

Coping with Change

by Jared Diamond

“The American way of life is non-negotiable.”

--Dick Cheney, Vice-President of the United States of America.

Although I disagree with our vice-president on many other matters, and although I would word even this formulation of his differently, in this case I do agree that he has succeeded in identifying a key issue facing the United States today: the issue of challenges to our way of life and our core values. We Americans are wrestling with the question whether we need to change our way of life and our core values, especially three aspects of them:

1. Our consumption rates, which have traditionally been high. Consumption rates are often confused with wealth and standard of living, with which they are correlated but not tightly.
2. Our relations with countries overseas, especially ones that might threaten us. Our traditional foreign policy has been based on isolationism, punctuated by short-term military involvements. Now, we are trying to decide whether to be involved overseas militarily, non-militarily, or not at all; whether our involvement should address just other nations' crises (as during World Wars One and Two), or also their fundamental problems; and whether our involvement should be long-term, short-term, or none at all.
3. How to balance rights of individuals against rights of society. Traditionally, the United States has been much more devoted to individual rights than have European countries and Japan.

Today, those traditional American values are under siege, especially because of three developments: the problems resulting from the disparity in wealth between the First World and the developing world; reverberations from the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the United States; and tensions within American society itself. Americans are more troubled now, and going through (or in need of going through) more soul-searching, than at any other time in my life.

These questions interest me not only because I am American living with the consequences of our core values, but also because these questions are related to a more general problem that was the focus of my recent book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (Diamond 2005). A key variable, I thought, in a society's success or failure was its willingness to reappraise its core values. The Greenland Norse refused to reappraise, while Meiji Japan did reappraise, with outstandingly different outcomes. (The Greenland Norse all ended up dead, while Meiji Japan ended up as a world power). I'm interested in reappraisals, or in resistance to reappraisals, in the modern world. Openness to reappraisal is different today in Europe, Australia, New Guinea, Bhutan, Tibet, Israel, the U.S., and (once again) Japan. All of those countries are confronted with the question: Who are we? What is essential to our national identity? Is our self-defined identity still serving us well today?

More broadly, these questions are related to three other types of reappraisals that also interest me. One type involves tribal peoples reappraising themselves while struggling for survival in the modern world. For example, why, among North American Indian groups (Native Americans), have Navajo and Pueblo Indians retained their cultural integrity better than almost any other group? A second type arises in our individual lives, in the form of the slow reappraisals that all of us make of our careers, marriages, and friendships. The remaining type of reappraisal also involves our individual lives, but consists of the rapid reappraisals that many of us make of our entire selves in a time of acute personal crisis.

I shall discuss these four types of reappraisal in reverse order, starting with individuals in crisis, and ending with whole nations and Dick Cheney's statement about American society. Preliminarily, I think I discern a generalization about reappraisals that applies across all four of these levels.

My first example of coping with change involves individuals plunged into a personal crisis, when one is suddenly forced to question one's entire self. My interest in this area stems from the career of my wife Marie Cohen, a clinical psychologist. During the first year of Marie's and my marriage, Marie trained in a clinical specialty called crisis therapy, at a community health center in Los Angeles. Clients came to that health center without prior appointments, in a state of "crisis," defined as their facing a challenge that they found insurmountable by their usual problem-solving methods. Common causes of such a crisis were the break-up of a relationship, a separation from or abandonment by a loved one, or the prospect of a divorce; the death of one's child, spouse, sibling, or parent; the loss of one's job, or a job failure, or even a job promotion or success; retirement; or the diagnosis of a serious illness. When the door of Marie's office opened and the next client walked in, Marie never knew what would be the issue of that person. But she knew that all of her clients would be in an acute personal crisis, because they had discovered that their previous ways of coping were no longer solving their problems. They were struggling either to find a new way of coping, or else to hold on to their old way. The crisis threw into question the client's long-established identity. Most of us have faced such a crisis in our own lives, or at least have lived with loved ones going through such a crisis.

