The New Freedom: Living with Hope, Skepticism and Irony

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> *Independence is . . . difficult for people living in Estonia because they must now think for themselves. They can no longer tum to other people for guidance. There is no one to tell them what to do.*
>
> -A newly minted Estonian diplomat in 1992

Freedom was a source of great hope for the citizens of Eastern Europe during the early 1990s. Berne Weiss and I arrived at this conclusion in our book, *Freedom* (1994), by distilled the legacy of the West's concepts of freedom, the common themes obtained from our personal experiences in Hungary, Estonia, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Most importantly, our conclusions were based on our interviews in Estonia and Hungary. It was also true, however, that many years of public lies and a long history of war and invasion in both countries have left the residents of Hungary and Estonia with a legacy of profound skepticism about the lasting effects and endurance of freedom in each country.

A sense of betrayal lies close enough to the surface to encourage a widely held wait-and-see attitude. Men and women who came from both countries were reluctant to commit to hope and were skeptical about solutions that have thus far been offered for long-standing problems. As one Hungarian put it, "You Americans have a solution to every problem, and we Hungarians [and Estonians] have a problem for every solution!" Yet, these same men and women also witnessed major shifts occurring in their countries and in their personal lives as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. They expressed the belief that these changes are irreversible and that the challenges awaiting them primarily concern their ability to live with andsustain their new freedom. Although past history leads to skepticism, current history led to hope and challenge. In setting the stage for our discussion of the reactions of Hungarians and Estonians to this freedom, Berne Weiss and I began with these feelings of hope and skepticism and, in particular, the sources and the expression of these feelings. I provide our original analysis, while also bringing this analysis up to date with the arch of hope and skepticism since the early 1990s in societies throughout our complex, unpredictable, and turbulent world. I suggest that there are often ironic juxtapositions of hope and skepticism in these contemporary societies.

Setting a Context

We must keep several points in mind when considering the hopes and skepticism of the Estonian and Hungarian people. First, any discussion of the experiences of freedom in Eastern Europe must begin with the acknowledgment that the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union was not predicted either inside or outside the Soviet Union by other than a few who seemed to be speaking more from their dreams than from any firm grasp of reality (Skirbekk, 1992, p. 121). (This might give us pause to weigh the significance of dreams.)

Why did the collapse occur so rapidly and so broadly? Morin (1992, pp. 90-91) suggested that the old Soviet system was strong for many decades precisely because of its weaknesses. Centralized planning throughout the region, which covers part of two continents, more than a dozen nations, and double that many languages, for instance, was disastrous because of inadequate communication, expensive and inefficient transportation systems, the apparently random decisions determining production—and the enormous diversity of culture and resources.

Yet the communication and transportation problems led to strong interrepublic dependencies, as each republic began to specialize in the production of certain goods or services; for example, during the Soviet era, the citizens of Hungary produced buses but had no automobile industry. Often goods and services were generated to serve the primary purpose of keeping everyone employed. It was precisely because the Soviet distribution service never really worked that people throughout all of the republics became absolutely dependent on the few goods and services that did make it to their markets.

Similarly, the inability of the Soviet regime to homogenize (and Russify) the diverse populations led to greater dependency on the central government because this was the only source of union among the republics—a union imposed by force and maintained by the continued threat of force. Russian became the universal second language because citizens in each republic were required to study it in school from the earliest grades and rarely learned the languages of their neighboring republics. Ironically, one of the few places where men and women from different cultures came to share and mutually celebrate their similar and differing values was in the work camps and gulags of Russia.

The Soviet Union unraveled rapidly because the weaknesses were suddenly turned against the regime rather than supporting it (Morin, 1992, pp. 91 ff; Feher,1992, pp. 108-109). Communication and transportation became so dysfunctional that many citizens received no goods or services from the state. They either lived on very little or began to produce and provide their own local goods and services. The efforts at centralized planning became so

convoluted and inefficient that the Soviet Union came to a standstill and simply was too big and too bloated to make any effective transformation (despite the inspiring leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev).

A second key factor, one leading to hope, in the Eastern European revolution was the absence of widespread violence, a necessity in the formation of democracy (Morin, 1992, pp. 99-100). Major changes occurred without the traditional imposition of Soviet force or, for that matter, the violence that accompanies most revolutions. Estonians speak of the "singing revolution" in their country that took place without any deaths or destruction of property. In *Summer Meditations,* Vaclav Havel (1992, p. 5) writes of the significance of the nonviolent nature of the revolution that swept Czechoslovakia and much of the rest of Eastern Europe:

> The idea that the world might actually be changed by the force of truth, the power of a truthful word, the strength of a free spirit, conscience and responsibility –with no guns, no lust for power, no political wheeling and dealing –was quite beyond the horizon of . . . understanding . . . but it was the only way that made sense, since violence, as we know, breeds more violence. This is why most revolutions degenerate into dictatorships that devour their young, giving rise to new revolutionaries who prepare for new violence, unaware that they are digging their own graves and pushing society back onto the deadly merry-go-round of revolution and counterrevolution.

Even where violence is being experienced in Eastern Europe, it usually occurs not as a result of a change in the structure of government but rather as a result of the liberation of pent up nationalist and ethnic hostility, which are now allowedto be acted out because of the heightened disarray that accompanies a change in governmental form. Dictatorships of a somewhat different form, sadly, did emerge (especially in Russia). Havel was only party right.

A third key factor that we must keep in mind is that in some instances the major changes that have occurred in Eastern Europe were either short-term or illusory or primarily cosmetic. The same people were often in charge and the same policies often were followed, though different words were now being used. Truth was still being distorted and extreme statements were still being made, only now they were the opposite of what was said before. In other words, the more that things seem to change in the former Soviet Union, the more, in some sense, they seemed to stay the same. Is this still the case? Are Vladimir Putin and other leaders of Russia and many of the former Soviet satellites, simply new versions of the old established patterns of authoritarian leadership? Is there still a Czar in charge?

