

## THE CASE FOR COMMON SENSE A New Economic, Ecological, and Social Revolution

### Introduction: An Awakening

I awoke from a restless dream. My eyes opened slowly. My mind began to return to consciousness. I looked around. I wasn't in my bed or anywhere where I might have been taking a nap. I was lying on an examining table in a hospital. Someone was asking me how I was doing – if I was okay. Slowly I began to remember where I had been before I *fell asleep*. Someone then also had been asking me how I was doing. I had said fine, until the last time they asked. The last time, I had felt a bit light-headed. I had looked at the heart monitor and had seen the lines tracing the rhythms of my heart going crazy. That's the last thing I remember from my old life. I had awakened to something new.

The doctor asked if I knew what had happened. I didn't; I must have given him a strange look. A young nurse who had been assisting with my stress test looked a bit stressed herself – shaken in fact. She had come in to relieve the regular nurse who was called away for mock code training – to practice bringing people back to life after their heart stops. My young nurse had just practiced by doing the real thing – for her first time, on me. She would come by my hospital room several times later that week to take electrocardiograms. She always had a strange look in her eyes – as if my being alive was surprising.

The doctor eventually told me what had happened. I had successfully completed my stint on the treadmill – twelve minutes plus. It was a routine six-month checkup after what had appeared to be successful angioplasty in the summer of 1995. I had been sitting on the table, cooling down, when suddenly my heart went into ventricular fibrillation – a spasm of the lower chambers. There is only one hope for survival of ventricular fibrillation – the paddles. Since the crash cart was only ten feet away, I was *dead* for only a couple of minutes before they shocked me back to life. Had it happened anywhere else, like during my daily jog, I would have stayed dead.

Even after finding out what had happened, I felt strangely calm. Why had my heart stopped in a hospital? My mother would have said it just wasn't my time to die. I must have some work left to do, I concluded. My near-death experience must have been a message: “You're not going to die yet, but you're not going to live forever.” There must be something important left for me to do, but time is running out, so, I had better get on with it.

I went through open-heart surgery, three bypasses, with no sense of fear. It made no sense that I came back to life only to die a few days later. I actually enjoyed the days and weeks of my recovery – even with the aches and pains that go with having your chest cracked open and your innards rearranged and repaired. My brother Tom came to stay with me for a week. We had planned to take a trip to the North Carolina that week to play golf and hike in the mountains. Instead, he helped me recuperate. We talked and I took lots of walks and naps.

After Tom went home, I spent time reading and reflecting on the purpose of my new life. What was I supposed to do that was so important that I had to die to be encouraged to get on with it? I was now certain that life had meaning, but I still had to figure out what I was supposed to do with mine.

By chance, I had recently borrowed a library book – The Life and Major Works of Thomas Paine.<sup>1</sup> Paine, a friend of Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, was a writer during the time of the American and French Revolutions. He wrote about philosophy and politics in a style that was understandable to the *common man*. His most famous writing was a fifty-page pamphlet called *Common Sense*. In it, he said that it made no sense for the American Colonies to remain attached to Great Britain; instead, they should declare their independence, and form their own Republic. His later writings revived the spirit of the American Revolution during its darkest hours. George Washington read Paine's pamphlet to his troops at Valley Forge. Paine's words gave voice to yearnings for freedom and gave hope when the cause seemed hopeless. Paine continued to write, using the penname of *Common Sense*, throughout the revolution.

Paine's writing may have been easy to read by the standards of the late 1770s, but it wasn't easy reading for me. Under any other circumstances, I probably would never have finished the book. Somehow, I felt a link between the book and my near-death experience. To me, borrowing it at this particular time was more than coincidence. Tom Paine's purpose in the 1770s somehow was related to mine today.

My colleagues at the University would have scoffed at my search for such meaning. We are scientists. In science, all things happen for purely logical and rational reasons. I had heart problems because calcium deposits had blocked three arteries of my heart, even though my lifestyle reflected virtually none of the high risk factors for heart disease. Carelessness, rather than destiny, had caused me to forget pretest restrictions on caffeine and to have four cups of regular coffee and a tall Starbucks that morning. If I had gone for a jog rather than to the hospital that morning, I would be dead. I wasn't dead only because I was lucky. The only reason I had checked out

Thomas Paine's book at the time was because I had wanted to read his paper on agrarian reform. In science, things happen for purely logical, rational reasons.