The outcome of consultation sessions in health centers offering crisis therapy is variable. In the saddest cases, some clients attempt suicide or do commit suicide. Some clients can't figure out an alternative way of coping, revert to their old way, and end up becoming crippled by grief at their loss or

job change or illness. In the best cases, however, they do discover a new and better way of coping, work through the crisis, and emerge stronger than before. This outcome lies at the root of the Chinese written character for “crisis,” pronounced “wei-ji,” and consisting of two characters: the character meaning “danger,” plus the character meaning “opportunity.” The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche expressed essentially the same idea in his aphorism, “What doesn’t kill us makes us stronger.”

A regular observation in crisis therapy is that something happens within a time span of about 6 weeks. We can’t live for a long time without some identity, although we can grieve, suffer, or remain unemployed for a long time. Within 6 weeks we either find a new successful way of coping, or we find a new maladaptive way, or we revert to our old way. How does the therapist deal with such a client?

The methods of crisis therapy were developed by Dr. Erich Lindemann in Boston after the November 28, 1942 Coconut Grove fire, in which 491 people died. Boston hospitals were overwhelmed not just by the burn victims themselves, but also by relatives distraught because they knew that their husband or wife or child had died in a horrible way, by being burned to death. Some of the relatives succeeded in working through their grief, while others remained permanently devastated. What could a therapist do to help them?

Lindemann (1979) struggled to figure out how to assist both the survivors and the relatives to cope with their grief. He developed, and he and others subsequently elaborated, the approach termed crisis therapy. It consists of no more than four to six hourly sessions, at intervals of a week. In contrast to other forms of psychotherapy that focus on chronic problems, underlying psychological issues, or understanding childhood traumas, crisis therapy focuses just on the immediate crisis.

Typically, when a client presents himself/herself in a state of crisis, the client feels overwhelmed by a paralyzing, seemingly insurmountable, all-encompassing multitude of stresses. The therapist’s immediate goal in the first session is termed “building a fence”: i.e., identifying what are the specific

things that really have gone wrong during the crisis, so as to be able to say, “Here inside the fence is the specific problem in your life, but everything else outside the fence in your life is normal and OK.” (As we shall see, I think that the same issue of building a fence applies to whole societies -- tribes or nations -- in crisis). Often, the client feels relieved already as soon as the therapist formulates the problem and “builds a fence” around it. Then the therapist can proceed to help the client explore alternative ways of selectively coping with the specific problem inside the fence.

The experiences of crisis therapists over the last 60 years have identified at least seven elements affecting a client’s success in overcoming a crisis. The first element is that step of “building a fence.” If a person in crisis doesn’t succeed in building a fence, then he or she faces the prospect of change that would destroy his entire identity, and of course one resists the prospect of such change. Hence a key question is: what is there of your old self that you can hold onto, and what can you and should you jettison? As we shall see again, that issue of selective change is key also to reappraisals of core values by whole societies in crisis.

A second element is something called “ego strength,” which includes but is broader than self-confidence. It is a sense of yourself, and a contentment with yourself, as an independent competent person; an acceptance of yourself for who you are; and an ability to tolerate strong emotions within yourself, to express yourself freely, and not to depend on other people for approval or even for your survival. Ego strength comes especially from parents who accept you for who you are, and who don’t expect you to fulfill their own dreams, and who don’t expect you to be older or younger than you actually are, and who help you learn to tolerate frustration by not giving you everything that you want, and also by not depriving you of everything that you want. All of that background goes into the ego strength that helps one work through a crisis.

A third element involves the difference between a rigid or inflexible personality or character structure, as opposed to a flexible one. Rigidity or inflexibility can be the result of a previous history of abuse or trauma, or of an upbringing that offered no permission to experiment nor to deviate from the family norms.

A fourth factor is the availability (or lack) of models of alternative coping methods. This is a consideration familiar to all of us who have weathered a personal crisis. It provides a big advantage if there is someone (ideally, a real person with whom you can talk, but also even someone whom you don't know personally but about whose life you have read) who has weathered a similar crisis, and has provided a model of coping skills that you can try to imitate yourself.