As those doing research on complex systems have noted, there are often deeply-embedded patterns (called "fractals") that provide an enduring structure for many systems—and the more complex the system, the stronger is the role played by these fractals. They keep the system in balance (providing the "glue" of system integration) and enable the system to operate in a relatively efficient manner (the same dynamics operating everywhere in the system). As often repeated by these researchers, "nature" tends to be a bit lazy—making maximum use of a few principles and dynamics. Perhaps, the system called a "human society" also tends to be a bit lazy, relying ultimately (especially under conditions of stress, anxiety and uncertainty) on the "good old ways" in which authority is formed, reinforced and engaged.

The powerful and reoccurring patterns in former Soviet countries, might also be manifest in the dominant epistemology (ideas about truth) of these societies. In this case, the epistemology might have been shaken up after the downfall of the Soviet Union. But, did this change endure. Citizens of the former Soviet Union were accustomed to believing that the truth was whatever was the opposite of the official information. That kept the options simple. With the new-found freedom, came more sources of information, more ambiguities, and more chances to sift and weigh information, ideas, and analyses. This can sometimes feel more like a burden than a gift. In the West, we are hardly strangers to proliferation of information and the increasing complexity that comes with freedom. We used to trust that the neighborhood school was the "right" school for our children because it was nearby; we trusted that our family doctor provided us with the best up-to-date care. Now we shop and compare. We feel obliged to be informed consumers of everything from education to nutrition because most of us have had the experience of buying empty packaging. During the early 1990s, Hungarians and Estonians met the duplicity of bureaucracy but not the duplicity of the marketplace. Today, there seems to be greater awareness throughout the world regarding the prevalence of lies and premeditated dishonesty (Ariely, 2012)

Given the foregoing observations concerning the magnitude and unpredictability of changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe, the remarkable lack of violence that occurred during the revolution and pretenses of change. We are now ready to examine the nature of the hope and skepticism that is shared by the citizens of both countries.

The Hope of Freedom

In both Hungary and Estonia, optimism during the early 1990s was liberated for the first time in many years. Berne Weiss and I witnessed or were told about the great celebration and euphoria that have accompanied the many tangible steps that have been taken in each country toward a new freedom. The experiences of freedom have assumed many different forms. During the cold war, the ideology of the West emphasized individual freedom as the basic defining difference between East and West. Now the physical wall was torn down, and the Soviet

troops returned to their homelands, which pre-date their Soviet conscription. In the context of the political standoff, *freedom* was a code word. For many in both East and West freedom had much to do with one's ability to travel, to speak the truth as one saw it, and to have access to an expanded range of information and personal choices. In many instances, freedom was experienced in a very personal way. In other instances, freedom was viewed more broadly, in terms of national liberation.

Freedom of Speech

The people we interviewed spoke about newly found freedom of speech. In the past, most Hungarians and Estonians felt comfortable talking freely at home and with trusted friends about the affairs of their own and other governments and could in some instances offer criticisms in public in various veiled ways (humor, satire, metaphor, and so forth). They now could talk freely in public about their discontents and openly expressed their opinions without fear of reprisals.

Most Americans probably cannot fully appreciate the profound feelings that this newly acquired freedom can evoke in people who have long remained silent (Belenky and others, 1986). The profundity became apparent when Berne Weiss and I listened to story after story about the need to remain silent on important issues and the pervasive uncertainty about what one can and cannot discuss with other people. We listened to old men and women tell their stories of repression and discrimination - about confinement in concentration camps. Their children and grandchildren sat in amazement and deep respect as their elders spoke of early life experiences for the first time. These older men and women —as witnesses and victims of the Holocaust and the Stalin era – grew up in silence; and now for the first time in their adult lives, they are able to speak up and recount stories from their youth that they had not even been able to tell their own family members earlier. One of the young Estonians we interviewed, for instance, recalled how she had found out only two months earlier that her grandfather had been sent to Siberia in 1942. She can now more fully appreciate the courage of this man and can personalize the repression and cruelty of the Soviet society into which she was born.

In many cases, the older men and women in both Estonia and Hungary had remained mute about these experiences in order not to implicate their children and grandchildren in their youthful protests or arbitrary confinements. One of the women we interviewed, who was a mental health worker, suggested that the freedom to tell the stories of past times ultimately liberates people to mourn: "Ten years ago we could never talk about the Holocaust experience. I must find the real root of their problems . . . . Now my new patients can speak directly about their experience." In healing the individual psyche, what follows mourning is forgiveness and love. Healing the collective psyche requires people to mourn their history to find the forgiveness and love that follow.

Freedom of Private Ownership and Enterprise

A major source of freedom in Hungary and Estonia during the last decade of the 20th Century was the return of individual ownership and the accompanying return of individual initiative and reward. Several of the adults we interviewed in both countries had the land their families once owned returned to them. Others had the opportunity to buy and own their homes. As one interviewee stated, 'We made a law to try to return what the Communists took from the farmers, and we have [vouchers] and if you had lands before the Communist time and the Communists took it from you, you can [get] vouchers, and they are good to buy land or property, and this way we have privatization, and we give the people the feeling that what the Communists took you are getting back." Johann, tan agrarian reformer in Estonia, spoke eloquently of families reclaiming not only their farms but also their agricultural heritage. Other Estonians and Hungarians returned to their families' occupations: fishing, crafts, ownership of small shops. Entrepreneurial Hungarians and Estonians spoke of the ability to start their own businesses or invest in existing ones.

