



How to Save the World: Actually Achieving Personal Evolution

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Abstract: This article carries forward the ideas in Savage's book with Bernard Phillips, *Creating Life Before Death: Before Disaster Strikes the Ship of State* (2nd ed., 2024), as illustrated by the 55 references in the bibliography. By reversing that book's sequence of ideas followed by stories, so as to present stories followed by their sociological implications, Savage looks toward communicating the full power of sociology for solving individual and world problems. He sees the result as nothing less than the framework for a new social movement, an Individual Evolutionary Movement. The key figures in the bibliography—Durkheim, Simmel, Weber, Addams, Dewey, Korzybski, Polak, Mills, Gouldner, Gould, Kelly, Phillips, Savage, Busch, Plotkin, Levin and Turner—succeeded in laying the groundwork for this paper with their focus on personal and world problem-solving. By centering on the concept of **INTERACTION**, the paper integrates these ideas, working toward fulfilling the vision of the "dynamic duo"—Phillips and Savage—of a social movement delivering an incredibly effective science of human behavior in the hands of the ordinary individual. Our times, with unsolved problems threatening the very existence of the human race, call for nothing less than such an Individual Evolutionary Movement. It opens up to individuals of all political persuasions and all nations with its focus on moving democratic institutions a step further, following the vision of Jane Addams: "The Cure for the Ills of Democracy—Is More Democracy". That vision extends to John Dewey's mantra to "educate every individual into the full stature of his possibility." In the view of Phillips and Savage, that possibility is limitless. Metaphorically, they see the Scarecrow, Tin Man, Lion, Dorothy and the Munchkins as learning to travel on the yellow brick road with no end, carrying forward the visions of Addams and Dewey and stretching beyond Emerald City.

Keywords: Internal interaction, external interaction, individual evolutionary movement, invisible crisis, democracy, science of human behavior, interdisciplinary.

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Introduction

One early morning, Bernie and I found ourselves waiting at the front door of the Barnes & Noble bookstore in Sarasota, Florida, to open up. In casual conversation we discovered that we had both been at Boston University in the 1960s. While I was obtaining degrees at the School of Theology Seminary, Bernie was teaching courses in sociology at the College of Liberal Arts just a few doors away.

We came to realize that we both had been attempting to address the failures of society to tackle fundamental problems, but in different ways. I had moved from pulpit to police car as a

Minister who became a Sheriff's Lieutenant, who was affectionately known as Reverend Fuzz.

Can you imagine the credentials I was bringing to the arena of law enforcement! First, I was shocked to learn that the Sheriff's Department had no meaningful educational program for the county school system. I immediately went to the Sheriff with an outlined program for every level from kindergarten to sixth grade.

My final program for the sixth grade ended with the words: "As I look out over you students, I'm wondering how many of you will end up as good citizens or criminals? And those of you who will choose to be criminals, remember, I will be coming to get you!" At which point I reached up and put my hand on my gun. At that point you could have heard a pin drop.



Sarasota is one of the largest counties in the state of Florida. In the early 1960s there was a manpower shortage of deputies who were on patrol for three eight-hour shifts. I again went back to the Sheriff to propose a unique Crime Prevention Program called Citizen Patrol. This would involve volunteers supplied with a police radio to patrol their own community area.

There were staff members of the Sheriff's Department who were against giving civilian volunteers a police radio. Additionally, the Sheriff was sure I wouldn't round up enough volunteers for the program. Four thousand five hundred volunteers later, he came around.

When I entered law enforcement, I didn't reveal that I was a minister. When I went in for my final approval evaluation, the Captain said to me, "Did you know there was a minister in town with the same name? I appropriately responded, "No shit!" And the issue for me was that I didn't want to be treated any differently from the other recruits.

Six months later, a reporter from our local newspaper, the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, went to the Sheriff and asked if he could interview the minister who had jumped from his pulpit into a patrol car. My cover was blown. Consequently, instead of arrests, I ended up performing twelve weddings for the deputies and doing marital counseling during our regular patrol hours.