A fifth factor is the ability to tolerate uncertainty, ambiguity, or failure at some initial attempts. It is quite likely that a person in crisis won't manage to figure out a new successful way of coping on the first try. It may take several attempts, trying different ways of coping to see whether they solve the crisis and whether they are compatible with the rest of one's personality, until one finally finds a new way of coping that works. People who can't tolerate uncertainty or failure, and who give up the search early, don't arrive at a new way of coping.

The next-to-last consideration involves a clash with a "non-negotiable value," to use Dick Cheney's words. One has to figure out where to draw the line in changing oneself: what is essential to your identity, and what values would you refuse to change because you consider them non-negotiable? At what point do you say "I'd rather die, than change THAT"? For example, many people consider adherence to their family or religion as non-negotiable; we are inclined to admire someone who would refuse to betray his family or to recant his religion under duress in order to get out of a crisis. But we quickly enter a gray area in which it is not so easy to decide whether a value really is non-negotiable: for example, would you recant your religion if you perceived that it is false, inappropriate, or fails you?

Many survivors of Auschwitz concentration camp did recant their religion, reasoning “There is Auschwitz, therefore there cannot be God.” The Norse who lived in Greenland as the most remote outpost of medieval Europe, from AD 984 until the early 1400’s, defined their identity as being Christians, and that identity gave them the strength to survive for centuries in a difficult environment with little support from other people (Diamond 2005). That identity eventually led the Greenland Norse to despise as pagans the Inuit (Eskimos) reaching Greenland in the 1300’s. The Norse would rather have been dead than live like the Inuit, and that view extended to despising the Inuits’ eating fish, which the Greenland Norse did not eat. As a result, the Greenland Norse ended up starving to death, rather than eat fish: abstinence from eating fish was part of being Christian and distinguished them from the Inuit. To us today, clinging to fish avoidance as a non-negotiable value essential to one’s identity, even at the cost of one’s life, seems like a mistake, rather than as something to admire.

A remaining factor contributing to success or failure in weathering a crisis is previous experience of successful coping. If you have had the experience of already coping successfully with some different crisis, that gives you confidence that you may be able to solve a new crisis as well. That contrasts with the sense of helplessness growing out of previous experience that, whatever you do, it won’t help you. That accumulated experience may explain why the Norse who settled Iceland around AD 870 founded a society that remained conservative for such a long time. Within the first few centuries of their occupation of Iceland, the Icelanders worked out a strategy for surviving in Iceland’s unforgiving, fragile, difficult environment, even though it meant living as the poorest people in Europe. After developing that strategy, the Icelanders’ experience was that, whatever innovation they tried, it made things worse rather than better. That frustrated the well-meaning Danes who governed Iceland for many centuries, and who proposed many ways to improve the Icelanders’ condition, only to be met by an unvarying response of “No, we won’t try it.”

In short, while our life background equips some of us better than others of us to master crises, we are not helpless victims of our parental upbringing. Instead, like the whole societies that I shall discuss, we too as individuals have choices. Being aware of factors making you more likely to succeed or fail gives you the chance to address those factors consciously. For an individual in crisis, fundamental to making good choices are an honest, albeit painful, appraisal of which parts of you are working, and which are not; and selectively retaining your strengths, and replacing your weaknesses with new ways of coping. We shall encounter these themes again when we discuss societies coping with change.

My second discussion of coping with change concerns individuals undergoing a slow reappraisal stemming from growing dissatisfaction with some specific facet of their life, rather than a crisis seemingly affecting their whole life. Typical examples that many of us have faced or will face are reappraisals of our career, our marriage, or our friendships. For example, many people become dissatisfied with their initial choice of career, think about switching careers, and some people actually make a career change. But it's scary to make such a change. We wonder: I think that a different career would appeal to me, but would I actually succeed at it? Do I have the right skills for the new career? Would I do better, or would it be safer, just to stick to my present career, which is more or less OK for me, even if it isn't fully satisfying? If I do decide to change careers, how can I make the transition from my present career? – Should I make an abrupt switch, or should I instead try slowly to phase out my present line of work and gradually to devote more and more effort to a new line?