The pathway to enterprise was not without barriers. As the Estonian government leaders we interviewed noted, there was still much to learn throughout Eastern Europe about capitalism and entrepreneurial ventures. I personally taught a course on marketing at a newly-created Estonian business school—even though this is not remotely my area of expertise. It appears that in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man or woman (or psychologist) is king. I was the temporary king. Ownership in both countries was usually linked directly to the operation of a small business. The notion of ownership through stock purchase or other forms of investment was still a new idea and did not fit very well with the small business traditions in both countries and throughout Eastern Europe. Free enterprise, for good or ill, was liberated in both countries, and citizens were now free to make money—and lose money. In doing so, thy were likely to learn much about doing business in the manner of the West. They certainly didn't need me as their temporary king of enterprise.

In reflecting back almost thirty years later, it is quite apparent that the Estonians did learn how to conduct business in a Western manner—and with many Western customers. Most importantly, the Estonians created a vibrant electronics industry, producing many devices and processes for digitally based communications. I am not surprised that this has been a focus of Estonian entrepreneurship, for the majority of citizens in this country were using mobile devices even in the early 1990s – the land lines in Estonian being of little use (as was typical of many Soviet infrastructures of the time). As Alexander Theroux (2011, p. 18) notes in his insightful observations of Estonian society:

> Estonia is more than just technologically hip: it is mobile-phone addicted and completely Internet literate. In 2010, Estonia go rid of every one of its street telephone booths and canceled the use of telephone cards intended for them. . . . In this small country, Wi-Fi is everywhere. Voting can be done on line by way of a

> national identity card. I believe that they have more cell phones in the country, percentage-wide, than does the United States . . .

It is important to note that Skype was created in Estonia—exemplifying this very successful focus on digital communication.

It would seem that Estonia abandoned its primary reliance on the extraction of natural resources (farming and fishing), as it joined Western Europe in creating the new 21st Century economy; however, this doesn't provide the full picture. Estonia continues to live in both an old, almost Medieval world (as evidence in the continuing preservation of the old town in Tallinn) and in the new digital world. Several years ago, I co-authored with Ken Pawlak a book about the six cultures that exist in American higher education (Bergquist and Pawlak, 2008). Two of these six cultures seem quite appropriate in describing what is occurring in Estonia (and many other societies in our contemporary world). These two cultures are what we label the *virtual culture* and the *tangible culture*. While these two cultures stand in opposition to one another, they also need one another. The virtual culture is represented in Estonian reliance on digital communication devices, while the tangible culture is represented by the preservation of Old Tallinn and (I would suggest) the strong emphasis in Estonia on national identity as witnessed in its music, the pride it takes in its long-standing universities, and its retention of the Estonian language (that is understood by very few people outside Estonian). I wonder if this dual emphasis on tradition (tangible culture) and innovation (virtual culture) may play a major role in the interplay of hope and skepticism about freedom in Estonia (and many other 21st Century countries). This interplay might be embedded in and helps to create the ironic condition that I introduce later in this essay.

Freedom of Choice

Accompanying the new freedom of the entrepreneurial spirit, is the freedom of choice:

> I hope my children know more than me so they can choose because the freedom for me is the possibility of choice.
>
> I can make choices. And sometimes I make wrong choices, and then I have to correct them. And that's a normal life.

Exercising the right to make choices is not always easy, as one young man told us:

> Now everything depends on their daily choices, daily decisions, and that's a fear for them. They never learned to make decisions. They are used to having the same kind of car, the same kind of bread, the same on the TV, and now everything is turned upside down and they can choose between twelve channels and they have to walk in a shop and choose a car, and maybe they make

> a wrong decision and they buy an old bad car for much money. Everything depends on them from now on, and that's a responsibility they are not used to.

More profound than the choice of consumer goods are choices concerning church affiliation or noninstitutional spiritual practice and the choice of friends. We heard stories of religious leaders who had fought long-term battles with the Soviet government to allow them to worship in their churches and had paid great prices for the limited religious freedom that they were granted. Hungarians and Estonians can now freely worship and recruit new members to their churches, explore alternative lifestyles, purchase homes, and express their unique abilities. Sadly, this is not the case with all societies that have experienced freedom during the past 30 years. In some countries (especially in the Mid-East), there has been increased constraint on the practice of certain religions – even violent actions being taken against those of alternative faiths. The so-called "advanced" countries of Europe and North America have not been immune to this "cancerous" tendency: what is it about human beings that we find freedom of choice for ourselves in order that we might eliminate freedom of choice for other people?

It should be noted that even after the Soviet Union collapse, many Hungarians and Estonians felt that the state/party combine still sought to discouraged them from following their religious leanings, and some of them felt challenged to circumvent the obstacles. Even though the governments in both Estonian and Hungary made the return of church property to the religious institutions a high priority (and even provided some financial assistance to churches), there remained a skepticism about actual, deeply-embedded support for religious practices among many of the people we interviewed. Other Estonians and Hungarians whom Berne Weiss and I interviewed during the early 1990s, indicated that religious practice was not important for them. They had either been "brain-washed" by the Soviet regime to devalue religion and spiritual practice or (more often) they simply exemplified the growing "secularization" in most societies throughout the world. For these more secular citizens, the government policy (official or unofficial) about religion didn't really impact their lives. It was other types of choice that had a major impact—often regarding consumer and/or economic choices: what do I buy and where do I work?

Even though there was a fair amount of indifference about religious practices, there was an awareness in the early 1990s, that many religious groups were stepping into the vacuum created by the potential for private education and social services. Not all human services were to be provided by the government. One Hungarian woman who worked for a political party spoke of meeting with a local parish priest to discuss the feasibility of a collaboration between the church and the local self-government on a senior center in a newly restored church building. She reported that the social workers in the local government were reluctant to approach him because they were not accustomed to dealing with priests. There were now more denominations vying for both followers and the state's

financial support. In various quarters, there was concern over the appearance of religious sects and New Age spiritual beliefs that many Estonians and Hungarians viewed as a sort of opportunistic infection of the spirit.

