationship's mature stages it is this acceptance.

Creative Systems Theory describes how this acceptance of relationship limits is layered. We confront such limits with the mature stages in any relationship. We see a further order of acceptance with maturity in our lifetimes—personal maturity makes relational maturity much less of a leap. And if the concept of Cultural Maturity holds, the future should make acceptance of an even deeper sort increasingly a part of common understanding.

With this creative picture, we begin to see more clearly how Cultural Maturity's changes might help us think in ways that better take ultimate limits into account. Later we will look at how our understanding of the internal mechanisms of Cultural Maturity's cognitive changes make this relationship between formative processes second half and a new relationship with limits more theoretically precise. For now, a couple observations suffice. Previously we examined how an Integrative Meta-Perspective produces a specifically creative sort of understanding. Here we add how a creative frame makes the idea that understanding might simultaneously affirm the inviolable nature of limits and take us beyond limits as some end of the road not so contradictory—a creative picture inherently does both.

In another way we can respond to our question of what inviolable limits, in the end, teach us. Framed creatively, what inviolable limits ultimately teach us about is the greater power and effectiveness that comes with being more directly conscious in our creative, took-making natures. This recognition helps bring the theme of limits together with our previous themes and gives the consequence of confronting ultimate limits a particularly provocative interpretation. Inescapable limits teach us about a world in which uncertainty as disorder is replaced by new more dynamic understandings of order; in which seemingly impossible burdens of responsibility are replaced by a more deeply engaged, more fully creative kind of responsibility; in which change becomes a newly integral part of truth itself; and in which complexity newly reveals its underlying coherence and its ultimate connection to the experience of purpose. That is a somewhat grand way of putting it. But it is ultimately what we see.

Confronting Inviolable Limits

We benefit greatly from guidance in confronting inviolable limits. Without it, the severity of dislocation such limits represent, can leave us floundering. There isn't a formula. But we are helped by the recognition that grappling with inviolable limits involves a predictable sequence of experiences. Not surprisingly, given the death of outmoded dreams Cultural Maturity requires, the sequence is very similar to what we see with grieving any important loss.

First, we tend deny such limits exist, or at least that addressing them will require anything new. Next, reluctantly, we acknowledge the fact of real limits, but feel frightened and disturbed by what we encounter.[15] Finally, we begin to recognize new possibilities that before we could not have understood, much less realized. The same progression accompanies limits wherever we find them.

Until recently, most people kept the implications of our natural environment's physical limits far out of sight and mind—in spite of ample evidence for such limits' inescapability. If people didn't ignore environmental limits, they assumed that future

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15   Holding dogmatically to the belief that no changes are needed or defining needed changes in terms of easily conceived images of final destruction or our favorite utopian ideal work equally well to keep the full implications of this creative transition at bay.

invention would make perceived limits irrelevant. Today we tend more often to reside in the second stage. We acknowledge such limits, but relate to them primarily as constraints—realities that diminish us.

That is a start, but ultimately not enough. While constraints are real, if we see the task only as learning to do with less, we remain well short of a solution. Most people find such a specter not at all inspiring—and I think appropriately. The result is that even when warnings are heard, too often they are not heeded. A further step is needed—one we are starting to take. Confronting such limits must somehow be understood as enhancing our experience of purpose and potency. As always with culturally mature perspective, this additional step fundamentally alters the conversation and reveals options that before now weren't ours to grasp.

We glimpsed this additional step in the previous chapter's conversation with Evan about progress. Evan saw how any useful notion of progress requires us to understand "more" in fuller ways. The additional step begins with the recognition that thinking of resource limitations only in terms of doing with less captures but part of the picture—and not ultimately the part that is most important. Certainly acknowledging limits makes for a healthier planet, and that benefits everyone. But questions of resource sustainability[16] also lead us toward issues at the heart of our modern crisis of story—questions about the nature of abundance (about when enough is enough). Such questioning provides a critical antidote to times in which what often most defines us, and links us, is how much we consume. The result is new and deeper appreciation for the diversity of factors that make life rich. People who choose to live more environmentally friendly lives and stick with their choice rarely describe feeling deprived. Most in the end feel quite the opposite.[17]

We find the same progression when we engage limits to what one person (friend, lover, or leader) can be for another. The whole notion of Whole-Person relationship at first doesn't make much sense, or if it does, doesn't seem particularly appealing. With

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16   Lester Brown defined sustainability as "satisfying one's needs without diminishing the prospects of future generations."

17   This framing of the progress question reconciles common polar positions. Do we face a necessary "end of growth?" The answer is yes if by growth we mean actions that continue to consume ever more of the planet's resources and do irreparable damage to ecosystems. But it is no if we mean growth in the sense

love, for example, Hollywood romance can have much greater initial attraction. Next we begin to recognize the dangers that lie with making another person our answer, but in doing so tend to interpret the absence of what we have known only as a sentence to loneliness. We grieve the loss of the romantic dream and the wonderfully comforting hope that we will one day find someone who will understand us completely. Later we realize such loss as the entry point to mature love. The old dream remains as a source of reminiscence, but only that.

We recognize the same progression more generally with any surrender of cultural absolutes. Confronting the loss of familiar social guideposts—and, with Cultural Maturity, recognizing that no new ones, at least of the mythologized sort we have known, will appear to replace them—at first evokes denial. We keep the growing inadequacy of ideological truths of whatever sort—moral, political, philosophical, religious—at arm's length. With time, we realize that what we witness is in fact the loss of a surety that never really was, only the death of once necessary illusions. This may at first evoke only fear or despair. But with time we recognize that what these changes mark ultimately is the possibility of more nuanced and embracing truths, ways of understanding that better speak from the fullness and wonder (and great responsibility) existence has to offer.

Besides providing guidance, this progression offers a more down to earth response to the question of what inviolable limits ultimately teach us about. Certainly inescapable limits teaches us about humility, remind us with Wordsworth that, "wisdom is often nearer when we stoop than when we soar." A bit more deeply, they teach us about proportion. I am reminded of Reinhold Niebur's often quoted prayer: "God, give us the grace to accept with serenity the things which cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference." Most deeply, they help us see a bit clearer what is and in an important sense has always been—at least as seeing is possible through our human eyes.

In the Trenches

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of increasing human creativity and capacity. The answer is no, too, if we mean technological advancement. Many technological advances will play key roles in making a sustainable future possible.

In my work with leaders, I often make use of exercises that directly challenge people to confront inviolable limits. If structured well, such exercises give little choice but to engage in culturally mature decision-making. We could craft exercises similar to the two examples that follow using most any final limit.

An exercise that I've found particularly powerful ties back to the dialogue with Bill on health care limits. I give participants a budget. I also give them ten patient biographies (including information not just about age and presenting illnesses, but also about the person's family and work history, self-care variables such as smoking and exercise, and more general observations about what the person has done with his or her life). I lock the group in a room for three hours with instructions to come back with a list of how the budget will be spent and justifications for their decisions. I emphasize that the predicament I have put them is not just some abstract exercise. Theirs is the task we face if we are not in total denial (and which we face covertly even if we are).

This exercise never fails to be both an agonizing and ultimately enlightening experience. Participants have to face that the task involves, in effect, choosing death for others. Often the question of what such decisions should be based on is just as agonizing—and enlightening—as the decisions themselves. Should we consider not just a just a person's disease, for example, but also their age or perhaps whether they have children who are dependent on them. And what about the life-style choices a person has made, both negative—whether they have smoked, for example—and positive—how much their life has made a contribution to others?