I'm especially interested in career reappraisals, because I've been through career switches three times: my search, between 1962 and 1968, for a parallel second career (while continuing my first career

as a physiologist), that resulted in my developing a parallel career on the ecology of New Guinea birds; my switch between 1980 and 1982, from cell physiology to physiological ecology; and my switch, between the early 1990's and 2002, from physiology to geography and environmental history. There were also two switches that I considered seriously, but that I eventually rejected: a switch out of science into becoming a linguist in 1959, and into becoming a musician in the early 1960's. In both of those cases I abandoned the idea of switching, because I had to recognize that I had the interest but not the necessary talent. All of these reappraisals about career switches were not short six-week crises for me; each was instead a long process lasting between two and 10 years. In addition to learning about career switches through introspection on myself, I have watched many other people succeed or fail at career shifts.

A key issue in any career shift is an honest and accurate appraisal of one's professional ability – i.e., again the theme of selective change. What aspects of your old career can you retain, and what should you jettison? What profession do your skills really suit you for? Some particular new career may appeal to you, but are your abilities really suited to it?

For example, I have one friend who started out as a theoretical physicist, and another who started out as a mathematician, both of whom became dissatisfied and switched into ecology while making use of their previous strengths, but the two of them did it in different ways. One, the theoretical physicist, lacked ecological field experience, and decided not to try to acquire it but instead continued to make theoretical models (as he had as a physicist), and he used those models to analyze existing ecological data or else collaborated with field ecologists. The other friend, the one who started out as a mathematician, had been a bird-watcher as a boy, so that when he did switch into ecology, he decided to observe birds seriously. Both of those friends became great ecologists, but in different ways: the first was Robert May (e.g., May 1973), and the second was Robert MacArthur (e.g., MacArthur 1972).

Contrast those two friends with the molecular biologists of the 1950's and 1960's, who had cracked the structure of DNA, the genetic code, and the molecular basis of immunology. Having gained self-confidence from their successes in genetics and immunology, some of them switched to studying neurobiology and the brain, which they saw as the next biological frontier. They hoped that that frontier would yield to their talents, just as had the frontier of molecular biology. But the results of their switches into brain research were on the whole disappointing, because they failed to appreciate the need for a type of thinking in brain research different from the thinking that had been required in molecular biology and that had been well matched to their talents. Molecular biology's frontiers of the 1950's and 1960's favored scientists with the power of reasoning about well-defined problems, involving a small body of facts that one could acquire while still young. In brain research, however, they found that they were now dealing with a messy system, unformulated problems, a huge body of facts, and the need for very complex measurements rather than brilliant strokes of reasoning.

Another type of career switch that involves similar issues concerns composers of classical music who start out writing instrumental music, and who then try to broaden out into writing operas. The greatest opera composers have devoted themselves full-time to opera: Wagner, Verdi, and Puccini wrote no memorable music other than operas. Many great instrumental composers have tried to write operas, but opera demands skills at maintained large-scale drama very different from the skills required to write a symphony, a string quartet, or even songs. Opera has exerted a fatal irresistible attraction for many non-operatic composers. Ones who tried it and failed included Antonin Dvorak, Cesar Franck, Franz Josef Haydn, Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, and Hugo Wolf. If only Schumann had written one more great piano concerto, instead of his unfortunate failed opera *Genoveva* (Daverio 1997)! If only Cesar Franck had written one more fabulous violin and piano sonata, instead of his now-forgotten unfortunate four operas (Davies 1973)! Beethoven tried and succeeded at writing a single opera, *Fidelio*, but at

enormous cost (Solomon 1977). Even after his last revision of *Fidelio*, Beethoven wrote, “This whole opera business is the most tiresome affair in the world, for I am dissatisfied with most of it.” Brahms (Swafford 1997) and Mendelssohn (Todd 2003) both toyed with writing an opera, but both resisted the temptation, and at least Brahms was surely right to resist: he recognized that he lacked the skill of sustained dramatic development, as demonstrated by the weakness of the closest thing to an opera that he wrote: his most disappointing large-scale work, his cantata *Rinaldo*.