The quite justifiable critique of Soviet officials and ideologues regarding the negative aspects of religious institutions remained intact even after the collapse of the Soviet government. One of the citizens we interviewed provided the following comment:

> Cults were the subject of a panel discussion and forum for a group I was attending. This group met monthly to discuss significant public issues. As with many such discussions of emotionally charged subjects, the outcome was inconclusive. Should the state control religious groups? How can people protect impressionable spiritually curious young people from cults? Where are people to look for guidance on their spiritual path? A young man who attended the meeting with his wife, expressed dissatisfaction. He had gotten no clear-cut message of what to believe. No decision was reached. There were no agreed-upon answers to the questions, and everyone was simply left to contemplate them.

In that moment, it seemed that one of the more difficult tasks imposed by the new circumstances was cultivating a tolerance for ambiguity. Citizens now had to begin making their own choices about complex and often elusive belief systems. They no longer lived in a world of dualism (right and wrong, truth and false)—either accepting or rejecting the dictates of their government officials. These men and women were now sailing on a storming sea of conflicting perspectives and belief-systems—sailing without a rudder and with no anchor. Life was indeed filled with existential angst: perhaps it is best to become a skeptical and perhaps alienated secularist: living without a firm foundation of beliefs and often being just as opportunistic as the manipulative cult leaders. Have the citizens of either Estonia or Hungary learned how to navigate this stormy sea of choice – and are any of us doing a much better job during the challenging years of our complex, unpredictable and turbulent 21st Century? How are we doing with the irony and contradictions that pervade our own societies and cultures?

Freedom of Movement

Concrete manifestations of restrictions—namely, physical barriers—were destroyed when the Soviet Union fell. These barrier collapses were some of the most dramatic and concrete manifestations of new-found freedom. Many "Berlin walls" were toppled literally or figuratively. Citizens of both Estonia and Hungary could now move freely around their own countries and travel to other countries. As one of our interviewees noted:

> Freedom for me means borderlessness, being able to come in and talk to people who live a thousand miles away from here. This is a practical translation of what freedom means to me. Talking with my Cuban friends, with my American friends, with my Swedish friends.

Even more simply, citizens can now move freely through their own cities and towns. For instance, for the first time in forty years, the men, women, and children of Tallinn, Estonia, could boat on the ocean by their city. Estonians could travel upon the ocean that virtually three-quarters of them saw and smelled every day of their lives—this was a very big deal. The fences and watchtowers had been torn down, and the guards left the beaches and docks of Tallinn, allowing its citizens to resume their accustomed vocations or avocations of fishing, swimming, and boating. This was a simple but powerful statement of freedom.

Perhaps, this is one of the important, distinguishing features of freedom in the European communities, as compared to the freedom experienced temporarily in many Mid-eastern countries. The recipients of temporary freedom in Egypt and other North African countries found little opportunity (or often little need) to communicate or travel beyond the borders of their own country. The barriers imposed by language and culture made it unlikely that these newly freed citizens had many friends in other countries. Most of their outreach was through the press and social media (reporting on the events of the uprising). Economic constraints also made international travel impractical for many of these citizens. Even when there has been movement to other countries (often by reluctant refugees), the movement has been restricted. The refugees often are caught in temporary camps that have become a long-term (perhaps permanent) reality for them. Whether we are considering the refuges escaping from Mideast repression or those (closer to home for most of us) who are caught in camps on the Southern United States border, there is very little freedom of movement. These displaced citizens are embedded in (and are often trying to escape) the temporary freedom afforded by a society in chaos.

The "revolution" in most countries have been insular and the interactions (both positive and negative) have often been directed inward toward fellow citizens. They are persecuted, bombed, extorted, and forced to flee. And there is little support waiting for them in the camps where they are forced to reside. Does sustained freedom always require an outside audience and support (both psychological and financial/political) from this audience? Is temporary freedom, arising from chaos, simply a new form of tyranny if no one is there to assist? Would the men, women and children living in Greek camps identify themselves as "free" if they can't move further into other European countries? Would the Central American families caught in holding facilities at the United States border identify themselves as recipients of American support for "*the huddled masses yearning to breathe free*"?

Freedom of National Autonomy

Along with the more personal aspects of freedom, the men and women Berne Weiss and I interviewed during the early 1990s spoke about the collective sense of freedom in each country—or a new nationalistic spirit. Each country was now free to plot its own future course, to pick its own friends and enemies, to determine its own destiny, to make its own mistakes. The spirit of nationalism that accompanied the new freedom created a need for

new bonds. In *Freedom*, Berne Weiss and I expressed our hope that these bonds would be based on trust and would replace the pervasive conditions of mistrust that were created when Soviet officials encouraged neighbors to spy and report on one another. Was our hope realistic?

Yes, in many ways, the foundation was laid during these early years of freedom for a nation-wide base of trust in both Estonia and Hungary. In part, it should be noted, this trust has been sustained because of the renewed threats of Russian leaders to reclaim both Hungary and Estonia (especially Estonia). The recent actions taken by Russian leaders against other Eastern European countries (such as the Ukraine) have reinforced the fears of invasion and loss of national autonomy. This threat of an enemy may be a key ingredient of national unity and shared trust in many parts of the world—ranging from South America to the Korean peninsula and from Israel to Taiwan.

Even if dependent on the menacing external enemy, the discovery or creation of a sense of national autonomy has allowed men and women in many countries to dream collectively and to recall their own distinctive history. It reinvokes memories and stories from the past that can once again be told about national heroes, aspirations, and achievements. During the early 1990s, it allowed the men and women of both Hungary and Estonia to mourn and celebrate collectively as well as individually. Over many centuries, most of the countries in Eastern Europe, including Hungary and Estonia, have experienced only brief, intermittent periods of freedom from totalitarianism. These brief historical "dreams" are embedded in a past that includes centuries of invasion and conquest and the more recent public (Soviet) history, in which reality was shaped to ideology.