There was even another wedding, as presented in *Creating Life Before Death*:

A young couple asked him if he would join them in a wedding ceremony, and he agreed, for he was indeed a minister. They wanted the ceremony to take place on a beach [called Siesta Key]. He said that they were in luck, because his current patrol zone—he was also a sheriff's deputy—included the local beach. He would take his dinner break to do the wedding, but then he would have to leave. He warned the couple that the beach is a public space, and curious people might come over to see what was happening. They said, "No problem."

On the appointed day he arrived, got out of his patrol car, put his robe on over his uniform, went down to the beach, and began the service with the traditional words, "Dearly beloved, we are gathered together..." Then he looked up only to see an inebriated person staggering his way toward the wedding party. He continued reading the wedding vows, when the drunk man yelled out, "You're not really going to marry that bitch, are you?"

Well, Tom was not about to get into an argument or debate with a drunk, so his first response was to just ignore him. But in a few minutes, the man yelled out something even more offensive. At that point, Tom lowered his book, pointed directly at the drunk man, and said, "You need to shut up and get out of here, or you're going to jail." The drunk said, "What are you going to do, call the cops?" And, like Superman, Tom opened his robe, exposed his uniform, and said, "We don't need to call the cops, dude, we're already here." The drunk took off like gangbusters, and the wedding proceeded with no more trouble (page 55).

Here was an interesting interaction of law and religion.

In addition to all of this, I joined my friend, Bernie Phillips, in a new social action project where we became known as the "Dynamic Duo."

Bernie's academic journey included many books, articles and phone conferences over the past ten years with one of his doctoral students and a Columbia doctorate in economics.

Bernie and I would write a book, *Creating Life Before Death*, which would challenge society to wake up and address its fundamental issues "before disaster strikes the ship of state." And we would also give credit to those who had been working with Bernie for a long time by listing them as additional contributors.

We envisioned a book following the title and subtitle of this current article with this sentence: **"It is the further development of the individual that is the basis for the continued evolution of society."**

Its interdisciplinary approach to human behavior would combine the full power of the entire academic world followed by stories illustrating those ideas, based on the strength of religion and philosophy plus law and order. That is what the Dynamic Duo had in mind.

Our efforts over the years have led to the publication of not only a first edition but also a second edition: *Creating Life Before Death: Before Disaster Strikes the Ship of State* (2024; note that if the 2nd edition is ordered from Amazon, only the subtitle should be used).

The book's cover shows the Titanic about to smash into a huge iceberg, illustrating the imminent disaster confronting society.

However, our experiences of presenting these broad ideas in workshops have taught us that audiences were taken by the concrete stories far more than the abstract ideas explaining human behavior. This conclusion leads exactly to this article, which reverses that earlier procedure.

Thus, I will start with stories that capture the imagination of our audiences. They will help readers deeply engage with the academic ideas pointing toward the solution of personal and societal problems.

My initial presentation of the foregoing Barnes & Noble story illustrates our new approach. That story exemplifies the initial and continuing interaction between Bernie and me.

THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL IDEA IN THE BOOK AND IN THIS PAPER IS THE CENTRALITY OF INTERACTION AS THE BASIS FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND PROBLEM-SOLVING.

Indeed, the very nature of our universe is interactive, for "no part of the world can be completely isolated from any other part" (page 15). Just as such interaction has yielded, over billions of years, the evolution of life on our planet, human patterns of interaction point us all toward the continuing intellectual, emotional, and problem-solving development of the human race. Thus, the continuing evolution of humanity works to fulfill the interactive nature and potentials of the universe.

The long history of the development of democracy throughout the world exemplifies the centrality of interaction for human evolution. By contrast, the rise of dictatorships like Hitler's

Nazi German and Stalin's Communist Russia—with their focus on hierarchy, narrow and rigid ideas, and personal conformity versus interaction—points away from the human spirit and toward personal degradation.

To illustrate the extremely negative implications of such limited understanding of human behavior, there is the widespread belief that IQ is a valid measure of one's native intelligence. Yet this idea that one's IQ places strict limits on one's intellectual ability is complete rubbish.