Although a scientist, I had abandoned this philosophy of rational explanation of all things some time back. In fact, for the last decade, I had been drifting farther and farther from the rational thinking of my colleagues. The near-death experience was only the latest, albeit the most dramatic, of a series of events that had been guiding my life in a different direction. I had slowly changed from being a conservative, free market, bottom line, agricultural economist to something fundamentally different – just how different I didn't yet know.

One of the earliest legs of my journey away from rationality had been my questioning of the difference between knowing *how* and knowing *why*. For example, I knew the logical, rational explanations of *why* my heart stopped, and *why* it started again, actually didn't relate to *why* it stopped, but rather to *how*. The blocked arteries and muscle spasms explained *how* but not *why*. As with all purely logical explanations of *how* things happen, rationality left me without a clue as to *why*.

In my early adult years, I saw science as the means by which humankind was slowly removing the mysteries of life. Science was born during a time when people thought God was the answer to nearly every question. Why did the earth exist? Because God created it. Why did it rain? Because God made it rain. Why were people born? Because God gave them life. In the 1600s, all wisdom was thought to reside in the minds of the religious scholars – the clerics. Early scientists, such as Galileo, were condemned by the church because their findings of science seemed to conflict with religious beliefs of the time. But science eventually prevailed. As modern science answered more and more questions, God became the answer to fewer and fewer.

Science claims that the earth was created by a *big bang*, not by God. It rains because moisture in the air cools as it rises, and eventually condenses into raindrops and falls back to the earth. A fetus is formed when a sperm fertilizes an egg in the womb, and about nine months later a child is born. These things happen according to basic physical laws, not because of God. As science discovers more and more of these laws, there are fewer and fewer mysteries left in the realm of God. I reasoned that science eventually would eliminate the realm of God. In essence, science was the means by which *man would become his own God*.

Confronted with this well-reasoned conclusion, however, I began to realize that science did not really answer the questions of *why*? Science

might describe *how* the earth was formed, but *why* was it formed? What is its purpose or meaning? Science may describe how raindrops are formed, but why does it rain – what is the purpose of rain? Scientists may answer, rain provides water for people, it feeds crops and crops feed people, but what is the purpose of people? Why are people born? The physical reproduction process only describes how, not why. Why do people die? That our heart and brain stop only describes how, but not why, we die.

Eventually, I came to realize that the whole of science, for over four hundred years, had not given us one single clue to the ultimate purpose or meaning of anything. When it comes to answering the questions of *why*, we are no nearer to the answers than we were 400 years ago. Science has allowed us to do some wonderful things. But, we will have to look elsewhere for the answers as to *why* things happen. And, I would have to look beyond logic and rationality to find out *why* I was still alive.

Some scientists freely admit that science is incapable of answering questions of why. But, this leaves the agenda for scientific inquiry to be determined by others – by economics or politics, or even worse, by possibilities. Do we really want profits and politics to determine which scientific issues we explore and which we ignore? And, the worst possible excuse for doing anything is simply, *because we can*. Yet, science that promises economic or political payoff is done, while science that might serve the true needs of humanity is ignored. And scientists do things just *because they can*, with little regard for the potential social or ethical consequences. Since we have no objective, quantifiable, replicable means of answering questions of why, we ignore them. We have become so concerned with being logical and rational that we ignore the ultimate necessity of being ethical and moral.

One thing dying most certainly will do is make you stop and think. In fact, that may be the single most important reason for near-death experiences. People seem to get so busy living, rushing from one minute of their life to the next, that they never find time to stop and think, why am I doing this? Even if we ask why, as we run from one task to the next, we never get beyond the logical and rational reasons that deal with *how* rather than *why*. I'm doing it for the money, we say. Or maybe we get beyond the money and say: I'm doing it for my children. But, why are you doing this for your children, and why did you choose making money as a means of doing something for your children? We rarely take time to ask, let alone answer, such questions.