The hope that Berne Weiss and I expressed during the 1990s might not have been fully justified; however, there is the lingering impact of temporary autonomy that might never be tapped down again. The genie might be out of the box and not easily shoved back in. The memories and historical accounts remain vivid and compelling—passed down from generation to generation—to be renewed again and again during the countries long search for autonomy and freedom.

Clearly, history and the past are very important in both countries. Men and women whom we interviewed showed us their family genealogies; they spoke of triumphs, defeats, and humiliations of several hundred years ago as if they had occurred only yesterday. They indicated in every way possible that they will not and cannot forget their past lest they lose their vigilance and become too complacent or idealistic. A similar observation might be made about the new sense of identity and autonomy to be found in many other countries over the past thirty years. Even though the "springs" in many countries were short-lived, they often produced a sense of history and pride that lingers even after the loss of freedom and national autonomy.

It is remarkable that personal histories are so very long. Invasions that happened four hundred years ago are experienced by Hungarians and Estonians as personal humiliations. Public histories, on the other hand, have in recent years been remarkably short. Soviet books on Estonian history, for instance, only briefly addressed the life of this country prior to 1942 (the year of Soviet occupation), focusing instead on the introduction of communism into the Estonian society. Both the personal and public histories create and sustain unrealistic expectations (hopes) and skepticism—often, ironically, in the same person.

Skepticism About Freedom

As is the case with hope, skepticism about freedom comes from both personal and collective experiences for Estonians and Hungarians. There was very good reason during the early 1990s for skepticism and pessimism—given not only the failure of many expectations regarding the positive impact of freedom but also the deterioration of many domains of society beyond even the low levels left by the crumbling Soviet empire.

Economic Hardships

The liberation of both Estonia and Hungary brought about major economic hardship, which fed the skepticism and pessimism in both countries. While the citizens of Estonia and Hungary were much better off economically than those living in most of the other Eastern European countries during the last two decades of the 20th Century, economic hardship was everywhere. While there were more choices in the supermarket, there was less money to purchase the new goods. As one of our interviewees noted: "We used to have the money but no choices; now we have the choices but no money." Men and women who had lost their government-guaranteed jobs were now unable to find new jobs because of the collapse of their economic systems. Older citizens were particularly hard hit because they were either on pensions that couldn't keep up with rampant inflation or had lost their pensions altogether. Frequently, their children were unable to support them—nor could these older citizens readily move in with their children.

The citizens of Hungary and Estonia had expected major changes that would lead at least to short-term prosperity. They hoped for a longer-term transition into the prosperous status of their neighbors in Western Europe. They found instead economic decline and stagnation. Estonians and Hungarians became weary during the early years of the 1990s and questioned whether real economic change had occurred in their countries, if it will ever occur, or if it has already occurred and left them in worse shape. Many of those we interviewed spoke of their daily struggles to survive in their communities; they want ready to feel their Estonian and Hungarian identity—an identity that had been denied them for the last forty to fifty years. Yet just at the point when the potential for a renewed identity was at hand, they had to scramble to secure an economic base. As Abraham Maslow (1998) noted many years ago, the motive to survive will predominate over higher order aspirations (such

as finding one’s personal or collective identity) every time. Today, we find greater economic prosperity in both countries (and in most of Eastern Europe); however, as I have already noted, another existential threat has damped the economic optimism: this is the threat of Russian invasion. Once again, security reigns supreme.

Before leaving this skepticism regarding economic prosperity, I would like to dig a bit deeper. A sense of economic wellbeing is based not just on the daily realities of living without needs and wishes being met, but also on a comparative sense of wellbeing. In many instances, the sense of economic privation is aggravated by the dreams that were brought to life by liberation. For many young people in Eastern Europe, who had been inundated with American movies and music videos beamed in from the West, the liberation of their country enabled them to dream of prosperity and consumption in their own country. I am reminded of a similar condition that was operating in South Africa during this same period of time. There were very primitive living conditions in many of the townships (where many Black South Africans lived)—yet each home (hut) had a TV where episodes of *Dynasty* (displaying massive American wealth) were being replayed many times.

Prosperity had clearly not yet come to pass in either Eastern Europe or South Africa. Some individuals in Estonia and Hungary were now becoming wealthy (or are at least more publicly displaying their wealth) which further aggravated the economic skepticism. Communication with the West's media and travelers from countries in the West were becoming more common, thereby compounding the problem of contrasting economic conditions. In essence, liberation led to a worsening of economic conditions in Eastern Europe and enabled citizens of these countries to become more keenly aware of their own privation in comparison to the living standards in the United States and Western Europe. While there were major discrepancies during the Communist era, in terms of both income and the perks one might receive, conspicuous consumption among the elite and wealthy was conspicuously absent. There was no Soviet version of *Dynasty* showing on the state-run TV stations,

Social Dislocation

Although by 1993, Hungary and Estonia have not yet inherited the West's economic prosperity, they have begun to inherit some of the problems of the West that seem to accompany freedom. First, they were now experiencing more social dislocation and unrest, often manifested in increased crime and violence, than was true in the past. The men and women Berne Weiss and I interviewed spoke of the painful process of losing friends because of differing opinion about politics, economics, or religion. Whereas they used to have a common enemy—the Soviet leadership and bureaucracy—now there was nothing that kept them together. As can be observed throughout the world, a common enemy unites people. When the enemy is lost, then the previously suppressed disagreements emerge: our past friends might even now become our enemies. With freedom from external threat comes an

internal threat. The re-emergence of threat from the East (Russia) might lead again to re-establishment of old alliances and even friendships. Or are the differences now too deeply set for a return to the olden days?