In fact, IQ is a measure emphasizing nothing more than one's degree of education. This is illustrated by the discussion of IQ in *Creating Life Before Death* (page 12). That analysis includes reference to David Shenk's *The Genius in All of Us: Why Everything You've Been Told About Genetics, Talent and IQ Is Wrong* (2010), Richard E. Nisbett's *Intelligence and How to Get It: Why Schools and Culture Counts* (2009), Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobsen, *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (1968), and Stephen Jay Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man* (1981).

Just now, as a great many of us are beginning to realize, the world is beset by numerous highly threatening problems, some of which—such as the rise of dictatorships, nuclear war, and climate change—threaten the very existence of all of us. Reader, you might ask whether the approach of the Dynamic Duo—in our book and this article—offers not merely vague hope but a clear direction based on solid evidence for both personal development and world survival.

Not only are we absolutely convinced that we have actually achieved a new direction. **We see our book and this article as the basis for a new social movement, an Individual Evolutionary Movement.** Our confidence is based on our fulfillment of key ideas within the academic literature on social movements (pages 40-41). This is illustrated by Lawrence Busch's "A Tentative Guide to Constructing the Future" (Spring 1976), Busch's doctoral dissertation (1974), the Dutch futurist Fred Polak's magnificent two volumes on *The Image of the Future* (1961), and Polak's one-volume book with the same title (1973).

Our approach follows the vision of John Dewey in his *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920/1948): **"Democracy has many meanings, but if it has a moral meaning, it is found in resolving that the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial arrangements shall be the contribution they make to the all-around growth of every member of society"** (page 11).

Dewey's view of democracy, as well as mine and Bernie's, is carried forward by Jane Addams, the philosopher who founded the discipline of Social Work and authored *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902). She wrote: **"The cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy"** (page 11).

Bernie and I have come to see interaction internally no less than externally. In other words, we see the importance of the mutual impacts among one's thoughts, feelings, and actions, or what we are calling "head," "heart" and "hand." Indeed, our book is organized in this very way, with Chapters 1 and 2 on "head," 3 and 4 on "heart," and 5 and 6 on "hand." All are essential for one's full development ! (Table of contents).

Metaphorically, this very approach was carried forward by the film, *The Wizard of Oz*. Reader, do you recall Ray Bolger as the

Scarecrow whose "head" was filled with straw, Jack Haley as the Tin Woodsman without a "heart," and Bert Lahr as the Cowardly Lion without the courage to act, suggesting his lack of "hand"? (page 11) Now, how is that for a good illustration?

As a result, I will parallel in this article the approach that Bernie and I took in our book. The following three sections of this article will be "Head," "Heart" and "Hand."

I will be doing what Bernie and I have been trying to achieve for so many years: developing an approach to human behavior which can pave the way for solving personal and world problems by initiating an individual evolutionary movement.

"Head"

I start my treatment of the three fundamental elements of human behavior—"head," "heart," and "hand"—with a story in *Creating Life Before Death* that centers on the intellect or "head," although the behavior of the individual always includes all three elements.

Tom Savage has a story producing insight into the nature of our problems as well as a direction for solving them. It took place when he was seven years old and had to do with his first crisis of faith. A volunteer Sunday school teacher had just told his class the story of the Israelites' escape from Egypt. At the Red Sea, Moses had parted the waters, and the Jews all went safely through. But when Pharaoh with his army and chariots followed in hot pursuit, Moses closed the waters over them.

At that point, Tom jumped up and yelled, "What happened to the horses? Surely God didn't drown the horses!" The poor teacher, sputtering, could offer no defense. Tom would not calm down, for he believed in an all-powerful and all-righteous God, and he would not tolerate a teacher who dared to stray from those beliefs. The result, however, was that Tom became perhaps the first kid ever to be kicked out of Sunday school (pages 3-4).

I'm immensely proud of what I did at the tender age of seven in that Sunday school, even though I was actually forced to leave it. I was beginning to learn that people in higher positions than myself did not have a monopoly on knowledge. I thus began to question the validity of our patterns of hierarchy. Equally, I started to question the limited range of knowledge that elders had. I began to believe in the importance of not simply conforming to existing patterns of behavior, as did the other children.