We do some things because we were first taught to do them, we then tested the things we were taught, and at least some seemed to turn out OK. Maybe we have observed and imitated successful people or have concluded

that some things are just what most people do. All of our life, we observe how the world works, at least how our part of it works, and we try to find our place within it. We do the things that we think will get us the things we most want out of life. We make some adjustments along the way, based mostly on what seems to work and what doesn't. But, we rarely look beyond our day-to-day experiences for reasons. In a sense, we all have become scientists; we form hypotheses by observing things around us and then draw conclusions by observing the result of our experiments. But our science of day-to-day living, like science as a profession, can answer only questions of *how*, not *why*.

Our common sense tells us that life has purpose and meaning. Otherwise, anything we might choose to do would be equally right or wrong, and anything we might choose to think would be equally true or false. If there is no purpose, we can neither achieve nor fail to achieve it; and if there is no meaning, we can neither interpret nor misinterpret it. Our common sense also tells us that the purpose of anything can be determined only by seeing it within the context of the larger whole of which it is a part. Everything is a part of something larger than itself, and everything is made up of parts that are smaller than itself. And, the purpose of a part of anything cannot be determined without knowing the purpose of the whole, because the purpose of any part of a thing must be derived from the purpose of the whole.

For example, the purpose for a line, a number, or a color on a piece of paper becomes apparent only when we look at all of the lines, numbers, or colors on the paper. A line may be the horizon in a painting of a landscape, a number may represent millions of dollars in a financial report, and red may be the color of a movie star's lips in a magazine photo. But, we can determine none of these things without seeing the part within the context of the whole. Likewise, a doctor may be able to describe the physical function of a human heart or brain, but the purpose of these organs cannot be determined without considering the body as a whole. The human body is the larger whole from which the purpose of the heart and brain must be derived.

The essence of the whole of anything depends on the arrangement or organization of its parts, not just on the nature of its parts. Each unique arrangement represents a unique whole, even if the parts are the same. Thus, the parts of a thing cannot acquire their meaning from the other parts, because the parts have no unique meaning apart from the whole. Each part only has meaning within the context of a particular arrangement. The nature of the whole is distinct from the nature of its individual parts.

For example, the parts of the human body, laid out side by side on a surgeon's table, have no meaning or purpose, either singly or in total, apart

from their function within the human body. They have meaning only when arranged in that unique and mysterious way that allows them to take on human life. In this case, the organization is dynamic as well as spatial. If the organs fail to function together, in a specific prearranged sequential order, the body dies. The whole is fundamentally changed. The parts of the human body cannot get their meaning from each other, but instead from the body as a whole. The body is the whole from which their purpose must be derived.

Likewise, a person cannot possibly derive the purpose or meaning of their life from the tangible processes of living. Experimenting and observing can only provide us with information about how we relate to the other parts of our universe, to the other people and other things with which we interact. This is why the philosophy of relativism, which contends that reality depends upon the specific situation, leaves life without purpose or meaning. Our purpose cannot be derived from the other things or people around us because we are all parts of the same whole. We may learn which functions we are most capable of performing – we are good planners, workers, teachers, or painters. But knowing our capabilities relative to others can't tell us the purpose of our work or our reason for living. The meaning of our individual lives must be derived from the purpose of the whole of human life. And, we simply are not physically capable of observing the greater whole of the universe from which the purpose of human life on earth, and thus the purpose of our life, must be derived.

Plato argued, around 400 BC, that one can never gain *pure knowledge* through observation because anything that can be observed is always changing, whereas, pure knowledge never changes.<sup>2</sup> He argued that we observe only imperfect examples of the true *form* of things – his term for the order or architecture of pure knowledge. Thus, we can observe examples of this form and we can visualize ideas of true form in our minds. But, we can never actually observe true form or the order of pure knowledge, because it exists only in the abstract.

Using Plato's terminology, the purpose of our life is derived from the true form of things – from the order of pure knowledge. *We know* this higher level of organization or order of things exists, because we *know* our lives have purpose and meaning. *We know* this through our common sense, our internal or inner sense of first principles, which is common to all people, by which we test the truth of knowledge and morality of actions.<sup>3</sup> Since a life without purpose and meaning is clearly inconsistent with our inner sense of first principles, our *knowledge* of reality, we conclude there must be some higher order of things. In the absence of an order that transcends our

observable world, there would be no larger whole from which to derive the purpose and meaning of our life.