I wonder about the potential permanence of polarization among the populations in Estonia and other Eastern European countries (as well as other countries in the world) because of the way in which this polarization is often exhibited. During the time when Berne Weiss and I were in Eastern Europe, many of the citizens of these countries were not terribly charitable. They not only celebrated national days—they took great delight in waving the flag and decrying the failure of the previous regime in the faces of their Communist neighbors. Citizens of both Estonia and Hungary found that their differences of opinion and discrepancies in values were often large, once they are expressed. Sadly, like many citizens living in so-called "mature" democracies, they had not yet learned how to live with diversity. Are conditions any better today? Do we still need an external enemy to find room for acceptance of those living with quite different perspectives in our own communities?

The answers to these fundamental questions about the future of social democracies may not be what most of us want to hear. Social dislocation in Hungary and Estonia, as in most societies, has often been displayed in the rending of the social fabric and lack of respect for the rights of other people. The stage was set for a sense of alienation during the Soviet era, with the building of large, impersonal housing projects and dehumanizing factories—that were intended primarily for those who were defeated (their country was invaded or they were members of a minority group). The architectural style that in Eastern Europe was known bitterly as socialist realism looks identical to the style that developed in the United States during the 1930s and later (notably exhibited in the housing projects of the Bronx).

In the United States this model of urban development is called functional—but it often leads to the same kind of alienation and anomie found in the Soviet Union (as noted by the American environmental psychologist, Robert Sommer). Architecture worldwide was bitten by the fascist bug, which became most virulent after World War II—when fascism presumably had been defeated. The architecture remains like the scars of pox after a plague. At the time Berne Weiss and I wrote our book there was only elevated hope and accompanying disappointment, for these alienating living conditions were not changing rapidly—and still haven't changed (in either the countries of the former Soviet Union or in the Unites States). What was once the utopian (and fascist leaning) vision of the 1930s (e.g. see *Life* magazine covers of the 1930s) had become something of a nightmare.

Berne Weiss and I found during our stay in both Estonia and Hungary that some people who longed for the old ways of living in Eastern Europe hoped to begin moving out of high-density urban complexes and back to the country, or at least to the suburbs. The rural or suburban state was certainly much more appealing to many

Estonians than was urban life. Their traditional life in the country (agriculture) or on the coast (fishing) often seemed a more "natural state" to Estonians. Freedom comes not just through shifts in the rules and regulations in a society, but also ultimately through the changes in people's daily living conditions: whether or not the circumstances of their lives are harmonious with their inner voices.

Did liberation bring about changes in such living conditions? Or did those living in these “stone cities” simply learn to adjust to life in a large, impersonal complex. Sadly, it seems that adjustment was often the outcome. As a result, the alienation that one experienced in the housing centers that were built during the Soviet era in Estonia as well as that found in many other areas of Soviet life, seems to have led to a widespread, low-level depression, which in turn seems to be linked to passivity. The Soviet system was apparently saturated with alienation. What is the relationship between depression, authoritarianism, and the experience of freedom? I would suggest that this is a fundamental question of our time.

The social collapse during the early 1990s was also manifest in a significant increase in the occurrence of begging and theft in the major cities of Hungary and Estonia. It was evident, as well, in the much more serious increase in hate crimes and even potential outbreaks of civil war between rival factions or ethnic groups. Similar manifestations of social collapse were soon unwinding in Bosnia and Georgia, among many other former Communist countries and Soviet republics, and is widely found today in countries throughout the world. During our early years in both Estonian and Hungary (while the Soviet Union still existed), Berne and I experienced the remarkable peace and security that comes with knowing that one can walk freely on city streets or parks at night. We realized at the time that this probably would not last for long in either Hungary or Estonia. Our predictions proved to be accurate. Law and order declined significantly in both countries during the early 1990s. Is crime often (or even always) freedom's fellow traveler?

Governmental Uncertainty

Another problem is the turbulence of governmental processes. Neither Hungarians nor Estonians were used to the public airing of dirty linen on the part of their political leaders. They were not accustomed to abrupt transitions in government, infighting among various political parties, or disruption in governmental services that often accompany a change in political control. In other words, they had not encountered the messiness of democracy! Bureaucracies in the old Soviet Union may not have worked very effectively; however, there was at least continuity and clarity of roles and responsibilities. Now (in the early 1990s) there was confusion and frustration. Long lines may no longer have been as common at public agencies, but simple, clear answers were now uncommon.

Unlike the Hungarians and Estonians, who instinctively refused to believe everything their government told them, we Americans tend to accept what our government tells us. We therefore had a difficult time understanding the resurgent popularity of the Communist party or various socialist parties in Eastern Europe during the last decade of the 20th Century. During the nineteen eighties, Solidarity in Poland was at the vanguard of what would become a domino effect, toppling Soviet-influenced or Soviet-controlled regimes in the Warsaw Pact nations. In feeling their way to a new system, the Poles set an example for how a shifting economy could pinch people. Remarkably, things changed during the 1990s. The Polish citizens gave a surprising measure of support to the Communist party during this decade. Not only Poles, but manyHungarians and Estonians came to appreciate the accomplishments and values of the previous system. A memorial service for Janos Kadar in Budapest in the spring of 1993 drew twenty thousand people. Today, during the second decade of the 21st Century, we find the pull back to the old regime (or at least the return to higher international status) in the strong leadership and widespread support for strong leadership in the figure of Russia's Vladimir Putin. One step forward and one (or two) steps backwards. Is this the nature of profound social change pitted against social and institutional stability?

Part of the message of the late 20th Century cold war linked a socialist economic system with political repression and its attendant restrictions on individual freedom. However, that link may have been more firmly fixed in the minds of those in the West than in the minds of Eastern Europeans. One possible way to read the emerging signals since the collapse of the Soviet Union is that with Soviet influence and power removed, many people preferred an economic system that offers more basic security than unlimited opportunity. From a perspective of thirty years following the Soviet collapse, we can observe a mixed outcome. Clearly in some of the Eastern European countries (such as the two countries Berne Weiss and I studied) there has been a gradual (even at times dramatic) embracing of a free-market economy—driven in particular by the digital technology revolution. In other countries (inside and outside Eastern Europe) there has been a much more regressive move following a revolution. Freedom appears to be experienced and reacted to in different ways in different societies and cultures. There is no one formula for success – and frankly not all societies might be prepared to handle freedom—at least for the next couple of decades.