Having discussed individuals coping with acute crises, and others coping with slower reappraisals of careers, let’s now examine reappraisals on the part of entire societies. Around the world today and in recent centuries, non-European tribes have had to deal with the shock of European impact. That impact presents a tribe with a dilemma. On the one hand, a tribe must adopt some European culture and technology if it is to survive. On the other hand, it can’t discard all of its tribal ways and adopt European culture wholesale, otherwise the tribe will lose its identity and merge into European society. In my field work in New Guinea for the last 45 years, I have observed very different outcomes among New Guinea’s 1,000 tribes. Most successful have been those tribes that do adopt eagerly but selectively; that retain pride in their tribal ways, or even belief in their tribal superiority; and that still live in or return to their traditional villages. Those societies have the tribal equivalent of ego strength that we discussed for individuals.

For example, one of the most successful tribes in Papua New Guinea is the Chimbu, first contacted by the outside world in the 1930’s. The first Chimbu man that I met was still wearing a traditional grass skirt and could not read or write, but on the day that I met him he had just bought a sawmill for 100,000 Australian dollars in cash, which was only part of the wealth that he had

accumulated. I learned the story of this enterprising gentleman. Living in his grass hut in his village, he had noticed that European settlers in the area were planting coffee trees. He inquired about the purpose of the trees, and was told that they produced seeds for which Europeans would pay a lot of money. So he began developing coffee plantations himself, using the profits to develop more plantations, then using the further profits to buy his own fleet of trucks to take his coffee to market so as not to have to pay other people for their trucks, and he was now branching out into sawmills. That's an outstanding example of selective adoption of European culture.

Another illustration of the quickness of the Chimbu to adopt selectively came while I was working at a remote patrol post and airstrip called Karimui. There, the local people of the Tudawhe tribe were gentle, and somewhat uncurious and unambitious. Living at or visiting Karimui were a few Chimbu government workers and traders. When the first helicopter landed at Karimui airstrip, it was unlike anything that the local Tudawhe and Chimbu had ever seen before. The Tudawhe gathered excitedly around the helicopter, touched it, talked about it, and eventually walked away or turned their backs and resumed their daily life focused on growing sweet potatoes. The several Chimbu who happened to be at the airstrip, however, remained there, talked to each other, and then approached the helicopter pilot and began asking him questions. How far could the helicopter fly, and how long did it take to fly that distance? How many kilograms of pay load could it carry? Who owned the helicopter? How did one operate a business and earn money based on owning helicopters? On being told that the helicopter owner chartered it to prospective users, they inquired about the charter costs per hour. They then walked away from the pilot for a few minutes, talked among themselves, and came back to the pilot with a proposal to charter the helicopter.

It turned out that those Chimbu had calculated that, if they chartered the helicopter to fly to an outlying village where birds of paradise were abundant and had not yet been hunted out, they could buy

bird-of-paradise plumes cheaply at that village, fly them back in the helicopter to their Chimbu homeland where birds of paradise have been largely shot out and plumes command a much higher price than in the outlying village, and earn enough from the mark-up on plumes to pay for the helicopter charter and make a large profit for themselves. That's an example of flexibility and selective change on the part of Chimbus (but not of Tudawhe), combining the traditional importance of birds of paradise in Chimbu culture with the possibilities opened by the availability of helicopters.