We can never prove this conclusion, however, because this higher order exists at a level beyond the realm of our direct observation. We can see evidence of this order reflected in the world around us and in the lives of others. However, our *changing* observations have meaning only because we have some intuitive knowledge of the *unchanging* form or order of things. We can observe only imperfect examples. Thus, knowledge of the purpose and meaning of life must necessarily come from our insight, intuition, inner sense, or more clearly, from our *common sense*.

Using Plato's terms, our common sense is our insight into the nature of pure knowledge. Through our common sense, we can visualize in our minds the higher level of organization or higher order within which we must live our lives. Through observing the interrelationships among things in nature, including human relationships, we can gain clearer insights into the nature of the higher order. But we can never fully understand it or even observe it directly, because it exists only in the abstract.

We can observe evidence of purposeful living in the lives of others. But we can find purpose for our lives only through insight and intuition – by searching with our soul rather than with our mind. We must search with that part of us that exists at the level above and beyond our physical selves, at the level of the metaphysical or spiritual self. The spiritual and metaphysical are not the exclusive realm of those who meditate or devote their lives to deep thought. The spirit lives in us all. We access it through our common sense.

The part of our sense that is correctly called common sense is the part that all people share in common. We all have this shared sense, or common sense, because we all derive our purpose and meaning from the same order of things. We are all parts of the same whole. Thus, our common sense of truth and fallacy, good and bad, and right and wrong, comes to us all quite naturally, regardless of our native intelligence, our social status or background, or our training and education. Of course, we don't all agree on many things, because most things simply are not first principles, by which we test the truth of knowledge or morality of actions. In most cases, however, we disagree on first principles because some people rely on their common sense while others believe only those things that can be proven by science, reason, and logic. Differences in doctrines among organized religions also have focused attention on differences rather than commonalities of beliefs. However, those who appear to lack common sense have simply become distracted and have lost contact with their true spiritual

nature. Common sense still is available to all through our sense of common spirituality.

Surveys, taken all over the world, indicate that nearly all people believe in the spiritual – the existence of some higher power or higher order of things. For the past four hundred years, we have been encouraged to suppress our spirituality and instead to rely on reason and rationality. We have been encouraged to abandon, or at least ignore, our belief in the value of common sense. It has been called the wisdom of the foolish, the uneducated, and the unscientific. But, spirituality has survived this derision and so has our common sense.

Although the two are sometimes used interchangeably, conventional wisdom is fundamentally different from common sense. Both represent widely held opinions, but the sources of those opinions are quite different. Conventional wisdom is rooted in logic and reason – in conclusions drawn from past observations. Sometimes the logic and reasoning are faulty, and thus the conclusions are faulty, but conventional wisdom is always based on some past observation or experience. Conventional wisdom need not be based on first-hand observation, as it may be passed down from generation to generation. And, conventional wisdom may include some things that make common sense. However, something makes common sense only if we sense it is true – only when the truth of it is validated by the spiritual or metaphysical rather than the logical part of our being.

Even the Founding Fathers of America were capable, at times, of denying their common sense in favor of the conventional wisdom. The rightness of owning slaves, for example, was conventional wisdom well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century – it had always been done. However, it has never made common sense that one person should enslave another. Thomas Jefferson wrote and spoke out against slavery, because he knew it was ethically and morally wrong. Yet, he helped draft a constitution that allowed slavery, and he personally owned slaves. Jefferson allowed conventional wisdom to take precedent over his common sense.

Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women in the U.S. were denied the right to vote. Conventional wisdom said their husbands should vote for them. In fact, former slaves were given voting rights in the U.S. before women. It didn't make common sense, then or now, to deny women their voting rights. Thomas Paine, among other prominent revolutionary leaders, spoke in favor of women's suffrage in the writing of the U.S. Constitution. But again, the leaders of the country allowed conventional wisdom to take precedent over common sense.

It was once conventional wisdom that war was a legitimate means of acquiring new territory, just as slavery was a legitimate means of controlling other people. Now, it is conventional wisdom that buying is a legitimate means of acquiring virtually anything you can afford and that employment is a legitimate means of holding economic control over other people. As humanity has continued to progress, as we have learned and evolved in our thinking, some past conventional wisdom has become today's foolishness. It's inevitable that some conventional wisdom of today also will become tomorrow's foolishness. As humanity progresses in its thinking, our conventional wisdom will change, but not our common sense.