Lack of Governmental Credibility

The skepticism and pessimism found in Hungary and Estonia during the early 1990s, might be even more firmly grounded on the long history of subterfuge in both countries. Eastern Europeans always knew that propaganda about the West, and in particular the United States, wasn't very accurate. As a well-traveled young banker said in one of our interviews:

> Now I'm realizing that I was taught many stupid things and stupid ideas about communism. The whole thing was very one-sided. They were trying to limit information about the outside world. They

> were painting the same one-sided picture about the Western world that in the fifties the United States was painting about Russia, at the [time] of the Rosenbergs [the Americans convicted of spying for the Soviet Union and subsequently executed]. The same sort of one-sided information that we had. But somehow we didn't take it seriously.

One wonders about the extent to which we Americans were particularly naive in accepting U.S. propaganda about Soviet life at face value. Had we simply fallen victim more readily to the illusions of freedom and to ideological conflict, or were we more accepting of our government's statements? Should we equate believing with being naive? Does a viable democracy require a high level of uncritical belief in what is being conveyed from the government? This is an especially important question to ask today (2019). As the warfare between the American media and government leadership escalates, is democracy being threatened at some core level?

Because the citizens of Hungary and Estonia were exposed for so many years to systematic lies, there was a lack of belief in any public statements when freedom came to both countries. These men and women knew that they had been lied to and were fully aware that information was often defined by those who had power (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). For many years, the public definition of reality in Eastern Europe had been at odds with privately held perspectives. How widespread has this alienation of information been over the past 30 years? We find a renewed attention to these dynamics about truth and reality in the research conducted by the behavioral economists--most notably Kahneman (2011), Ariely (2008. 2012) and Thaler (2015). Their research findings suggest that public "truth" can be quite pliable.

These psychologists (accounting for two Nobel prizes in Economics) write about the heuristics that simplify and often distort "reality". They offer an extremely important question: who is sitting at the table when truth is being formulated? The Hungarians and Estonians (as well as the citizens of many other former Soviet satellites) seem to have been more aware of these epistemological dynamics then those living in the Unites States. What does it mean that both Kahneman and Ariely were raised in Israel? Is there a healthy skepticism about truth and reality to be found in Israeli culture that resembles that found in Hungary and Estonia?

The dynamics of epistemology as related to freedom might go even deeper. One of the discoveries we made while in Eastern Europe was that Communist party membership during the Soviet era was often unrelated to ideology or even political preference. While the rhetoric of the party was clearly ideological and political, men and women joined the party for many different reasons—only some of which related to sociopolitical issues. At a very basic level, membership in the Communist party could be considered a substitute for membership in institutions of a religious, spiritual, or cultural nature that were lost when Hungary and Estonia were first

invaded. As Nicolas Berdyaev (1960, p. 158) notes in his remarkable analysis of the origins of Soviet communism, communism is inevitably opposed to any formal or informal religious institution because it is itself a religion. Berdyaev, a Russian Orthodox theologian, suggested that communism as a surrogate religion:

> . . . .professes to answer the religious questions of the human soul and to give a meaning to life. Communism is integrated; it embraces the whole of life; its relations are with no special section of it. On this account its conflict with other religious faiths in inevitable. Intolerance and fanaticism always have a religious origin. No scientific, purely intellectual theory can be so intolerant and fanatical, and communismis exclusive as a religious faith is.

The young people who earlier joined the youth branch of the party primarily for social purposes were often joining local churches during the early 1990s—not because they necessarily were becoming religious but because they were looking for institutions that could provide settings and occasions for social gatherings and activities – much as young people in the United States often do. The older Estonians and Hungarians were also often joining the newly emerging political parties to establish or, in many instances, sustain friendships. Given the small population and size of Estonia, the existing friendship patterns have been particularly important in establishing the new parties. As one of our interviewees noted, the many small parties that littered the political landscape of Estonia during the 1990s were nothing more than the blending and extension of friendship patterns and business alliances. Perhaps the invention of Skype in Estonian exemplifies this strong desire for connectedness (even if it is now done digitally).

Berne Weiss and I found that the urge to join was related not just to a desire for connections. It was also related to a more practical, economic motivation. Older men and women joined the Communist party in order to get a job, hold a job, or obtain a promotion. Our interview with a new Estonian diplomat, for instance, revealed that "in the past [Soviet era], in order to get a better job, or to get an apartment, or to go as a tourist to other parts of thecountry or abroad , or to go on a business trip, one must be a member of the Communist party." Things did not change after the Soviet collapse. Ironically, many of the privately ambitious and most entrepreneurial of the citizens in both Hungary and Estonia were members of the supposedly collective-oriented, anti-individualistic Communist party. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that by the middle of the 1990s many of the most successful free market" entrepreneurial capitalists in both countries (as well as other former Communist countries) were former members of the Communist party. As one of our observant interviewees noted:

> You know the changes are not like throwing out the ones who are not needed and keeping the good ones. I mean it was a smooth development or a smooth procedure when those guys were replaced. . . . Those who were active members of the party, they are still in high positions in some companies.

This condition is even more prevalent today. We can look anywhere in the former Soviet countries to find that the big tycoons were former Soviet officials. The most glaring example, of course, is the Russian oligarchy. It was often troubling and enlightening for us to interview men and women who were former Communist party members. They described their new business enterprises or their new affiliations with American or Western European corporations. In most instances, they seemed to adjust easily to their new entrepreneurial or corporate roles, leading one to wonder how different Communist party membership was during the Soviet era from contemporary private enterprise and corporate membership. A corporate fast-tracker we interviewed had previously worked for an ad agency. She described a co-worker this way:

> When it was a Communist regime, she believed that she was a fighter; she was running in front. And when the changes came, she just turned back and she started to talk about the business and advertising . . . because she found something else to believe in.