The differences in Papua New Guinea between the Chimbu and the Tudawhe are mirrored by differences in North America among the approximately 187 Indian language groups living in North America at the time of European arrival 500 years ago (Jorgensen 2007). Dozens of those Indian languages have already disappeared, and most of those that are still living languages are in the process of disappearing, spoken by just old people (in numerous cases, just a few old people or even just one) and not being learned by children. If an anthropologist could have surveyed North America in AD 1492 at the time of Columbus's landfall in the Caribbean, the anthropologist would have found it difficult to predict which tribes would best succeed at remaining intact and retaining their language. I doubt that the anthropologist would have foreseen that the only two North American Indian tribes with regular radio broadcasts in their language today are the Navajo and the Yupik Eskimo, and that the North American language with by far the greatest number of speakers today is Navajo with 150,000 speakers, when the Navajo may have numbered only a few thousand people upon European arrival. Many formerly much larger and more powerful Indian tribes are now no longer intact, and have lost or largely lost their language: for example, the Cherokee now down to 11,905 speakers, the Hopi 5,264, the Mohawk 1,667, the Nez Perce 697, the Seneca 200, the Pawnee 4 (all of them elderly), the Klamath-Modoc 1 (elderly), and the originally formidable Narragansett none (Grimes 2000, Harrison 2007).

Why are there such large differences in cultural intactness among North American Indian tribes, as measured by language retention? Partly, it's a matter of geographic luck: the Navajo were lucky to be in a remote barren area not coveted by whites, whereas the Cherokee and Narragansett had the misfortune to be living in good farm land on the east coast from which white colonists expelled them. However, there are cultural factors as well. The Navajo have been outstanding at selectively borrowing from European society while remaining intact and proud. The Navajo adopted sheep herding, blanket weaving, silver-smithing, and trucks, but most of them still live in their traditional hogan dwellings and speak Navajo.

Finally, let's consider issues of coping with change at the largest scale: state societies changing, or refusing to change, their values when conditions change. At that level, too, change requires the national equivalent of ego strength, a willingness to reexamine one's national values, the skill required to change selectively, and the ability to build a fence. I already mentioned the unsuccessful case of the Greenland Norse, who refused to change when conditions of cooling climate and the arrival of hostile neighbors required change, and who ended up dead as a result. In this concluding section I shall mention the success stories of Meiji Japan and post-World-War-Two Europe, and the unresolved stories of Japan, Europe, and the United States today.

The outstanding story of selective change in modern times is that of Japan during the Meiji Restoration beginning in 1868. The uninvited arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry's American fleet in a fortified Japanese harbor in 1853 forced Japanese to realize that the policy of isolation maintained by Japan's military leaders (the Tokugawa shoguns) no longer worked to protect Japan against foreigners. Hence, beginning in 1868, Japan embarked on a crash policy of selective change and borrowing from the

West, with the result that Japan became the only non-European country other than Thailand to succeed in avoiding colonization by Europeans. Japan jettisoned its shoguns, and jettisoned their policy of isolation. In order to borrow selectively from Europe, Japan sent envoys to different European countries to learn what each country was best able to offer. For example, it learned ship-building and the principles of a modern navy from England, and it learned the principles of a modern army and constitutional government under an emperor from Germany. It built railroads and telegraphs on European models. Within a few decades it fought and defeated its much larger neighbor China, then a decade later Russia, then another decade later Germany. Japan adopted western clothes and (selectively) economies. Despite those incredible changes, they remained selective: Japan remained distinctively Japanese by continuing to prefer its complicated kanji writing system, retaining much of its culture and food and religion, and retaining a belief in its uniqueness and superiority.

After World War Two, Japan succeeded in another drastic reappraisal and selective change, when it jettisoned its long military tradition and its autocratic government. It rebuilt its economy to become one of the world's richest countries. Japanese today still wear western clothes while writing in kanji. Today, though, Japanese core values are once again under assault. Japanese women in growing numbers are rejecting the traditional role expected of them, and are choosing not to marry Japanese men, with the result that Japan's proportional birthrate is the lowest in the world, far below the level for maintaining Japan's population. Despite the resulting aging of the Japanese population, as more and more old people require support from fewer and fewer young people, Japan continues its traditional policy of refusing to accept immigrants and assimilate foreigners – the solution to the corresponding problem of declining birthrates and aging population adopted in Europe and the United States. After centuries of virtual self-sufficiency under the Tokugawa shoguns, Japan has recently been plundering the forests and fisheries of

other countries to become the world's leading importer of wood products and seafood, but Japan is thereby destabilizing its own trade partners and its ultimate suppliers of essential resources.