In the end, people have to look, too, at what bases for choosing we are really capable of—whether certain considerations present moral slippery slopes that may always be too slippery for our human capabilities. People are forced to face quandaries with implications not just for health care, but for the deepest of questions about who we are, what matters, and what is possible.

Another exercise draws on challenges we encountered in Chapter Three with Tom and Vivian's conversation on war and peace. The group's assigned three-hour task is to come up with a future global "defense strategy," a set of approaches that will make the world the safest it can be

I start by pointing out two inescapable limits-related truths. First, we have to accept that the weapons-of-mass-destruction genie is irretrievably out of the bottle.

Efforts at non-proliferation are greatly important, but pretending that immensely powerful weaponry will not be generally available in the future is dangerously naive. The second limits-related truth concerns the growing interdependence that comes with globalization. In times ahead, the order (and protection) once provided by strict national boundaries should become less something we can rely on. The world of the future—at least if things don't go terribly wrong—will be much more systemically interconnected. The group must work within these constraints. Again I emphasize that this is not some abstract exercise. These limits are real and the need to rethink defense strategy inescapable.

The exercise forces participants to think with an unaccustomed systemic sophistication. Approaches that have any change of success must take into account all of the diverse factors that go into a social system's felt sense of safety—not just military strength, but also social, economic, environmental, and even religious concerns. Participants have to somehow factor in cultural differences, including differences that may have their bases not just in belief, but in stage of cultural development. They also have to address how decisions are to be effectively made at a global scale. And people, again, have to confront questions of fundamental human limitations—what in all that we might want to be possible perhaps is not, and the implications.

Inviolable limits have repeatedly played key roles in think tank groups I've assembled over the years. Earlier I mentioned a group I and a chemist colleague[18] brought together to take on the problem of nuclear waste. The effort included some of the world's most knowledgeable nuclear scientists. Confronting limits played a major role not just in doing the necessary work, but in expanding the effort well beyond my expectations.

Right off, the topic of limits took center stage. The group agreed that the job for which we had brought them together was essentially impossible—at least if we assumed the goal to be storing nuclear waste with absolute assurance of safety. The half-lives of some of the radioactive substances we need to contain are longer than the whole of civilization's history. No way exists to predict changes that might take place not just hundreds, but thousands or even millions of years in the future.

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[18]   Tom Engel, then chairman of the University of Washington Department of Chemistry. We convene the group in May 1992.

This fact of inescapable limits did not stop them. Given that the waste was already there—and more, that additional waste would certainly be produced in the future—the task was obviously to do the best possible. Acknowledging limits up front—the ultimate unpredictability of geological events and the even greater unpredictability of changes in human values and social structures—gave the group's thinking a no-nonsense directness and sense of imperative that otherwise might be lacking.

I previously mentioned a specific creative conclusion they arrived at: that temporary storage with safeguards provided an ultimately "safer" option than trying to make everything secure for thousands of years.[19] This conclusion required an acceptance of limits to what was possible. It also required seeing beyond common ideology-based ways of looking at the problem. More conventionally, we would assume the possibility of ultimate security and argue for once and for all solutions. Or, alternatively we might use ultimate impossibility as an argument against any further creation of waste.

But such technical insights comprised only part of the group's contribution. As we worked together, interest grew in a further, more general and ultimately even more critical limits-related question: How do societies best go about making the sorts of decisions nuclear waste presents? Participants had each dealt with policy decisions that similarly involved potentially cataclysmic consequences, huge uncertainty, and no obvious solutions. They had also seen how rarely in such situations does any one group—scientists, politicians, religious leaders, or citizen activists—have the whole answer. Many, too, had learned the hard way how difficult it can be to generate the needed political backbone when it comes to hot-potato concerns.

The group expressed excitement about applying the immense brainpower in the room to this broader question and proposed that they commit the second half of our seven days to addressing it—in spite of the fact that it was well outside their traditional fields of expertise. Those remaining days were some of my most memorable with this kind of work. We engaged in powerful and deeply humbling inquiry—into, in effect, the necessary defining principles and possible mechanisms of culturally mature governance. Confronting inviolable limits—along with physical limits, limits in the ability of conventional decision-making structures to deal with questions that involve limits, and

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19   Environmentalist Steward Brand reached a similar conclusion in his 2009 book *Whole Earth Discipline.*   .

more basic limits to human capability—opened the door into a level of conversation that is as yet rare, but which must increasingly define good collective choice-making in all parts of our lives.

Ideology and Limitlessness

I've promised to address some conceptual loose ends. The fact that effectively confronting inviolable limits might reveal new possibility—and more, the specific kind of new possibility needed for life in a culturally mature world—should now make basic sense. Confronting inviolable limits challenges us to at least entertain culturally mature possibilities.

But we usefully move back a few steps for a closer look at a more basic question: Why is it that more traditional ways of thinking leave us short when it comes to limits? I've suggested the answer: Past ways of understanding have been "designed" to protect us from limits. It they didn't celebrate limitlessness, such is directly implied. That this has been the case is not a problem. History's various myths of limitless have protected us from realities that previous to now would have been more than we could tolerate.

We see this protective limits-denying function most readily in the implications of any parental conception of reality. Whether framed in the language of my-country-right-or-wrong nationalism, narrow religious ideology, or a view of science and invention that becomes a technological gospel, such views imply an ultimate, and thus ultimately limitless seat of truth. Parentally conceived truths are in the end omniscient and omnipotent truths.

Limitlessness is also implied by any systemically partial conception of truth. Certainly this is the case when polarity reigns. We've seen how polar truths stop short of the needed maturity of perspective if for no other reason than that they are half-truths. More specifically with regard to limits, they stop because they their stories argue for limitless. By doing so, they keep constraints that before would have been not just unwelcome, but unbearable, safely out of view.

We see limitlessness implied with polarities of every sort—political left versus political right, masculine versus feminine, leader versus follower, mind versus body,

material versus spiritual, or good versus evil. Such views inherently argue for a heroic mythology. Sometimes the source of the idealized conclusion is a belief that the pole opposite to that which we identify is an enemy to be defeated. Succeed and all will be eternally well. Good defeats evil and we enter the kingdom of heaven. Political left defeats political right—or the reverse—and ideological purity conquers all. In other instances, the source of the perceived limitlessness is precisely opposite. Instead of projecting our demons, we project images of ultimate truth. When we put leaders and lovers on pedestals we give them power to make us ultimately safe and ultimately happy.[20]

The same limits-denying mechanisms holds if we think more complexly but still give one crayon in the systemic box last-word status. Prior to Cultural Maturity's threshold, systemic parts in a similar way voice myths of limitlessness. They argue that if only they could define ultimate truth, everything would be well. Once into culturally mature territory, we perceive things more accurately, which increases options. We also see in more complete terms what we have to play with—which includes the fact of real limits. We better appreciate both the gifts and the limits of each of the systemic "crayons"—whatever they might be … aspects of how we understand, individuals in a group, domains in culture as a system (government, business, art, science, religion, education), academic disciplines, nations and broader affiliations within humanity as a whole. This limits-honoring picture requires greater maturity and responsibility. But, at the same time, creative options increase dramatically.

