

Introduction
Draft--“Calling ‘the better angels of our nature’:
A Multi-Angle View of the Debt Crisis”

The Initial Plan—and What Actually Came Into Being

This 8 page document is an introduction to a 398 page document titled “Draft: Calling ‘the better angels of our nature’: A Multi-Angle View of the Debt Crisis”.

The initial plan for the “Debt Crises” document was that it would be a compilation of excerpts and evidence from articles, websites, etc illustrating that the debt crises is one of the ten most critical challenges of our times. And that as such it would be added to the three draft sections already completed (out of ten) for the “IPCR Critical Challenges Assessment 2011-2012” project (for more information, and access to the draft sections made available up to this point, visit the IPCR webpage for this project, at <http://www.ipcri.net/Critical-Challenges-Assessment.html>) .

However, in the process of trying to follow that plan, more and more excerpts and evidence (from an increasing variety of sources) seemed to be worthy of being considered “dots” relevant to the “big picture”. Furthermore, many of these “dots” were missing from the views given the most space in current public discourse (cultural influences magnified most frequently by mass media). And then the debt crises itself started moving into a “dangerous phase”. Thus, what actually came into being is more than just a section of a larger project. Evidence, and events, suggested that this writer condense the material he had accumulated so far (including research for sections not yet in draft form), and create a document which foreshadows what the completed “IPCR Critical Challenges Assessment 2011-2012” project report would look like. Readers will therefore find that evidence for most of the ten critical challenges highlighted by the IPCR “Critical Challenges” project is included in this “Multi-Angle” document [see Section IV. “Cultures of Violence, Greed, Corruption, and Overindulgence” and Section V. “Other Challenges Which Are Part of This Writer’s Ten Point List (see Appendix A) and Which Need to be Resolved as Part of a Sustainable Solution to the Current Debt Crises”]. When evidence from so many different sides of the “Debt Crises” is brought together in this way, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that there is an urgent need to create, develop, and accelerate a full array of solution-oriented activity, as soon as possible.

Much of the outline for the “Multi-Angle” document has been included in the “Table of Contents”. Thus readers looking for a quick overview of the document can refer to the “Table of Contents” (the whole document is accessible from the above project page, and at http://www.ipcri.net/A_Multi-Angle_View_of_the_Debt_Crises.pdf . This introduction will offer some insight into the significance of specific sections, and provide commentary which summarizes the most important conclusions.

The Importance of “What Gets Passed On to Future Generations as ‘Cultural Norms’”

Sections II-VI (92 pages) provide some historical background, and provide evidence for some of the many challenges we now face. These sections may help readers understand that “what gets passed on to future generations as ‘cultural norms’” is an important part of the current “Debt Crises”. These five sections are titled: “Ghosts of Capitalism Past”; “The United States—and ‘Implicit Legitimation’”; “Cultures of Violence, Greed, Corruption, and Overindulgence”; “Other Challenges Which Are Part of

This Writer’s Ten Point List (see Appendix A) and Which Need to be Resolved as Part of a Sustainable Solution to the Current Debt Crises”; and “Four Summaries of Critical Challenges Ahead”.

The evidence in these sections suggest that many of the issues which have resulted in the debt crises (and many other critical challenges) are problems which are at the very core of our difficulties with being human beings...and thus will require much more than the usual amount of problem solving, if we are to “change course”. *The debts owed are not just monetary*. The debts owed include the quantity of human effort which will needed in the future to remedy the destructive consequences of the tragic moral lapses in the past—and the destructive consequences of tragic moral lapses in our present circumstances.

People who believe that because they have no conscience there are no after-effects and consequences associated with their actions are disconnected from the reality of “what gets passed on to future generations as ‘cultural norms’”. People in the generations now alive on this planet have received (as our inheritance from previous generations) ideas about “cultural norms”—a “package” which includes many ideas which in reality have counter-productive, harmful, or even crippling effects on efforts to support and maintain the “greater good of the whole”. We are finding that out “big time” in our current circumstances. There are many danger signs flashing now. More and more people are coming to the realization that overcoming the challenges of our times will require problem solving on a scale most of us have never known before—and that there is an urgent need to restructure our economic systems and our education systems to respond to these challenges.