To recast its traditional role of women, its traditional rejection of immigration to maintain a homogenously Japanese society, and its exploitation of resources of other countries would require drastic selective change on the part of Japanese society. Japan has shown its capacity for drastic selective change twice in the last 140 years. Will Japan succeed in reappraising again? No one can predict the outcome. However, it is interesting at least to consider which of the seven factors that I identified earlier as affecting an individual's success in overcoming a crisis seem to be in Japan's favor in overcoming its national crisis today, and which factors might diminish one's optimism. In Japan's favor, I think, stand four of my seven factors: Japan has historically been successful at building fences setting off problematic areas of Japanese society (e.g., foreign relations during the Meiji era) from unproblematic ones (e.g., comfortable acceptance of much of traditional Japanese culture); Japan continues to be imbued with national ego strength; it drew brilliantly on models of alternative coping methods in the Meiji era; and it draws confidence today from that previous experience of successful coping. But three of my seven factors seem less favorable for Japan: perhaps an element of societal rigidity; lack of Europe's and the United States' experience of wide policy swings associated with real parliamentary democracy and permitting toleration of initial policy failures; and some traditional values that may be considered non-negotiable despite their increasing mismatch to modern conditions. Readers may ask themselves similar questions about prospects for re-appraisal in modern Britain, continental Europe, and the United States, which I shall now discuss.

My next example comes from Europe, especially Britain, after World War Two. Britain's traditional identity was based on being a world power, masters of the greatest empire in history, owners of the world's strongest navy, and a belief in the British people as being tolerant, a belief made easier by the

British population being homogeneously British, with little need to decide how tolerantly to behave towards other people at home in Britain. Then came the abrupt decline in Britain's wealth and political power and the rise in its immigrant population after World War Two. Four devastating blows within two years shocked the British people by making clear how much conditions around them had changed: the debacle of the Suez Crisis of November 1956, when Britain was forced to recognize that it was no longer a world power capable of an independent foreign policy; the scrapping of Britain's last battleships in 1958; and the Nottingham and Notting Hill race riots of 1958, exploding the myth that the British were tolerant when actually confronted with large numbers of immigrants.

Those shocks triggered an agonizing reappraisal, which was at its peak during the years 1958 to 1962, while I was living in Britain. Most British people recognized then that something was wrong, some British concluded that it was necessary to change, and others sought to cling to the past. I recall a dejected British friend in those days telling me that Britain was on its way to becoming one of the poorest countries of Western Europe. But the British people did succeed in carrying out a selective reappraisal, as a result of which they no longer aspire to empire or command of the seas or a dominating independent foreign policy, but Britain is once again a rich country and a leader in science and technology, partly integrated with Europe while remaining unmistakably British.

Continental Europe has been undergoing its own reappraisal for the last 60 years. For centuries, Europeans had viewed themselves as citizens of intermittently warring nation-states. World War Two forced Europeans at last to recognize that that identity was no longer viable, because it had already cost the lives of tens of millions of Europeans in two world wars. Europe then embarked on the path of economic and political unification that has resulted in the European Union as it exists today. To anyone familiar with traditional European outlooks until World War Two, the progress towards political and economic unification that has already been achieved is incredible. But recent rejections of the proposed

European constitution illustrate that Europeans still have not completely resolved their basic dilemma: how to preserve the ancient diversity and competition between nations that made Europe strong, while incorporating that diversity and competition into a new European unity.