Remember my brief introduction to the psychotherapeutic approach that engages aspects of a person's psychology as if they were characters in a play. Before the establishment of a strong Whole-Person place from which to act, each "inner character" in

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20   The polar assumptions can also be more specifically dualistic—in the Cartesian sense—with each pole seen as having a part of truth. Mind and body or material and spiritual, depending on how we think of them, can each represent this kind of polar relationship. But here, too, at the least we remain in deterministic worlds (in which final outcomes are in theory predictable). And not uncommonly one pole, or both poles simultaneously (however logically contradictory this might seem), get final truth status. Limitlessness, in the end, again prevails. A scientist can also hold absolutist religious beliefs. A religious person can assume technological progress will provide our salvation. Steven Jay Gould referred to science and religion as "non-overlapping magistra." We can hold absolute beliefs that are logically mutually exclusive without experiencing contradiction.

its particular way makes the claim that if its word prevails, all problems will be resolved. When we lead from a place of Whole Person identity, we learn to recognize the limits—along with the particular contributions—that come with each partial view. In so doing, we come gradually to live from a more conscious all-the-crayons-in-the-box posture. We do this not just with regard to ourselves, but also with regard to how we experience more generally.

Cultural Maturity's cognitive changes make these conclusions more theoretically rigorous. We can think of each the new ingredients Integrative Meta-Perspective engages in terms of limits—both in terms of recognizing limits and moving beyond them. Re-owning projections makes clear how limits exist to the truth claims of either side of any polarity. Recognizing multiple-intelligences similarly demands a more encompassing, and thus limits-acknowledging picture of one intelligence versus another. And appreciating creative organization over time in a related way alerts us to limits inherent to any one temporal slice in formative process's systemic pie. Integrative Meta-Perspective both affirms these limits and provides a larger vantage in which this recognition of limits contributes to ultimately creative outcomes.

The picture that results makes clear that our beliefs in limitlessness have never had much to do with how things really are. They have been products of the mechanisms through which our minds have worked. Fortunately, that we might see something beyond the simple fact of limits also comes with how our minds, at least in potential, work—with awareness in its full creative manifestation and the more consciously all-the-crayons-in-the-box understanding that results. In struggling to come to terms with inviolable limits we bring that greater complexity in ourselves to bear. Doing so, in potential, changes everything.

Note that this result applies only to systems of our second, "living" sort. We don't see the same opening to new possibility when struggling with the realities of simple mechanical systems. Limits there are simply limits. Recognizing that one's car can only go so fast doesn't accomplish anything more than perhaps help one drive more safely. It doesn't turn one's car into something else or make it more wise.

This is not to say, however, that the more creative relationship to limits Cultural Maturity's cognitive changes produce does not have implications for certain non-human

systems. It very much applies if we are dealing with systems of our second sort. Today, the appreciation of limits to traditional mechanistic understandings of biological life is opening an increasingly vibrant and surprising picture of the animate world. And how I am using the term "living"—with very larger quotation marks—refers ultimately to any system where "bridging" polar assumptions applies. Quantum mechanics, in spite of having its discovery in the early parts of the last century, continues to make our jaws drop with its unexpected and often bewildering conclusions.

An essential implication of this picture is how grappling with any inviolable limit becomes a hands-on "technique" for addressing the tasks of Cultural Maturity more generally. Particular inviolable limits not only have specific lessons to teach, they hold in their apparent constraints the seeds of the more encompassing new possibilities on which our future depends. Inviolable limits, wherever we find them, when effectively engaged, teach us about the new, more mature ways of relating, new more sophisticated values, and fundamentally new and more complex and powerful ways of understanding that will be critical to a future worth living.

The Hero's Journey and the Existential Abyss

We've seen how an Integrative Meta-perspective requires the engagement of intelligence as a whole, all its multiple aspects. This suggests a limit inherent to the writing of books. Words set in sequence communicate rationally structured observations much more readily than the "grammar' of other sensibilities. Given this limitation, we might expect to find value in including reflections that draw specifically on the non-rational.[21]

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[21]   An Integrative Meta-Perspective might seem to suggest that a book which claims to address Cultural Maturity and its changes should apply our multiple intelligences in equal measure. This is not the case. Being that in our time rationality represents the dominant intelligence, certainly when it comes to reflections that involve theory, a book composed in equal measure of rational discourse, emotional expression, symbolic imagery, and the language of the body might be great fun, but for most people would be unintelligible (or would only be dismissed as very bad poetry). I've tried to strike an appropriate balance.

The language of myth draws directly on imaginal intelligence. And within the world of myth, the symbolism of the great hero's journey has particular pertinence to the topic of limits. I've used the word heroic metaphorically to describe our historical relationship to limits. The hero's narrative told in its entirety, addresses not just our first sort of limit, but also inviolable limits and what they ask of us.

Joseph Campbell referred to the hero's journey as the "universal monomyth," the narrative of which all other are ultimately parts.[22] The hero's journey is traditionally described as having two halves. Its first half is most readily understood. It is heroic in the conventional sense. It describes slaying dragons, rescuing fair maidens, and succeeding at impossible-seeming feats. It is about good over evil, triumph in the face of adversity. David and Goliath and Sleeping Beauty represent hero's tales of this first-half type. Second-half stories engage more deeply—a person could say maturely.[23]

Psychiatrist Carl Jung was one of modern times' most articulate decipherers of symbol and myth. He also was unusual in the attention he gave to the developmental tasks of life's second half. He argued that it was these tasks that the hero journey's second half addressed. In his writings, Jung drew frequently on the Arthurian legend of the Holy Grail. The Grail myth is commonly interpreted as a story of religious seeking, but Jung emphasized that it is about wisdom more generally, about everything that goes into a mature relationship to life. Jung described how the Grail could not be reached by heroic means. He also described how nothing could be more important than its seeking.

Symbolic dynamics always work at multiple levels. Creative System Theory proposes that the hero's journey is, in the end, a description of formative process. If this interpretation is accurate, the lessons of the hero's journey should be pertinent everywhere formative dynamics play a role—within everyday choices, the developmental mechanisms of relationships and lifetimes…and the story of culture.

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[22]   Campbell was an important personal mentor when I was in my twenties and first developing Creative Systems Theory.

[23]   In these descriptions I'll focus on the more obviously heroic, more right-hand version of such narrative as it is easiest to talk about. In fact, we would better speak of the heroic/romantic myth to emphasize that it incorporates both right-hand and left-hand aspects. Each hand equally reflects a mythology of limitlessness.

As to limits, the important first lesson that our "universal monomyth" teaches is that ultimate limits need not be the end of the road. The journey has a second half. And what this second half of the hero's journey is most specifically about is limits of an inviolable sort. Not only can't its tasks be addressed by heroic means, the hero's journey's second half makes no real sense from the perspective of the first. The hero's journey not only teaches us that further truths lie ahead, it affirm that what lies beyond the first journey's heroic assumptions has great and even ultimate significance.

As important is a second lesson. It has to do with the severity of the dislocation inviolable limits and the tasks of maturity present. Inviolable limits may be a "natural" part of formative process and confronting them may bring great reward. But the fact of just how fundamentally disorienting inviolable limits can be—and why—is equally essential to understand. It helps make sense of our often contradictory feelings in confronting today's limits—our hopes and our fears—and also our often quite irrational assumptions about what may lie ahead.

That confronting inviolable limits would cause confusion might seem obvious—and certainly so with those we confront today. Ultimate limits take away familiar truths and present worlds that are more demanding. But the dislocation is even more fundamental—and thus even more potentially disturbing. The symbol-making part of us understands this. And while we can dramatically misinterpret what it is trying to say, the imaginal's role as a creatively germinal aspects of intelligence gives its message special significance. It is trying to tell us about something to come that we are not yet consciously able to grasp.