Downside Risks Resulting from High Levels of Debt, Moral “Blind Spots”, and Limits to Growth

Section VII “The U.S. and many other countries will enter the next 15 to 20 years burdened by substantial public debt...” (114 pages) includes two subsections: A. “Some Important Considerations Associated with U.S. Debt” and B. “A Timeline of Articles on the European Debt Crisis, and Related Crises (articles from August 3, 2011—January 5, 2012) (mostly excerpts, some whole articles; from Reuters, Huffington Post, and other sources) [includes references to 94 articles, and a summary (chronological) list of article titles]”.

Again and again, in references to the debt crises, there is mention of the need for “economic growth”, so that there will be enough business income to pay salaries and wages, and pay down bank debt; so that there will be enough household income to cover expenses, and pay down consumer debt; and so that there will be enough tax revenues to cover the costs of public services, and pay down massive government debt. And there is the implication that without such “economic growth” there will be an increased risk of business failings, household bankruptcies, bank failings, and sovereign debt defaults. One important “danger signal” which is now “flashing” is the unwillingness of investors to buy enough of some governments’ long term bonds (which have in the past been considered risk-free investments at returns of around 2%) unless the return guaranteed is more than 7%. There are an increasing number of investors who are not “confident” about some government bonds—who are worried about whether such bonds will actually have any significant value 10 years from now. Unfortunately, the kind of “economic growth” which is most often being referred to includes a vast array of “enterprises” which require the continued exploitation of flaws and weaknesses in human nature, fragile ecosystems, and already significantly depleted natural resources—and which are much of the reason why cultures of violence, greed, and corruption have become so common that most people believe they are inevitable (see Section IV “Cultures of Violence, Greed, Corruption, and Overindulgence”).

There is an increasing amount of evidence to support the realization that overcoming the challenges of our times will require problem solving on a scale most of us have never known before—and that there is an urgent need to restructure our economic systems and our education systems to respond to these challenges.

The Themes of Education and Education Systems

The themes which begin the document—in the “Preface” (“Key Themes Brought Forward in Many Ways in this ‘Multi-Angle’ Document”) and in Section I (“Definitions of Education, Suggestions for Questionnaires”)—point towards the critical importance of education and education systems in the years ahead.

Here are a few excerpts from both sections:

(from the “Preface”)

5. The challenges of our times are not something the experts will resolve while the rest of us are doing something else./ The ways we “invest” our time, energy, and money have a direct impact on the “ways of earning a living” that are available./The investments of time, energy, and money that each of us make in our everyday circumstances becomes the larger economy.

6. Human morality is not a constant—it is not something which is the same throughout the centuries of human existence; human morality is something which can become degraded or raised up, depending on the leanings of human aspirations.

(from Section I)

“In times when people are trying to resolve multiple crises, it will be most helpful to make ongoing re-evaluations of education systems, to see if they are serving communities as well as they can.”

“Here, in the beginning section of this document, some definitions, observations, and sample evaluation questions are offered, as a way of providing some insight into—and encouraging some careful thinking about—the relationships between our ‘world views’ and our education systems.”

“This writer believes that there are many difficult challenges ahead (see Appendix A), and that we will need problem solving on a scale most of us have never known before for many years into the foreseeable future. Thus, he believes it is a time to use a ‘constellation of initiatives’ approach (details of The IPCR Initiative “constellation of initiatives” approach are provided in Section VIII A. and Appendices C-H) to re-evaluate our existing ‘world views’ (and the corresponding education systems), to build consensus for ‘local community identified and prioritized’ sets of challenges and solutions which are more appropriate to our current circumstances, and to re-create our education systems (economic systems, etc.) in ways which are more appropriate to overcoming the challenges of the times.”

What might constitute a “constellation of initiatives” approach is explored in more detail in Section VIII “Solutions” (108 pages), and in the Appendices (55 pages). The six subsections in the “Solutions” section are: “The ‘Constellation of Initiatives’ Approach of The IPCR Initiative”; “Transition Ahead: Less

Megacities and More Ecologically Sustainable Towns and Village”; “Increasing Transitional Employment”; “About the ‘Interfaith’ in Interfaith Peacebuilding”; “Community Service Opportunities for Local Newspapers”; and “Re-defining Wealth--and Other Community Service Opportunities for Investors”. In the “Solutions” section there are references to many service-oriented initiatives, and much detail provided about their work, to illustrate as clearly as possible that we have the necessary knowledge and resources to overcome the challenges of our times.