The long-range impact of my many personal experiences over the years searching for increasing understanding is represented by this quote from *The Sociological Imagination*, a book written by Bernie's mentor at Columbia, C. Wright Mills (1959/2000, 7):

The sociological imagination . . . is the capacity to shift from one perspective to another—from the political to the psychological; from examination of a single family to comparative assessment of the national budgets of the world; from the theological school to the military establishment; from considerations of an oil industry to studies of contemporary poetry (pages 40-41).

Mills' book, which is still widely quoted, taught and used by sociologists and other social scientists, was rated by the members of the International Sociological Association as the second most influential book for sociologists which was published during the entire 20th century, preceded only by a book written by Max Weber, a founder of the discipline.

Can you believe a professor with this much talent could arrive in the morning for his classes riding a motorcycle wearing a coonskin cap with its tail waving in the wind?

In Mills' time as well as our own, sociologists within the American Sociological Association had developed a number of specialized Sections, such as Aging and the Life Course, Children and Youth, Collective Behavior and Social Movements, Community and Urban Sociology, Economic Sociology, Family, Environmental Sociology, Mathematical Sociology, Political Sociology, Social Psychology, Sociology of Education, Sociology of Law, and Sociology of Religion.

At the present time, there are no less than 53 such specialties. Although they succeed to an extent in addressing problems, they fail to integrate their knowledge and thus confront the Big Picture. They fail to follow Newton's vision: "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

My own experience solved my problem of having ended my meaningful careers by opening up a third career as an author, represented by our book and this current article.

Let us now turn to "heart."

"Heart"

My own experiences include my visit to Nepal, as described in *Creating Life Before Death*:

My major professor at the Boston University School of Theology had given me a letter of introduction for visiting a Buddhist monastery in Nepal. I had been advised to arrive at 6 a.m. The monks had left at 5 a.m. with their begging bowls. I arrived promptly on time as instructed at 6 a.m., and no one was there to greet me.

As time wore on, I began to go through a variety of emotional states: frustration, exasperation, and by 9 o'clock anger at such rudeness. At 9:30, emotionally exhausted, I had fully accepted my situation. Then, suddenly the door to the monastery parted and a saffron-robed monk said in perfect English, 'Now that you are open, you may come in.'

I had been put through a Buddhist exercise that clears the mind of trivial thoughts in preparation for possible Enlightenment (pages 84-85).

It was in Nepal that I had the opportunity to experience the joining of a Western and Eastern tradition. The mistake I had made was introducing my own Western values and trying to apply them to what should have been a new vision and perspective. The emotional impact on me of that encounter with the monk in a Buddhist monastery was amazing! Overall, I learned over time to avoid rushing madly from one task to another, and to stop to smell the flowers. In short, I had come to see myself in an entirely new way. It took quite a bit of doing, but I became a practitioner of meditation.

But it was only after I met Bernie and worked with him for years on *Creating Life Before Death* that I opened up to the vast amount of knowledge within the social sciences which can help me and anyone else continue to develop emotionally.

That knowledge is exemplified by the work of the eminent sociological theorist, Jonathan H. Turner. He developed laws of emotions to help us understand our positive and negative experiences. These ideas are summarized in our book (page 93).

For example, if you have negative societal experiences which habits perpetuate, broad knowledge of human behavior can help to raise you up. In short, when society chooses to put you down, you can build yourself back up by learning integrated interdisciplinary knowledge. That understanding can also enable you to reverse personal feelings of failure.

"Hand"

Reader, there is a song which I can't quite remember. But it begins with the words, "If I had a hammer,; and I hope you can remember the rest

If you know how the lyrics go, you know how they can help us in our new Individual Evolutionary Movement.

As for the problem of how to create such a movement at this time in history, I turn to the work of the Dutch futurist Fred Polak and the American sociologist Lawrence Busch. Polak studied social movements throughout the entire history of Western civilization, producing both two-volumes and a shorter one-volume book, both with the title, *The Image of the Future*. Busch's doctoral dissertation centering on Polak's work, was followed by an article building on these publications: "A Tentative Guide to Constructing the Future." He published it in a journal initiated by Bernie and a colleague. Here are the key ideas in that article:

Busch stated a pre-condition for a successful image of the future: "a crisis must be widely perceived in the existing order," just as Bernie and I believe He goes on to discuss the key conditions that are required:

An Image of the future must be holistic if it is to achieve widespread acceptance.