A first way we witness this depth of dislocation is in how the second half of the journey makes no real sense until we are actually in its midst. The reason is deeper than the simple fact we have not been there before, and deeper, too, than how creative stages make leaps. It is a reason we've seen earlier in first looking at the implications of developmental/evolutionary perspective and beginning to address the importance of rethinking our modern concept of progress.

The journey's first half may have diverse tasks—stages if you will—and they may make wholly different demands. But they conform to the same overarching task. They take us heroically onward. The second kind of story presents a whole new orientation, a

whole new direction, fundamentally different from the first. It manifests as time of return, and thus of reconnection and integration.

We can hear the new direction reflected in common figures of speech. Things "come full circle," thoughts or actions become "second nature." We must take some care here. The journey's second half can be misinterpreted in a way familiar from earlier reflections. Return in this sense is not at all about going back. And it is certainly not about refinding some "original essence." The journey's second half ultimately takes us even further from our beginnings than the first. But it *is* about a new, more integrative kind of process. In the next chapter we will examine this common misinterpretation and why we might see it more closely.[24]

The depth of dislocation becomes most symbolically vivid if we link the narrative of the hero's journey with earlier imagery. I've spoken of the entry-point of maturity as a threshold. That threshold marks the point of transition between our two journeys. The key to understanding the depth of dislocation we can feel lies in how the symbol-making part of us experiences that threshold, particularly how it can experience it in anticipation. As we approach maturity's threshold, not only is there no way to know just what lies on its far side, it is not possible to know if anything lies there at all. There can be fears of nothingness, or worse, that what waits is annihilation. The threshold can seem easily to mark only an abyss.

The Existential Abyss is a formal concept within Creative Systems Theory. In *The Creative Imperative*, I describe a gatekeeper who stands at maturity's threshold (in some form with second-half maturity of any sort). To proceed past him, we must accept three truths: first, that from here we are on our own; second, that we will no longer have final answers; and, third, that we are in the end responsible. Time reveals that each of these truths has a complementary truth (each now familiar from earlier chapters)—we are also deeply interconnected, we can know in ways that are better than knowing for sure, and responsibility in a creative sense is an ultimate source of fulfillment. But these further

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[24]   The short version: The fact that "return" imagery would be used to express where a mature perspective takes us reflects as much the cultural time from which traditional myth emanates as creative integration's results. In contrast with Modern Age reality, time, then, was still circular more than it was linear. Put another way, with imaginal intelligence, the potency of the archetypally feminine still outweighs that of the archetypally masculine.

truths make themselves visible only once the doorway's threshold has been crossed. Making passage requires a stripping away not just of the particulars of familiar story, it requires a confrontation with the possibility that one has reached the end of story—and meaning. We can't walk toward any inviolable limit—or any culturally mature truth more generally—without at least making the gatekeeper's acquaintance.

This confrontation can feel disturbingly absolute. In an important sense that gatekeeper is death—or more accurately, his face reflects our fears that death is what lies ahead. This is not physical death, but for the symbol making part of us it can seem to be this—or worse. Imaginal intelligence experiences any change, any surrender of the known, as a small death.[25] Creative integration requires not just that we surrender the known, but that we face the possibility that in doing so nothing will remain. In anticipation, the inviolable limits of maturity's threshold can seem to mark the creative story's conclusion—if not our demise, certainly meaning's demise.[26]

Recognizing such symbolism helps make understandable why we might experience the core crisis of our time, as I have described it here, as a crisis of purpose and hope. The Existential Abyss can appear to take everything away, or certainly to rob us of that which has seemed most central to meaning. To the imaginal, Cultural Maturity is very much about death. Certainly it is about the death of familiar answers. More deeply it is about the death of our whole basis for having dreams, that heroic story and its images of limitlessness. It also about the death of truth more generally—truth in any final absolute sense.

Such symbolism also helps make sense of why people might interpret our times in some of the extreme ways that they do. We see all manner of the radical reactions—from denial, to great hope (often of a naive sort), to premonitions of doom. Modern apocalyptic imagery manifests in contrasting forms—religious, environmental, philosophical—and with varying degrees of severity. But arguably its origin is in all

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25   Albert Camus counseled: "Don't wait for the last judgment. It happens every day."

26   I've described how midlife marks life's most deeply transforming period. Some people slide through its changes relatively unscathed. But psychologically its changes are particularly fundamental. In part midlife's significance is a product of the concrete limits it presents. As much it is because of these deeper, more symbolic mechanisms (which, depending on one's temperament, can affect with great intensity).

cases the same: a concretizing of such death (and perhaps rebirth) symbolism—a confusing of death as mythic image with the concrete realities of mature change (a confusion amplified by how often current changes leave us overwhelmed and hungry for simple explanation).[27]

Cultural Maturity's interpretation—whether we draw on our developmental metaphor, cognition's more aware and complex all-the-crayons-in-the-box picture, or the language of the hero's journey—offers an antidote for such more dismal predictions. It argues that to assume demise confuses symbol with substance (and in ways that could have most dangerous consequences). This is not to say that we don't confront horrific circumstances on the planet many of which are products of short-sightedness, and worse. And it is not to say that such shortsightedness may not in the end prove our undoing.

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[27]   Because such confusion can result in cynicism and despair, or worse, self-fulfilling prophesies, it is important that we understand how it works. Religious end-time scenarios are most obvious. The future becomes a time of final destruction to be followed by a resurrection (rebirth) of the chosen in a separate heavenly realm. A common result of such conclusions is denial of problems. In extreme cases, we see the making of choices that further the likelihood of predicted destruction.

As important are more benign and often unconscious, "It is all going to hell in a hand-basket and there is no way out" apocalyptic beliefs. Such less ideological end-is-near assumptions can be just as seductive; they let us be right even if it is a painful kind of right. And they can become in a less direct way self-fulfilling. They easily translate into cynicism, despair, and inaction.

Other beliefs link death and rebirth symbolism as part of earthly existence. This is common in romantic, idealist, and new age thought. Our current age is seen as a time of (often great) error. We will soon see a time of collapse and after that a time of radically-altered awareness and new light. In less extreme forms, current times are framed in terms of ignorance and diversion and the future in terms of the birth of a dramatically more aware and compassionate world. More extreme versions make the rise of civilization in effect an error and treat the new picture as a kind of collective spiritual enlightenment. (The error may be framed variously as the rise of patriarchy, hierarchy, materialism, or competition and domination. In creative terms, it is the growing presence of right-hand sensibilities.)

We can think of death's anticipation playing just a great a role, though a less explicit one, in views that see current assumptions as culminating or assume inventions will solve all future problems. Part of what makes such views work is how they keep fears of ultimate loss at bay.

Cultural Maturity argues that what makes any of these narratives attractive is that in different ways each protects us from having to deal with death in the sense this symbolism is really about. They keep us from facing the fact of ultimate limits and the deep existential responsibility the future will ask of us.

Civilizations decline and disappear just as a piece of sculpture can shatter in its making or a relationship can cease being fulfilling.

But Cultural Maturity doesn't predict literal death—unless we fail miserably at what our times ask. It proposes that what we witness today represents not the end, but the predictable challenges—and possibilities—that mark the beginning of our maturing as a species. Cultural Maturity argues that potentially great reward lies in finding the maturity and courage of perspective needed to engage today's new limits creatively. Such maturity and perspective will not provide answers for today's dilemmas. But it will make possible what is possible. More, it should support a new finding of purpose in ourselves and of significance in the human endeavor.