Bringing the Best Ideas “Through the Mist”

And yet... even though we do have the necessary knowledge and resources, many people do not understand the urgent necessity for accelerating solution-oriented activity. Unfortunately, the current content of our public discourse (cultural influences magnified most frequently by mass media) does not include enough messages from people who speak honestly, truthfully, respectfully, and responsibly about the nature and dimensions of the challenges ahead. Thus, confidence is dissipating rather than being built up—particularly in the United States—because our public discourse does not honestly and truthfully identify enough of the actual challenges we are now facing *for all of us—collectively—to know that our efforts will be enough to overcome them*. Confidence (not just confidence in financial markets, but confidence in our viability as a species) will be dimmed by a lack of clarity until there is truthful public discourse on the full dimensions of the critical challenges ahead. Confidence will be built up when we—collectively—believe that the efforts of everyone working together is a greater force than the challenges we are facing.

However, efforts so far to resolve this lack of clarity—and dissipating confidence—have come up against multiple obstacles and difficulties. Unfortunately, the critical challenges associated with dysfunctional and destructive ideas from the past, the critical challenges associated with the limits to “economic growth”, and the critical challenges associated with cultures of violence, greed, and corruption only represent part of the obstacles and difficulties we face. From among other challenges listed in Appendix A (and keeping in mind that Appendix A is simply *this writer’s list....*), we also have to contend with an extremely complex cultural environment—where there are so many organizations and initiatives, advocating for so many agendas, and in the context of so many mass media information providers (the Internet, television, radio, print etc—and the corresponding owners of such outlets), that it is difficult *even for people highly skilled in identifying what is reliable evidence* to sort out what are the most critical challenges, and what are practical solutions to those challenges. *Problem solving in the everyday circumstances of our modern societies has become this complicated and complex*. Thus, people who are have a “knowledge deficit” when it comes to understanding the challenges of our times are everywhere, and they are investing their time, energy, and money—voting—all the time.

There are many ideas which represent solution-oriented activity—and many ways solution-oriented activity could be accelerated—but these ideas and approaches are simply not “coming through the mist as much as they should be”. The need to achieve “clear vision”, the need for affordable education systems appropriate to the tasks ahead, and the need to inspire the involvement and participation of as many citizens as possible, has urged The IPCR Initiative to advocate for a combination Community Visioning Initiatives, "Community Teaching and Learning Centers" with ongoing workshops, and "sister community" relationships as a way of generating an exponential increase in our collective capacity to overcome the challenges of our times. [Note: Regarding the complex nature of the challenges ahead, the following “rule of thumb” may be helpful: “The smaller the circumference, the more accurately can we gauge the results of our actions, and (the) more conscientiously shall we be able to fulfill our

obligations as trustees.” (J.C. Kumarappa) There are many more helpful suggestions along these lines in subsection B (in “Solutions” Section VIII) titled “Transition Ahead: Less Megacities and More Ecologically Sustainable Towns and Villages”—and more excerpts from J.C. Kumarappa’s book “Why the Village Movement?” on p. 281-282.]

The Contributions The IPCR Initiative Hopes to Make

Subsection A of the “Solutions” section (“The ‘Constellation of Initiatives’ Approach of The IPCR Initiative”) provides an overview of 7 key elements which are part of The IPCR Initiative approach to peacebuilding and community revitalization (and which have much potential to create solution-charged environments, and accelerate solution-oriented activity). Even more details associated with The IPCR Initiatives’ “constellation of initiatives” approach are provided in the Appendices. [Here it is worth highlighting Appendix D. “Brief Descriptions of The Eight IPCR Concepts”; Appendix G. “A 15 Step Outline for the kind of Community Visioning Initiatives advocated by The IPCR Initiative”; Appendix K. “(Draft) Section #7 (part of ‘IPCR Critical Challenges Assessment 2011-2012’) ‘A marginalization of the treasured wisdom associated with religious, spiritual, and moral traditions’ (‘Commentary’ piece)” (6 pages, *highly recommended*); and Appendix L. “A Sample Questionnaire from The IPCR Initiative (16 Questions) (Some suggestions for questions to use in preparing for Community Visioning Initiatives)”].

[Special Note: The “15 Step Outline” is an example of collaborative problem solving at the local community level—and an example of the kind of problem solving which requires that each of us (not just those in power) “actualize in our own lives” practices and processes which turn polarizing circumstances into collaborative efforts (which make best use of the knowledge and skills each one of us has). There are difficult challenges ahead. We will need the best efforts we can make at working together to overcome such challenges.]