My remaining example at the level of the nation-state involves my own country, the United States, which is now undergoing its own agonizing reappraisal. It is becoming clear that three of our dearest core values no longer serve us well. One of those core values is our consumerism. The United States was able to become the richest country in the world, i.e. the one with the highest consumption rates, because for over two centuries a relatively modest population of Americans occupied much of a continent with seemingly unlimited resources. But our consumerism no longer works in the modern world of shrinking resources, when the population of the United States has passed 300 million. Our average per-capita consumption rates are about 32 times those of developing countries (Diamond 2005). Those consumption rates are no longer sustainable, and we can no longer justify them by claiming that they are necessary for our high standard of living, when Canada and Western Europe enjoy higher standards of living despite lower per-capita consumption rates.

Our second core value under stress is our individualism. The balance between individual rights and communal rights differs between the United States and Europe. For example, in the United States, land-owners are usually free to cut down a tree on their own property; in Europe, local governments restrict that right of individuals. I have been watching that dilemma play out in debates over land development in the state of Montana, where my family and I spend our vacations each summer, and where individualism is stronger than almost anywhere else in the United States. In our summer area of Montana's Bitterroot Valley, there were until recently no zoning restrictions on land use, with the result that the valley now has its largest cinema standing immediately next to its largest biotechnology plant, both in the middle of hayfields. Several decades ago, we Americans resolved our debate about individual

rights to pollute with cigarette smoke the air breathed by others (e.g., in airplanes and restaurants), in favor of communal rights. But we have not yet resolved the corresponding debate over smoking into the whole atmosphere: we permit, and we even grant tax incentives to, owners of fuel-inefficient motor vehicles such as Humvees, despite the economic losses that the resulting global warming is already causing in many American states. Will we Americans reappraise our traditional favoring of individual rights over communal rights, when it no longer makes sense to do so?

The remaining traditional American core value now up for debate involves our role overseas. Our first President, George Washington, famously advised us in his Farewell Address of 1796 to avoid entangling alliances. That isolationist policy was good advice at the time, when the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans protected us from any enemy strong enough to be a threat. For nearly 150 years our foreign policy continued to rest on that foundation of isolationism, punctuated by short-term military intervention in World War One, yielding immediately after the end of that war to a reversion to isolationism. Our current involvement overseas in Iraq and Afghanistan still consists primarily of military interventions.

That traditional value of isolationism, which worked as long as the oceans were an effective barrier, is now failing. Particularly since the World Trade Towers attack of September 11, 2001, it is clear that the oceans no longer protect us from terrorists, nor from emerging diseases and unstoppable waves of immigration. Will we Americans change the values underlying our traditional isolationism and short-term military role overseas, and will we start making heavy overseas investments in addressing the fundamentals that generate terrorism, disease, and immigration? In favor of addressing the fundamentals is that it would be cheap and efficacious to do so: it would cost only about \$25 billion (an amount equal to the cost of just a few days of our military activities in Iraq) to launch a worldwide attack on the world's three most important infectious diseases, namely, AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. It would cost only about \$8 per year to protect each African in Africa's malaria zone against malaria, for a total of only a

few billion dollars for all of Africa; mining and oil companies have succeeded in local examples of such malaria control programs in southern Africa (Sachs 2005). Family planning is very cheap, and is desired by many people in the Third World. Such changes in our overseas policy, shifting towards long-term emphasis on fundamentals, would go against our traditional core values. But, just as in the case of the individual client coming in to the office of my wife Marie, some of our traditional core values as a nation don't work anymore, and they don't enable us to cope.

I shall close by returning to Dick Cheney's phrase: "The American way of life is non-negotiable."

The key question that one has to ask in that regard is: "Don't negotiate with whom?" Our Vice President was surely implying, "Don't negotiate with other countries." Yes, of course we won't negotiate with other countries about the American way of life. But, really, the ones with whom we have to negotiate are ourselves. No one is tougher to negotiate against than one's old self. It remains to be seen whether we Americans are willing to renegotiate with ourselves, selectively, the core values underlying the American way of life.

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