Capacity and Creative Possibility

All culturally mature concepts have imbedded in them a recognition of absolute limits. But one Creative Systems notion is particularly explicit in this regard and warrants introduction. This is the concept of Capacitance—one of Creative Systems Theory's "crux," Whole-System notions. The topic of limits highlights its significance. And the concept, in turn, provides important insights about limits and culturally mature thought more generally.

Capacitance concerns how much of the stuff of life (how much uncertainty, how much responsibility, how much change, how much complexity ... however we wish to frame it) a system can handle. It takes us beyond particular capacities to get at what makes abilities, present and future, possible.[28]

Capacitance describes potential. It also describes limits—think of a balloon that if blown up too far could pop. The ecological notion of carrying capacity is a Capacitance concept for the biological sphere. Push a human system too far beyond its Capacitance and the result is either outright damage or the evoking of protective mechanisms

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[28]   It is important to distinguish the concept of Capacitance from more familiar capacity-related notions like intelligence, power, or personality. All of these can be considerable in a person with low Capacitance. Saul Bellow observed that "A great deal of intelligence can be invested in ignorance when the need for illusion is deep." We only need witness Hitler with regard to power. And with regard to personality, we find its peak (but certainly not Capacitance's peark) in Hollywood celebrity.

(generally some form of polarization[29]). Anais Nin observed that "life expands or shrinks in proportion to one's courage." Capacitance describes appropriate limits to one's creative courage.

In times past we didn't need notions like Capacitance. Moral dictates, social roles, and mythologized truths served to guide us in making Capacitance-appropriate (age-appropriate, skill-appropriate, cultural stage-appropriate) decisions and protected us from experience that was yet more than we could take in. As Cultural Maturity's questioning of such rules places these tasks of discernment and protection more in our personal hands, generic measures such as Capacitance become newly important. If Cultural Maturity is right in its claims, such measures must be maturely systemic. Creative Systems Theory's formulation of Capacitance succeeds in being so.[30]

People often have a decidedly mixed response to the concept of Capacitance. The need for greater awareness and responsibility is part of it. But as much, we don't like to so directly acknowledge fundamental limits. We would much prefer to believe—and culture's stories have assured us—that if we are good people, and make a good effort, anything is possible. Accepting that this is not only not true, but that believing otherwise itself limits us, requires—well—a lot of Capacitance. But increasing we have no choice. In exchange for surrendering this further piece of our heroic story, Cultural Maturity offers that we might learn to manage Capacitance—and thus both possibility and safety—in much more sophisticated, particular, and creative ways.

Applying Capacitance in our personal lives helps give a feel for the concept's larger significance. We've seen how surrendering cultural dictates and mythologized truths requires us to make a wide array of now more individualized choices. Doing so necessarily involves a couple key "crux" discernments. We need to discern what kinds of actions are most likely to make experience alive (answer that Questions of Referent). We

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[29]   Systems pushed beyond their available Capacitance protectively polarize. See the CST concept of Creative Symptoms in the Appendix.

[30]   The Appendix describes the concept in greater detail. Like all CST notions, Capacitance shifts attention from specific abilities and conventional measures to the more encompassing question of how we organize experience. Note that Capacitance frames nicely in creative terms—both its definition and our task with regard to it. We can define Capacitance as the amount of possibility a system can creatively manage (in formal CST terms, the amount of aliveness—we could say creation—it can embody per unit time).

also need to evaluate available Capacitance. We may accurately appreciate the general direction in which right choice resides, but if we misevaluate what such choice will require of us—the needed Capacitance—we will have problems. This is so whatever way we misevaluate. Hold back out of fear that we might be overwhelmed and experience goes dead. Push beyond what we are capable of and the result is even more unhelpful— either outright harm or reactive protectiveness.

In my therapy practice, I advocate for what I call the "eighty-percent rule." I emphasize the importance of people structuring their lives so that they stretch themselves, but also that they always have a bit in reserve. This might at first seem a rather conservative suggestion, but in fact it represents quite the opposite. Living effectively on our "creative edge" requires leaving enough of a buffer that we can respond with resilience to unexpected challenges. We also need that buffer so we can take in fresh experiences—where often as not the greatest fulfillments lie.

Spending much time over one's Capacitance is never healthy. Our bodies produce stress hormones and our minds work much less effectively. Living chronically over one's Capacitance also has particularly adverse consequences if we wish to live a culturally mature life—where Whole-Person/Whole-System identity and perspective is key. We can put the result in "parts work" terms. When we exceed available Capacitance, parts take over in an effort to protect us. We polarize and project to keep life's challenges at a safe distance.

Attentiveness to Capacitance is just as important when we move from personal to social decision-making, when our concern is the health of communities, organizations, and nations. An essential ingredient when crafting culturally mature social policy is an appreciation for where limits to Capacitance lie. Return for a moment to that exercise of designing a safer world. One of the major causal factors in terrorism—and to the risk of conflict today more generally—is how, with globalization, diverse peoples get pushed together in ways that stretch available Capacitance. The likelihood of polarization in the face of threat becomes dramatically amplified (and with newly powerful weaponry, most dangerously so).

Of particular importance for good global policy is the recognition that Capacitance is directly tied to cultural stage. Each stage produces greater potential Capacitance. The effects of globalization will thus manifest in different ways in different

places. Attention to Capacitance becomes critical if we are to correctly anticipate the effects of our actions. Culturally mature global policy supports the growth of Capacitance while also helping protect social systems from being pushed beyond their Capacitance limits.[31]

The concept of Capacitance has a direct relationship to the concept of Cultural Maturity more generally. Culturally mature choice requires a certain level of Capacitance. And the causality goes both ways. All the changes Cultural Maturity implies—all those defining themes—follow naturally from that particular level of creative potential. How do we best "promote" Cultural Maturity? Good leadership is key and specific ideas and approaches each have important roles to play. But in the end, anything that supports a high level of systemic Capacitance supports the likelihood of culturally mature thought and action.

Note an implication for today's multi-tasking, chronically stressed-out world. Today we often consider living beyond our Capacitances a virtue (and not doing so a sign of weakness). One result is that Integrative Meta-Perspective can become difficult to achieve and certainty to maintain. People protect themselves through whatever forms of polarization are most native to their temperaments. But that is not all we see. Of particular significance, the frenetic pace provides its own kind of protection, made particularly impervious because of how widely it is shared. We bounce over the surface of experience, in the process distancing ourselves from any real depth of engagement. What gets put forward as a virtue functions as a defense mechanism that protects us from effectively engaging the creative tasks before us. The result is a dangerously addictive cycle—dangerous to us individually in that the result is an unhealthy, dangerous to us collectively in that it undermines effectively moving forward.[32]

Limits and Boundaries

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[31]   The importance of being attentive to Capacitance is most obvious with regard to relations with less developed nations. But it is just as pertinent with regard to ourselves. Note how commonly today constituencies in modern Western nations become polarized over the most trivial of issues, this exactly when Cultural Maturity would seem to predict such polarization to be on the wane. The Existential Abyss combined with globalization and all the more specific quandaries our times confront us with, presents a major challenge to Capacitance for everyone.

[32]   See Transitional Absurdities in Chapter Seven.

We can't talk about the fact of real limits without touching briefly on one of the abilities most essential to addressing limits effectively—the ability to set them. If we wish to live healthy and effective lives we need to make good external boundaries—to demands that chronically push us beyond Capacitance limits, to threats that might do harm, to everyday distractions that deplete needed resources. We also need to make good internal boundaries—to inclinations that might have us make choices that lead us in unhelpful directions or that do not honor Capacitance limits.