One of the keys to understanding the value of contributions The IPCR Initiative can make is this: the IPCR Initiative is not trying to “displace” or “make irrelevant” any existing or forming initiatives (of a solution-oriented nature). The IPCR Initiative is trying to provide systematic community building/problem solving processes which can make best use of all of them, on the grounds that we will need the best contributions every one of us can make (*through the organizations and initiatives each of us prefers to support, and participate in*) if we are going to manage a transition from dysfunctional systems which are very complex to functioning systems which are much less complex.

There is another key element of The IPCR Initiative, however, which means that it cannot simply be a “hub” which assists many other organizations in achieving their goals (something a combination of Community Visioning Initiatives and “Community Teaching and Learning Centers” have the potential to do). While it may be understandable—due to the complex difficulties which arise from efforts to “make best use of” the treasured wisdom of all religious, spiritual, and moral traditions *when some of the traditions claim the others are not valid*—that many initiatives and approaches do not make such efforts... *The IPCR Initiative believes that it is becoming more and more likely that an exponential increase in compassion for our fellow human beings will need to become an essential and critical element of a truly comprehensive response to the challenges of our times. In such circumstances, we cannot afford to exclude from our “tool box” the time-tested sources which have helped people learn compassion over many centuries. What we need to do instead is to learn how to cultivate the time-tested sources so that the sources yield the treasured wisdom.* [Note: There are organizations and initiatives working along “interfaith” lines which have been an inspiration to this writer, and which offer

many ways to participate in solution-oriented activity. For more information about those organizations and initiatives, see Subsection D. in the “Solutions” section (VIII) (titled “About the ‘Interfaith’ in Interfaith Peacebuilding).]

The most complete statement by The IPCR Initiative on both the difficulties and the potential for good along the lines of cultivating wisdom and compassion is in Appendix K. Faith helps move from “it hardly seems possible” to “it must be possible” (since faith believes love will prevail). The most advanced societies are the ones which are successful at integrating spiritual wisdom into the everyday circumstances of community life. (The two preceding statements are from Appendix B “17 Propositions and Premises which make up the foundation of The IPCR Initiative”.) The IPCR Initiative is an effort to contribute to the process of integrating spiritual wisdom into the everyday circumstances of community life.

The Importance of Cultivating Wisdom and Compassion, Increasing Transitional Employment, Encouraging Resource Sharing, and Re-defining Wealth

Given the complex challenges ahead, it is worth emphasizing (and re-emphasizing) (as often as possible) the importance of cultivating wisdom and compassion, increasing transitional employment, encouraging resource sharing, and re-defining wealth in the transition ahead. The following is a re-emphasis of those themes in the form of three references.

1) Here is an excerpt from #2 in the subsection “About the ‘Interfaith’ in Interfaith Peacebuilding”:

“And what is possible along the lines of wisdom and compassion? How many of us would say that we are fully aware of what is possible along the lines of wisdom and compassion? What would the everyday circumstances of our community life be like if many of us *were* fully aware of what is possible along the lines of wisdom and compassion? Many of us *could be* much more familiar with what is possible... unfortunately, much of the real treasured wisdom of religious, spiritual, and moral traditions now seems to be hidden—and thus in need of being re-discovered. These “hidden” resources include teachings which inspire and encourage people to

- a) place a high priority on the development of truth, virtue, love, and peace—and live disciplined lives for the purpose of adhering to truth, cultivating virtue and love, and maintaining the pathways to enduring peace
- b) sacrifice personal desires for the greater good of the whole
- c) find contentment and quality of life while consuming less material goods and ecological services
- d) prefer peacebuilding which supports and actualizes mutually beneficial understandings, forgiveness, and reconciliation—and *which abstains from violent conflict resolution*—as a way of bringing cycles of violence to an end
- e) use resources carefully, so that there is surplus available for emergency assistance
- f) support community life and cultural traditions which “... bring to the fore what is often hidden: how many good people there are, how many ways there are to do good, and how much happiness comes to those who extend help, as well as to those who receive it.