Our common sense never changes. For example, the fundamental principles of honesty, loyalty, trust, and love that underlie positive human relationships are as unchanging as the physical laws of motion and gravity. They never change. These principles exist beyond the realm of human logic and reason, at a higher level of organization that is accessible only through common sense.

Common sense has always told people that war has never been a legitimate means of acquiring anything and that slavery has always been wrong. Today, our common sense tells us that no one necessarily deserves anything just because they have enough money to buy it and no one has the right to control another person just because they employ them. Our common sense also tells us that reality is infinitely divisible and infinitely multipliable, that the human mind is incapable of fathoming the limits of creation with logic and reason. Conventional wisdom eventually will change, but common sense has not, does not, and will not.

Although we sometimes confuse conventional wisdom for common sense, we need only stop and think for a moment to discern between the two. Do I *believe* this to be true because of what someone has told me, because of something I have read, or something I have reasoned through on my own – or perhaps, because I simply want it to be true? Or do I *know* this is true because I feel it in my soul – regardless of what I have been told, of what seems logical, or what I want to be true? If it's common sense, you will know that it is true because you feel it in your soul. Otherwise, it's only conventional wisdom.

The framers of the Declaration of Independence had no scientific basis for the bold assertion: “*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.*”<sup>4</sup> These truths were not derived by logic and reason, and this statement certainly did not represent the conventional wisdom in those days.

But they felt the truth of it in their souls. They were relying on their common sense.

There is no logical, rational reason to support the Golden Rule, “*Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you.*” Yet, this powerful concept is a part of almost every organized religion and every enduring philosophy in the history of the world. It's just common sense. When Paine and others before him wrote of the *rights of man*, and others since have written about basic human rights, they did not rely on exhaustive scientific experiments. They relied instead on common sense. Our common sense, like theirs, comes from the spiritual part of us that allows us to glimpse the realm of the higher order of things. We all have access to it, but we must open our hearts and our minds to receive it. We must be willing to accept its reality.

So how does all of this relate to my near-death experience, to Thomas Paine, and to my purpose for still being alive? First, I'm convinced most people today are living without taking the time to think or to ask *why*. Why do we live where we live, marry or stay single, have kids or not have kids, wear the clothes we wear, drive the cars we drive, and live in the houses we call home? Why do we work at our particular jobs, work the long hours that we work, and do the things that we do to get ahead?

I am convinced the simplistic answer to all of these questions, for an increasing number of people, is *money*. Our society increasingly is driven by a single goal: the desire for more money. How have we become so focused on money? By our parents telling us that money is important, our schools teaching us that money is important, and our learning through experimenting and observing that money can buy things that we need and want. Making money seems to be the universal measure of success; it seems to be the *thing to do* in today's society, and in fact, money really seems to be what makes the world go round. So, we've concluded that making money must be the purpose for our lives – or at least is the means of fulfilling our purpose.

Sure, we may think about our responsibility for taking care of other people and our responsibilities for being good stewards of the earth. But can't we better fulfill those responsibilities if we have more money? We can give money to our kids, to our favorite charities, and even directly to the poor. The more money we have the more good we can do. Social welfare is a luxury of the rich. We can afford to recycle and reuse our waste and better protect the environment if we have more money. Environmentalism is a luxury of the rich. We can give more money to our churches and other religious institutions if we have more money to give. We can even serve God best by becoming rich. Such statements may seem logical and reasonable. But, do they make common sense?

We realize that in public affairs, the health of our economy has become far more important than the health of our democracy. But, we reason that the strength of our democracy ultimately depends on the strength of our economy. Who wants to live in a *poor* democratic country? We realize that corporations today have far more influence on government than our forefathers ever intended, but corporations provide jobs, personal income, and even tax dollars. Corporate America is the engine of economic growth. Economic growth is the foundation for democracy. What's good for Wal Mart is good for America! Again, these statements may seem reasonable and logical. But, do they make common sense?