Being this conscious in setting boundaries is again something we are not familiar with doing. Historically, culture as parent has made most of our boundaries for us. Traditional notions of right and wrong, of masculine and feminine, of personal identity, leadership, or national identity, have made clear what is to be kept in and what is to be kept out in our choices. With Cultural Maturity, not only do all of these boundary choices come to lie more in our hands, we must learn to make them in a more complex world in which just what it means to have a boundary can be much less clear. We need more conscious and sophisticated boundary-making capacities in every part of our lives. This is the case whatever the systemic scale—individual decision making, in relationships, or how we function as communities, organizations and nations. [33]

When I first make this assertion, people of certain temperament can take issue. Boundaries seem harsh and rigid, exactly what we don't want our relationships and decisions to be. Cultural Maturity should be about breaking down walls, they say. But for reasons that should now be familiar, there is no contradiction. Remember our discussion of the necessary "bridging" relationship of connectedness and difference in the previous chapter. We saw there how the rigid boundaries of times past were products of polarity and projections. It is right that we should "break them down." But an absence of boundaries is not anything we should want, nor what we should expect. Good boundaries are essential to life, and certainly to an at all fulfilling life. In the end, we can say yes only to the degree we can effectively say no.

Integrative Meta-Perspective provides a new sensitivity and multiplicity in our boundary options. It makes possible more permeable boundaries when appropriate. It also

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[33] The limits Capacitance presents are not inviolate in the ultimate sense of final limits. Capacitance grows over time. But they inviolate in the sense that at any particular time they are absolute.

make possible more solid, once-and-for-all boundaries when they are creatively called for. Rigid boundaries are by nature reactive and brittle and are thus rarely as safe and effective as we imagine.[34] The more "living" boundaries that come with mature perspective makes possible an essential new sophistication at once with regard to life's yeses and to life's essential no's.

When our interest is mature systemic perspective and culturally mature decision-making, attention to inner as well as outer boundaries derives special importance. Integrative Meta-Perspective requires a complex set of internal yes's and no's. In doing parts work, a key aspect of the Whole-Person task become learning to "triage" the contributions of each inner character, making use of utterances that are useful, making clear boundaries to those which are not. This triage process combines with the ongoing internal boundaries through which the Whole-Person always retains final responsibility. I've described how each crayon in our systemic box makes essential contribution, but none gets the last word. Any time a part takes over—no matter how apparently virtuous its contribution—Integrative Meta-Perspective collapses and ideology, polarity, and projection reign.

This need for good internal boundaries further supports the importance of good in-the-world boundaries. Prior to Cultural Maturity's threshold, parts do a lot of our boundary making for us. Ideology reflects parts having their way. Once into culturally mature territory responsibility for making good external boundaries comes to lie entirely in the Whole Person's hands. When we fail at this essential responsibility, parts come to the rescue and use polarization and projection to reestablish old, more "reliable,"[35] forms

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[34]   How this new relationships to boundaries is felt depends greatly on temperament. People with certain temperaments have by nature quite permeable boundary structures. The larger challenge for them, beyond being more conscious of the important role of boundaries, will be learning to more overtly make them. Other temperaments are more natlively "thick skinned." The challenge again involves being more appreciative of boundaries and how they work, but learning to make boundaries that are more flexible and permeable will require special attention. In the Appendix we will look at how systems of all sorts have creative "temperaments" (with related boundary challenges).

[35]   Conscious boundaries are more adaptive and in potential more solid. But they may feel less familiar and, if not used wisely, can make a person more readily a target. Making them effectively require greater Capacitance.

of protection. When we do our job with regard to boundaries, parts have no reason to intrude.

The importance of good boundaries invites further quick reflection on common modern assumptions. People today often celebrate the boundarilessness that comes with modern information technologies, particularly new social media. In Chapter Four's conversation on the evolution of community, I commented on the hunger people today feel for community. That hunger can make such boundarilessness greatly attractive. But there is an unhealthy truth, or at least a truth that can make what is actually happening much different from—indeed nearly opposite to— what our stories tell us about it. Such boundarilessness can translate functionally into a particularly impenetrable kind of boundary. We encounter something similar to what I described with how today's frenetic pace can distance us from the depths of experience real effectiveness requires. Where interactive technologies result in real connectedness, we should very much applaud it. But we need to recognize, also, that, at least, in new media's current forms this is most often not what we see. The triviality of what is commonly communicated combined with its shear quantity and our inability to escape it keeps the depth of relatedness and the fullness of inquiry our times need to be about at a safe distance.[36]

Limits to Representation

I've made reference to a further, key limits-related concept, what Creative Systems Theory calls the Dilemma of Representation. The Dilemma of Representation helps further clarify both the gifts and the curses of Cultural Maturity's challenge—certainly its conceptual challenges, but ultimately also its challenge to who we are. It also provides important perspective for the practical tasks of supporting and catalyzing the changes Cultural Maturity is about.

Whether our efforts to communicate are verbal or pictorial, depiction confronts us with fundamental limits. Such limits are closely related to the Dilemma of Differentiation. Representation is about delineation, and the more "living" sort of delineation needed new understandings require takes us beyond what words or images readily represent.

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[36]   Again, see Transitional Absurdities in Chapter Seven.

A good way to experience this rhetorical impasse first hand it to try to articulate any conclusion that bridges polarities. When we say mind or body, leader or follower, political left or political right, most people have no problem understanding what we refer to. But begin to get at how minds and bodies, leaders and followers, or political extremes actually function and conventions of language break down. We can talk of having "mind/bodies" or applying "participatory leadership," but the messy vagueness only serves to emphasize the inadequacy of conventional language for the task at hand. Common language leaves us in a tangle when we try to describe any complex, multi-level, creatively emergent system (a mouthful only slightly better than a phrase like mind/body).[37]

Certainly, voicing any culturally mature concept or conclusion requires careful attention to how we use words. The most obvious difficulty (now familiar) comes from the cognitive complexity—the interplay of intelligences—that culturally mature thought necessarily draws on. The world as seen through intelligences other than the rational does not so readily translate into words (though poets often do admirably well). And the world as it appears with the ability to consciously hold the whole of human sensibility in an integrative fashion even more fundamentally confounds conventional discourse. (Here poets and pundits are stretched equally.)

The common structure of language reveals related difficulties. Conventional discourse juxtaposes nouns (things) and verbs (causations). Like it or not, this structure strongly biases understanding toward a connect-the-dots reality. This may be the reality of mechanical—right-hand—action/reaction causation we get with active verbs. (John hit Jack.) Or it may be the more tautological—left-hand—causality of ultimate connectedness (it is all one dot) we get with "passive" verbs. (A rose is a rose. God is love.). Either way, our descriptions stop short of mature perception's necessary completeness.

The issue with language limitations is not that culturally mature conception is inexact, quite the opposite. Rather, the need for greater precision takes us beyond the common application of language. It is a rhetorical impasse we've encountered repeatedly in our efforts to "define" Cultural Maturity.

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[37]   It is essential that we distinguish mature systemic conception's elusiveness from mystery, what Plato said "can neither be spoken of or written about." Culturally mature truth defies definition not because it is invisible, but because it is more inclusively substantive than conventional definition can reach.