2) As a way of helping the processes of “...bringing to the fore what is often hidden...”, increasing “transitional employment”, and re-defining wealth, readers are encouraged to have a close look at

- a) subsection E. in the “Solutions” section (“Community Service Opportunities for Local Newspapers”)
- b) subsection F. in the “Solutions” section (“Re-defining Wealth--and Other Community Service Opportunities for Investors”)
- c) subsection C. in the “Solutions” section (“Increasing Transitional Employment”) (which includes the topic “Community Visioning Initiatives, Job Fairs, and Local Currencies”—*highly recommended*)

3) And here are a few excerpts from “The IPCR Resource Sharing Policy”:

“In light of the urgent need to build bridges and increase collaboration between diverse communities of people, all of the documents, information, resources, etc. created by The IPCR Initiative and accessible at The IPCR Initiative website (at www.ipcri.net) are accessible for free, and may be used without permission and without attribution. This writer gladly and willingly contributes time, energy, and money to make the resources and documents of The IPCR Initiative accessible to people for their own personal use, or so that they can assist fellow human beings and contribute to the greater good of the whole.”

“The challenges ahead are significant; if IPCR resources can help people build solution-oriented momentum, *that* would be the best kind of compensation.”

“Thus, once a pilot project [using IPCR resources of any kind (for examples, see The IPCR Initiative homepage, at www.ipcri.net)] is underway, the IPCR Initiative does not require that any such pilot projects use The IPCR Initiative name, or adhere to any common mission statement, or list of shared goals. In other words, any individuals or communities of people using IPCR ideas or resources will have no obligation to adhere to a “brand” message—or even reference or make attribution to IPCR resources which inspired their efforts. They can build, adopt, change, modify, and otherwise create their own way forward—with their own name for the initiative, their own website content, their own stated goals, etc. By encouraging innovation and creativity in this way many different experiments can be made, and there will be more chances that many communities of people will arrive at many different kinds of successful model projects.”

“In addition, if communities of people can arrive at the understanding that the *whole community* will be sufficiently compensated by carrying out the “constellation of initiatives” kind of solution-oriented activity advocated by The IPCR Initiative, questions regarding personal compensation will be of lesser importance... the exponential increase of solution-oriented activity will dispel the lack of trust which compels people to be overly concerned with accumulating and safe-guarding a predominantly personal definition of wealth. It is in this spirit of “*contributing to the greater good of the whole, and helping to restore confidence in the higher values of life*” that all documents, information, etc created by The IPCR Initiative are accessible for free, and viewed as resources which ought to be made as accessible as possible to people who can make good use of them.”

“[Please note: Quotes, statistics, and other copyrighted material used in IPCR documents have been appropriately attributed to their copyrighted sources. Readers may thus be assured that The IPCR Initiative encourages and supports the proper referencing of copyrighted material to their copyrighted sources.]”

Closing Comments

There can be much very useful public discourse on how to create effective local Community Visioning Initiatives, of the kind which can succeed in turning polarizing circumstances into collaborative efforts

(and thus make best use of the knowledge and skills each one of us has), and which can create, develop, and accelerate a full array of solution-oriented activity. I hope that sometime in the near future I can assist with preparing for and carrying out Community Visioning Initiatives of the kind advocated by The IPCR Initiative. If many people could see and feel the practical value of carrying out similar forms of Community Visioning Initiatives, such collaborative, solution-oriented activity could become a common experience... a common cultural tradition... a cultural tradition which can link many diverse communities of people together, in a fellowship of people working towards the greater good of the whole... and a cultural tradition which can help pass on to future generations the best ideas humans have accumulated in more than 5,000 years of human history.

What can we do—at this particular point in time—in the everyday circumstances of our lives, to bring the best ideas from the storehouses of accumulated wisdom now accessible to us and “through the mist”, so that our community building and problem solving processes will be most effective in helping us overcome the challenges of our times?

“In the best of times, even the most profound challenges can be overcome; for in the best of times, _____ is/are nurtured, supported, and sustained by family, friends, teachers, mentors, elders, and the everyday influences of community life and cultural traditions.”

The document “Calling ‘the better angels of our nature’: A Multi-Angle View of the Debt Crises” is an effort to assist fellow human beings in identifying what—from the storehouses of accumulated wisdom now accessible to us—would best answer the above question “What can we do...”, and what—from the storehouses of accumulated wisdom now accessible to us—would best fill in the blank in the above statement.

For a Peaceful and Sustainable Future,

Stefan Pasti, Founder and Outreach Coordinator
The Interfaith Peacebuilding and Community Revitalization (IPCR) Initiative