A successful image of the future must provide the promise of the resolution of the anomalies and contradictions of the existing order.

The future must be constructed in the present, not the future..

A successful image of the future must provide an escape from the existing order, but it must find that escape within the existing order itself.

A successful image of the future must provide an operationalizable methodology for the individual.

All successful images of the future are structured.

A meaningful image of the future must involve the mundane. (L. Busch, 2007; summary on pages 40-41).

Reader, after going through this article, you should be able to figure out for yourself just how every single one of these ideas is essential for the personal growth that can yield a successful social movement and enable you to join the Individual Evolutionary Movement.

You should also be aware that this article includes no more than a small sampling of ideas in *Creating Life Before Death* that can enable you to join the individual evolutionary movement. Those ideas include the Levin experiment indicating an alternative to worldwide aggression (pages 114-116), the nature of our invisible crisis indicating the origins of that aggression (pages 67-76), the idea that we're all scientists with no limit to our continuing development (pages 13-14), Alfred Korzybski's general semantics movement pointing toward personal evolution (page 46), and the Japanese use of *kaizen* or continuing improvement after World War II to repair their shattered economy (page 13).

More generally and systematically, here is a list of the 12 key ideas within *Creating Life Before Death*:

1. The tiny passage at the bottom of page 15 opening up to interaction both outside of and within the individual (head-heart-hand) as the basis for personal and world evolution.
2. The discussion of IQ & human biology on page 12.
3. The discussion by Polak & Busch on successful social movements on pp. 40-41.
4. Mills' interdisciplinary quote on 40-41.
5. The Levin experiment on 114-116.
6. Discussion of the invisible crisis on 67-75.
7. Kelly on the scientific method: 13-14.
8. Korzybski on gradation: 46
9. Turner on emotions: 93.
10. Dewey and Addams on democracy: 11.
11. The Wizard of Oz metaphor: 11
12. The Japanese *kaizen* concept: 13

My college experiences. Straight nine years of study. No Spring breaks. Summer months devoted to holding jobs in order to purchase books, supplies, clothes, for the Fall return to classes.

Now, with all of this over, the end seemed well in sight. All tests passed. All requirements completed. All, that is, save only one, leaving me A.B.D. A.B.D.! Sounds suggestive of a venereal disease, doesn't it? Well, it isn't! It means, All But Dissertation for the Doctoral Degree.

Can you even imagine? All that effort. I had also argued that up to that point in my life it had been all study, with no back-up real life experiences. So, I would take a "short break," and you know what "short" turned out to be!

But, it was the beginning of summer. I had just purchased a Kawasaki 900 hp motorcycle. This, plus my biker vest, heavy boots, Levis, trying to mask my baby Andy Hardy Look. My fellow students, the tough guys, had taunted me throughout my Elementary and Junior High School years. Well, look out, guys. I would now be ready to "kick some ass" if anyone tried to make fun of me. Fortunately, no one tried, so I managed to live another day.

Now, mounted on the bike, I took off to travel across the country, exploring the diversity to be found from the East to the West coast. This adventure completed, I saw an ad to visit South America. That was for only three more months. I could, would, then return to the discipline and demands of academia. You can see where this is going, even if I didn't. So, forty-five years, and ninety countries visited later, I still planned to complete my degree requirements, but Boston University was tired of waiting, and just awarded me a second Masters Degree Diploma.

My last trip was to Bhutan, Land of the Thunder Dragon! Traveling to Katmandu, Nepal, then flying into Bhutan, I now was

to complete my lifelong dream, visiting the Tiger Nest Temple, high in the Himalayas. I'm at 16,000 feet, and with the thin air I can hardly breathe. My guide has said, "Mr. Savage. You're eighty years old, and not in the best of shape. Tiger Nest is an arduous four-hour journey up, and four coming down. And, I hate to tell you, you're in no shape to do this!" And, dammit, he was right!

Then, at 85, I fell on the marble floor in the bathroom of my condo apartment, and wasn't found for three days.

For the first time, I knew I had to recognize death would actually be my final journey.

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