To get around it, I've applied a variety of approaches—analogy, philosophical observation, metaphor and mythic reference. But while this multiplicity of approaches helps, it only gets us where we need to go by inference. Creative Systems Theory presents new terminology that is specifically systemic in its formulation. But while this gives us tools to work with, the dilemma remains ultimately unresolved.[38]

Pictures, we find, leave us in a parallel pickle. No matter how hard we try, culturally mature formulations do not reduce to simple visual representations. Neither two- nor three-dimensional depiction can get us there. Limits to pictorial representation are similarly not about an absence of precision. They reflect how systems of our second sort are complex at a level that pictures cannot capture. Culturally mature formulations defy more familiar approaches to visual representation for the same reasons that the ideas of quantum mechanics escape such capture. [39]

Conventional pictorial representation can serve us adequately for some purposes. A good example is the earlier use of paired circles to represent polar opposites [   ]. It's simple and handy. But such representation communicates the generative interrelationships that make poles creative only by inference, and the dynamic nature of each pole not at all. And it fails totally if we wish to depict the complexly dynamic realities revealed and made possible by the bridgings of culturally mature perspective.

We can stretch visual depiction to get around such difficulties, though in doing so we must accept that we can never fully succeed. Creative System theory utilizes a variety of what it calls "three-plus" representations—diagrammatic approaches that apply two dimensions of representation (in ways that imply three) to communicate things that neither two nor three dimensions can adequately capture. Each involves some "trick" that brings alive the more creative picture.

We've seen this approach applied with several images encountered previously:

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[38]   We can define CST concepts precisely using other Creative Systems concepts and often adequately using other culturally mature notions. But more general attempts to define any CST idea become quickly convoluted. It is the same with any culturally mature idea. No logical way exists to get from conventional thought to the needed precision. (The best we can do is to systemically encircle them—point at them from multiple directions—as we have in this volume.)

[39]   Richard Feynman once remarked that he could picture invisible angles but not light waves.

The image suggested by referring to polarities as juxtaposed creative "hands," works in this way with a little help [   ]. Its more animated representation suggests interrelationship—and less directly something further. If joining hands were the end of it, this picture would not add much to understanding. The image comes closer to "living" representation by virtue of the implied presence of a person doing the joining (and through this, of meaning in that interrelationship). And the notion that our two hands reflect a complementarity—a more archetypally feminine left hand juxtaposed with a more archetypally masculine right—evokes reference to polarity's underlying creative workings.

The doorway diagram I've used to introduce the concept of "bridging" [   ] represents a more elaborate three-plus depiction. For the image to work, we need to adjust our orientation to it. While the doorway's arch makes a conceptual association and gives our minds something to hold onto, creative "bridging" is about more than just joining the archway's columns. Joining the archway's two halves at best depicts compromise (or worse, hides a reduction of one pole to the other). And even standing at the threshold, what we do as we begin to recognize the limits of absolutes, is not enough. It only leaves us hanging in a precarious limbo—that Existential Abyss.

Affectively applying the image requires some sleight of hand. The act that makes the image an accurate metaphor is not completing the arch, but stepping over that threshold (and into a world that before we arrive must remain invisible to us). A toe over the archway's threshold lets us begin to recognize new questions (and that they are new). A few solid steps beyond it offers that we might begin to glimpse Cultural Maturity's emerging new landscape.

Our box-of-crayons image, too, represents "three-plus" representation. It is significant for how simply it takes us from the easily misinterpreted notion of "bridging" to more directly communicate systemic multiplicity. But as with any three-plus tool, representational limitations remain. The box communicates awareness's role in an Integrative Meta-Perspective only in a crude way. And while the spectrum of colors provocatively communicate difference, it suggests the creative interrelationship of parts only by inference.[40]

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[40] The diagram I used to introduce the leap from enlightenment objectivity to an Integrative Meta-Perspective (p.   ) is also in a limited way three-plus representation, though less clever in this slight-of-

The Creative Function presents a particularly sophisticated kind of "three-plus" representation. We've seen how it brings together earlier observations about the fact of creative stages and the role of polarity in formative process. I've also noted how it descriptively links developmental processes and here-and-how complexity.

Differentiation Phase | Integration Phase
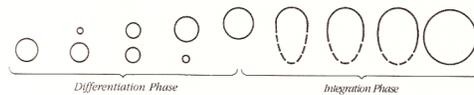
It also, again, confronts representational limits. We can adequately depict creation's first half, creative differentiation, as discrete circles (at least as adequately as with any paired circle representation). In fact opposing poles creatively interlink and each stage links to the next. But within any stage-specific slice, none of this is visible; colluding polar pairs can seem like the most extreme of opposites, and each polar juxtaposition will be experienced as complete and final truth. The representation thus comes close if our interest is reality as perceived through the eyes of each stage.

Beyond formative process's first-half, representation works much less well. The Creative Function's mid-point represents what Creative Systems Theory calls Transition. We could also call it maturity's threshold—or the Existential Abyss. It represents that at once disorienting and transforming reorientation that orders the beginnings of maturity in an individual life, and as proposed by the concept of Cultural Maturity, much in present cultural times. Visual representation here provides some information, but more about what is absent than what we see.

As we proceed into formative precess's second half, visual depiction fails us fundamentally. The complexities of maturity appear as an inadequate, and really misleading, dissolving of one pole into the next. (We've seen how mature systemic conception expands not just our appreciation for connections, but for the intricacies and

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hand sense. It simply requires that we use our imagination to fill in what we cannot explicitly depict. The Enlightenment-thought representation works well enough by itself. The mature prespective image requires that we somehow imagine the divided circle to represent the various stage of formative process. (We could make each section different color, but that, too, would be but a hint at the different organizational contribution each represents.)

dynamisms of "living" difference.) The function's representation fails fundamentally at depicting Cultural Maturity—and, ultimately, being that it is crafted from our familiar juxtaposed circles, the fact that formative process's workings are creative at all. Again, that it does is not a product of inexactness or because what it depicts is ultimately mysterious. Rather is it because Creative Systems Theory succeeds as systemic conception in the second sense.

Limits to articulation, both verbal and pictorial, remind us both of how much the realities of Cultural Maturity stretch us and how much in return they offer for our efforts. No matter how smart we may be, culturally mature representation messes with what we are used to. Understanding why—and what it takes to get beyond such limits—provides essential perspective for addressing the often overwhelming and frequently contradictory, limits-permeated challenges the future presents.

Limits and Hope

The way culturally mature perspective alters our relationship to limits at least supports that key challenges may be addressable. A mature understanding of limits helps us more accurately evaluate the tasks ahead. And whether the origins of limits we confront are new circumstances or the modern inescapability of limits that have always existed, Cultural Maturity provides tools that can help us engage inviolable limits creatively.

The topic of limits also provides some additional help with the question of whether needed perspective is something we are up to. There is again the fact that the needed potential is built into us. Rather than something we must invent, the ability to better recognize and deal with limits is part of the larger change process Cultural Maturity represents. And if our developmental analogy holds, the realization of such potential is not only developmentally consistent, it is developmentally timely.

We can also find reassurance in the way a mature understanding of limits affirms the "ordinariness" of Cultural Maturity. It reminds us that what our times ask of us is neither esoteric nor super-human. Inviolable limits can be deeply disturbing, but confronting them is about nothing more than engaging what is and always has been—now with a new depth.

The more specific concept of Capacitance provides some additional hope-related insight. At least it makes more clear what success depends on. Hope's question becomes, Do we have the Capacitance successfully realizing Cultural Maturity will require? The concept of Capacitance in different ways supports the appropriateness both of concern and hope.