We need to stop and think! Does all this really make sense? Do we really believe that if we make more money we will take better care of others, or is organized social welfare just a means of protecting our own wealth and social status from being degraded by the poor? Do we really believe that we are protecting the environment through endless economic growth, or instead, are recycle and reuse campaigns simply means by which we protect our privilege to exploit resources for our own benefit? Do we really believe we are taking better care of our families by leaving them for hours on end to earn more money, or would they rather have the love and affection that can come only from our personal attention? Sure, the quality of time counts, but there is no greater quality than being there when you are really needed, and *really needed* can't be scheduled a week in advance.

Is our economy really working for our benefit, or have we been brainwashed into working for the benefit of the economy? Who really benefits when employment and incomes rise, the people who do the work or the people who manage and own the companies? Who really benefits when corporate profits rise, the stock market booms, and the economy grows, the people of the nation or the multinational corporations? Is our growing economy the foundation for our democracy, or instead, the greatest threat to our democracy?

Are we even making our own decisions about how we live our lives, or are others making them for us? Do we base our decisions about what we should do with our life on common sense principles for purposeful living or on experimentation and observation? Is working harder, making more money, and achieving financial *success* really a *common sense* purpose for living? Is making money more important than making friends? Is being wealthy more important than being moral? All of this may be logical and reasonable. But does it really make common sense?

Are we truly happy with our self-centered, materialistic way of life? Or do we need to take some time to rethink how the world works and the

purpose of our life within it. If we have acquired many of the things that we thought would make us happy, and find we are no happier now than we were before, why should we believe that having still more things could ever make us any happier?

Our common sense tells us, the only way to find true happiness in life is to live in harmony with the higher order of things – to do what we were put here on earth to do. Sure, we need to take care of ourselves, but we also need to care for others and to live in harmony with nature. Anything else will lead to continual conflict, frustration, and dissatisfaction – all indications of life adrift from purpose and meaning. It's just common sense.

Restoring purpose and meaning to our lives will require a revolution in thinking. It will require a return to common sense. We are at a point in time, not unlike the period of enlightenment of the 1700s, when the old era of religions dogma was dying and the age of reason was struggling to be born. Except this time, the old era is the age of reason – of logic and rationality – rather than religious dogma. The new era might be referred to as the age of insight – of intuition and judgment, rather than reason. In the age of insight we need not and must not reject science, but we must accept the fact that science can only tell us *how*, but not *why*. Intelligence combined with insight can be powerful, but intelligence without insight is impotent. In the age of reason, we looked to science for knowledge. In the age of insight, we will look to spirituality, to common sense, for purpose and meaning.

I am not suggesting a return to religion. Spirituality is not synonymous with religion. In fact, organized religion has become almost as decadent as the rest of society in its worship of human rationality. The age of insight will bring a return to true spirituality – spirituality in the sense of seeking harmony with the higher order of things. We will rely on spirituality to find meaning and purpose for our lives and to define guiding principles for living. But, we must reject new religions that propose new sets of laws, rules, and regulations for day-to-day living. For day-to-day matters, we can still rely on science and rationality.

The age of insight will bring us something new – such as has never been seen or known to the world before. We will see the world anew, from a new and different perspective, and will be able to find our purpose and place within it. But first, we must break away from the old; we must experience a revolution.

Through Thomas Paine's writings, we can see the anatomy of a successful revolution – regardless of the nature of the tyranny. First, Paine gave the enemy no quarter. From Paine's writings, you would have thought that Great Britain was hell and that King George was the devil. Paine denied

the legitimacy of the Monarchy. He said those of past generations who had signed away for all times their rights to self-rule had attempted to give away rights, which they did not own and therefore could not legally sign away. Also regarding Monarchy, he said, it made no sense for one family, of questionable character and intelligence, to possess the right to dictate the lives of all others. The crown was persecuting the colonies mercilessly, he said, because the Monarchy was inherently evil. Paine concluded the only way to end the tyranny was to declare our independence from Great Britain.