On the concern side, the simple fact that Cultural Maturity is Capacitance-dependent means that, like it or not, real limits become part of the equation. Just being good people and trying hard—or even eloquently advocating culturally mature actions—may not by itself be enough. Remember the efforts of Evan and Bonney in the last chapter to get the conceptual "elephants" of progress and diversity into the room. Without sufficient Capacitance, the whole notion of Cultural Maturity—along with any idea or action consistent with it—makes no real sense. If culturally mature perspective requires major increases in Capacitance, and particularly if it requires a large critical mass of people with very high Capacitance, the odds of significant realization may not be what we might hope.

A person might counter that all we really need is a few high Capacitance leaders. But while electing high Capacitance leaders is again a worthy goal, it doesn't eliminate the Capacitance impasse. Often we don't recognize high Capacitance leaders when we see them.[41] And their presence can uncomfortably stretch us, with antipathy a common response. It is high Capacitance leaders that we are most likely to assassinate.[42]

In times past we've often gotten around this disconnect by electing leaders who don't have overwhelming high Capacitance. This has not been the problem we might imagine it to be. What was lost in vision was often made up for by the better systemic match. But it in times ahead, it may become very much a problem—perhaps even an insurmountable one—given the exceptional Capacitance many future challenges will require.

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[41] Lawrence Kohlberg, a colleague of Jean Piaget, proposed a scale of moral development. Kohlberg noted that moral conclusions born from a person's own stage will seem common sense. An idea from a single stage ahead will feel intriguing if not fully understandable. An idea from two or more stages ahead will be more than just incomprehensible, it will seem almost not to exist. An idea, assumption, or way of being can be "true" only to the degree the system has sufficient Capacitance to embrace it.

[42] Think of Lincoln, Gandhi, JFK, Martin Luther King.

But while the concept of Capacitance raises concerns, it also affirms the appropriateness of hope. At the least, being that Capacitance is a developmental concept, we would expect it to increase along with the changes that have brought us to this point. If the potential for Cultural Maturity's more general changes exists "in our bones," then our modern bones might be expected, also, to be up to supporting the needed Capacitance.

Another important capacitance-related observation provides reassurance by suggesting that needed new awarenesses may not require as much Capacitance we might imagine. Paradigmatic leaps do not necessarily involve major increases in Capacitance. In an earlier footnote, I described how systemic reorganization occurs using the image of a snake that must periodically shed its skin in order to grow. The skin represents the system's current worldview. The snake's girth represents Capacitance. Each new skin is distinctly new—a "transformation." But it is a product of incremental increases in girth.

What this metaphor suggests is not all good news. It implies that Capacitance can change only so fast. (The snake may experience times of faster and slower growth, but the expansion of its girth is a gradual process.)[43] At the same time, this deeper understanding of Capacitance means that shifts that could initially seem beyond us may not be as inconceivable as we might assume. (Who would have imagined the Renaissance before its appearance? Or the fall of the Berlin Wall, at least its suddenness?)[44]

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[43] We might reasonably think that if high Capacitance is what the future requires, we need only teach it: Educate people about culturally mature perspective and provide learning experiences that promote the needed Capacitance. All that will be very important. But we must be humble to the fact that while Capacitance increases with learning, it is not Capacitance that makes leaps. As Capacitance increases worldviews can change fundamentally, but changes in Capacitance itself are gradual and continuous. (Leaps in world view are systemic shifts made possible by a certain available, gradually acquired Capacitance.

[44] An additional hope-related observation might initially seem of minor comfort, but it is of no small significance. It notes that much that can seem crazy—and obviously "immature"—in modern culture is predicted by the concept of Cultural Maturity. In drawing on our developmental metaphor, I noted how transitional dislocations easily leave us estranged and floundering. I've also described how systems protectively polarize when pushed beyond their available Capacitance. Confronting that Existential Abyss would be expected to confront Capacitance in major ways. And we face events and challenges that do so more specifically. (Today's loss of absolutes in general pushes people to the edge of what they can handle, and particular events such as terrorist attacks, natural disasters, or particularly contentious social issues

Are we up to the challenge? Again, possibility and guarantee are not the same. Cultural Maturity's perspective on limits affirms that directions with real possibility and significance—even profundity—exist. It also further supports that the instructions for taking on those new directions may lie imbedded in our tool-making natures. The question of whether we are up to the needed magnitude of courage must be ours to answer through our actions.

The Price and the Prize

The price we must be pay for a mature relationship to limits, as with each of our other dimensions of maturity, is considerable. We must recognize that a lot of things that we might wish were possible simply aren't—for a variety of reasons, some economic, some the product of simple physical realities (limits to resources, limits to the planet's carrying capacity), some because the needed capabilities are yet beyond us. We have to acknowledge that rarely are we as in control—or ultimately as capable of control in any traditional sense—as we might like to think. We also have to accept that we can never be the kind of answer for other people—or them for us—that we may at times wish (whether the we in question is ourselves as individuals or who we are together as communities, ethnicities, or nations). And we have to appreciate that the ultimate desires of certain parts of us may be unattainable (indeed ultimately any desire that has it origins in only a part). In the end, we have to allow not just that no truth will ever have the certitude of cultural truths in times past, but that any story we might have about truth itself must forever be open to question.

And as should now be well apparent, the price we must pay if we fail to acknowledge this humbling additional piece of the new maturity is, again, higher. Deny physical limits and our choices will make the earth—our home—much less hospitable, if not uninhabitable. Deny limits to what we can control in the traditional sense and our

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coming center stage—the gatekeeper presenting himself suddenly and unexpectedly—can effectively push people over.) This protective dynamic explains much that today can seem particularly absurd and discouraging—for example, the periodic increases in political and social polarization (and the often particular pettiness of that polarization) we often see today when Cultural Maturity might seem to predict the opposite. In Chapter Seven we will look at an additional mechanism through which Transitions dynamics predictably contribute to nonsensical beliefs and responses.

efforts with more systemic challenges of all sorts—managing global economic systems, the prevention of global pandemic, combating terrorism, addressing social scourges from obesity to drug abuse—will spin out of control. Deny limits to what we can be for each other and we will find the skills needed for successful and secure relationships of all sorts—from those between individuals to those between nations—increasingly beyond our reach. And deny limits to where systemically partial truths—even of the most idealistic sort—can take us, and our dogmas will place us ever more intractably at odds wih and ever further distinct from truths of the kind we need.

The rewards for meeting limits honestly are, in the end, immense. Doing so provides the possibility of more balanced personal lives and a more sustainably healthy world. More, by helping us reclaim our limits-denying projections, it opens the door to before-unrecognized possibilities—in ourselves, in our relationships, and in the objects and institutions we create. Of our themes, the need to confront inviolable limits perhaps relates most directly to our time's crisis of purpose—and also provides the most immediate antidotes. Facing what may not be possible helps us better recognize what it essential. More generally, as grappling with ultimate limits reveals images of limitlessness to themselves be limiting—expressions of now constraining, outdated truths—we begin to glimpse a new, fuller, and even more potential-filled picture of who we are.

Weaving the Threads

The short version:

> We face inviolable limits at every turn. Some reflect new circumstances—for example, the reaching of environmental limits. Others, such as limits to what we can be for each other and limits to understanding, reflect ultimate truths that we are only now becoming able to recognize and tolerate.

> Our times demand both greater ability to acknowledge real limits and ways of thinking able to take limits more directly into account.

The good news. Cultural Maturity should make us more tolerant and even embracing of inviolable limits. An Integrative Meta-Perspective respects inviolable limits as absolute constraint, but at once, sees them as invitations to a new order of creativity and possibility.

Such understanding, if it is to have real depth, requires new and deeper appreciation not just of what may lie ahead, but also where we have come from—the topic of the next chapter.