However, Paine always went beyond condemnation in his writings. He always painted a vision of the great and glorious democratic republic that lay in the future, just beyond independence. He met every argument concerning what the colonies would lose with an argument of what they would gain. They would lose the protection of the British fleet, but as Paine pointed out, the only enemies the Colonies had were actually enemies of England. The Federation's need for a navy would be modest, without Great Britain's enemies. He calculated that the Colonies could build their own fleet with taxes currently paid to the Crown, with money left to spare for many other good uses. The trade they would lose with Great Britain would be more than offset by trade with other countries – the enemies of Britain that were currently off limits for trade. However, most important, independence would eliminate direction and control from the Monarchy, which would allow the colonists to shape their own destiny. A democracy would restore to them the basic rights of man which the Monarchy had taken away. All men long for freedom, he said, and with an independent republic, they would be free.

Finally, Paine never gave a hint of doubt that the revolution would succeed. Even in its darkest hours Paine found common sense reasons to support his optimism. For example, when the British occupied Philadelphia, some saw it as a major defeat for the colonies. However, Paine saw it as an indication of the inevitability of victory. If it required half of the British army to occupy one city, they could never possibly expect to occupy all of the vast space that constituted the whole of the American colonies. There was no way that the British could win, regardless of where they might choose to take their armies. Also, when the British took the fort at Charleston, Paine called it a blessing in disguise. The colonists had become complacent and lethargic in carrying out the war. Now they would be compelled to take notice, to get serious about the war, and to move toward final victory. Paine never doubted the ultimate victory – to him, it just made common sense.

So that's why I had Thomas Paine's book when I went in for my stress test that day. I needed to learn what it takes for a successful revolution. That's why my heart stopped for a minute that day in February 1998. I

needed to have time to become acquainted with Thomas Paine. But most important, I needed to have time to stop and think. I needed to stop and think about the lack of purpose and meaning in my life and in the lives of so many others. I needed to understand why I had lived without purpose and meaning for so many years, and why so many others are still living that way.

In my days and weeks of recuperation, I came to realize that it's time once again for a revolution. I had been reading about the post-industrial, knowledge-based society; about quantum physics as the new foundation for science; about growing skepticism of science and technology, and about returning to spirituality to find *true north* principles for living. I had also been thinking about the inadequacy of economics as a social science, and about the extent to which economics now dictates so many aspects of our lives. I had been studying and working for the past decade to develop a new paradigm for agriculture – for agricultural sustainability. But I had not yet put all of these things together in my mind.

My brush with death gave me both the time and the motivation to wake up to the need for revolution in America. It also helped me realize that the purpose for the rest of my life was to promote this revolution. I was not to be a revolutionary in the sense of Thomas Paine, supporting and promoting revolution through armed conflict. This new revolution will not be fought on the battlefields, or even in the halls of Congress, for the most part. Instead, it's mostly a battle for the hearts and minds of people. My purpose is not to call people to arms, but rather to challenge people to stop and think – to ask *why*. My purpose is to help people find the courage to challenge the pseudo-wisdom of science and rationality – to learn to rely instead on their insight and intuition, on their common sense.

In many respects, the story of life parallels the story of American society, as crisis has emerged out of naivety and complacency. I spent most of my life living the typical American success story: born poor, worked hard, got an education, did whatever I could to get ahead, and achieved a reasonable degree of material success. But, somewhere along the way, I began to question. Why am I doing this? Does this really make any sense? The answers I found led to still more questions, and eventually, to a revolution in thinking, and more recently, a change in my way of life.

I realize I have been luckier than most. I have had time to think. My years of academic and professional life have given me a variety of experiences and opportunities to think about the inevitable consequences of our systematic abuses of science and reason and our continued pursuit of narrow, individual self-interests. I also have had the time and opportunity to think about what we must do to build a more sustainable society – a society

that is socially just and ecologically sound as well as economically viable. I unknowingly had spent my whole life preparing for that day when I came back from death. But the success of the new revolution doesn't depend upon me. Ultimately, it depends upon the willingness of people to use their common sense. My primary purpose for being, for the rest of my life, is to help make *the case for common sense*.

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Paine. 1961. The Life and Major Works of Thomas Paine, edited by Philip S. Foner. The Citadel Press. New York. NY. Rereleased, August 2000 by Replica Press, Bridgewater, NJ.

<sup>2</sup> See Plato, Theory of Forms. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2003. © 1993-2002 Microsoft Corporation.

<sup>3</sup> See Philosophy of Common Sense, in Catholic Encyclopedia, On-Line.

<sup>4</sup> See Declaration of Independence, World Book, 2002. World Book, Inc.