Perhaps American businesses attract many of the same type of ambitious men and women who were attracted to the Communist party in the Soviet Union. Do we find throughout the world those men and women who are willing to embrace a specific corporate culture ("drink the punch") in an uncritical manner? To use the term coined by Eric Hoffer (1951), are they ready to become "true believers" in an alternative social system at a moment's notice?

The Truth About Truth

We have arrived at a point where we can step back and look more broadly at the role played by epistemology in the experience of freedom. We are ready to look at the more fundamental way in which we arrive at and act upon our discovery of truth and reality. Specifically, we will examine truth and reality through the lens offered by William Perry (1970). He proposed that there are essentially four modes (or stages) of cognitive and ethical development. In brief, the first mode is *dualism*: a frame of reference that places everything into one of two categories: true or false, real or unreal. A second mode is *multiplicity* that leads one to question and not trust any categorization of reality into true or false categories: there is no truth and therefore there is no falsehood. There are only a variety of competing truths. The third mode identified by Perry is *relativism*: there are specific truths that can be verified within a specific context (this context containing criteria for determining the truth). Fourth, there is a *commitment in relativism*—a framework that brings one past relativism to the embracing of a specific set of truths based upon which one can make specific judgements and take specific actions (knowing full well that other sets of truths hold equal validity).

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When, as Perry proposes, the simplistic truths of the dualistic frame of mind (that is, when clear-cut goods and bads, rights and wrongs) have been shattered, as they have been in Eastern Europe, then the next step is not to a thoughtful, ethically oriented relativism or commitment in relativism. Rather, there is turning to an expedient, often cynical multiplicity. Having abandoned all hope of finding a simple universal truth (the expectation of the dualist), the multiplist moves to another level of dualism. Namely, if there is no one truth, then there must be no truth, no ethical standards, no agreed-upon standards of conduct. Rather, there is only the standard of profit, of social status, of getting ahead of one's fellow citizens. The Golden Rule becomes: "the person with the gold determines the rules."

We found this multiplicity in both Hungary and Estonia, particularly among many of the former party members who lost their idealistic dreams or never had them but were expedient even in their decision during the Soviet era to join the Communist party. ("In college I had one friend, a girl, who seemed to be political, but when the political changes came, I realized that it was only for interest. . . . [S]he started to do something else, and she became apolitical.") We were particularly disturbed about and have reflected often on the story told by the famous Estonian scientist we called Endel.

What is the truth about Endel? His narrative of survival and even triumph under the Soviet regime is filled with the use of humor, coded messages, and indirection. He danced carefully and artfully around the political forces operating in Estonia and elsewhere in the Soviet Union. In fact, the politics of the Soviet Union seemed not only to keep him alive, out of prison, and "in a comfortable bed with a beautiful woman"; the political processes also seemed to have given him enormous influence over the scientific endeavors of the Soviet Union. Yet in choreographing and performing this elaborate and artful dance, did Endel sell out his own country and his own scientific integrity? At this point in his life, can he even tell the difference anymore between expedient compliance with authorities and his own personal values and ideals? Endel seems to be either a multiplist, who will say anything to survive and thrive, or an idealist and cosmologist who patiently and successfully kept his dream alive in a strange and very alien world. Perhaps he is both.

Other, more clearly idealistic, or less skillful, men and women who often exemplified a commitment to relativism joined the Communist party because they saw it as the only mechanism through which they could improve their community and society. While they were not particularly enamored of Marxist doctrine, nor (specifically) the Soviet brand of Marxism, they knew that this was the only game in town. Many of these Hungarians and Estonians were among those who (along with Gorbachev) led the reforms within the Communist party that set the stage for the liberation of Eastern Europe. These were often the men and women who spent years in prison or risked their lives during the 1970s and 1980s in fighting for a more responsible Soviet regime. By the middle

of the 1990s, many of these men and women, who still cared deeply about the welfare of their communities and country, were locked out of community organizations and public service. Other former members of the party who were much more opportunistic and self-serving were successful beneficiaries of the new freedom. Under such circumstances, skepticism and pessimism were certainly justified.

What, then, is one to believe about public pronouncements over the past 30 years? What is the new reality, and is it to be believed? As a psychologist in Prague pointed out in 1993, "We used to know what the rules were and the consequences of breaking them. Now we don't know what the rules are, so there's no way to know what the consequences are for breaking them. We don't even know if we are breaking them." In addition, images from the West were not (during the 1990s) and still are not all they were expected to be. The free market begets competition, not cooperation, especially in an environment of scarcity.Many Eastern Europeans believed that Soviet tales of homelessness and hunger in the West were part of the big lie. Finding out that such problems do indeed exist in the land of plentyadds to the sense of losing one's balance on shifting ground. The men and women of Hungary and Estonia look at the economic volatility and inequities in the West and wonder what price they must pay for freedom. They examine the alternative lifestyles, modes of production, and governance systems in the West and realize that their newfound freedom has led to the flooding of their own culture with disparate and often incompatible values, aspirations, and images of the successful life.

Conclusions: Living in Irony

In many ways the intermixing of hope and skepticism in Estonia (and elsewhere in the former Soviet satellites) during the early 1990s exemplifies the condition of irony portrayed by the philosopher, Richard Rorty (1989). Specifically, I propose that citizens of these post-Soviet societies are living under conditions of profound and pervasive contradictions. They are, in Rorty's terms, *ironists*. According to Rorty (1989, p. xv) the ironist is the "sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her most central beliefs and desires." By "contingency" Rorty is referring to the contextual and transitory nature of all belief systems—a stance that is aligned with Perry's commitment in relativism: "[the ironist] is someone sufficiently historist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance." (Rorty, 1989, p. xv)

These conditions of irony seem to apply to the life of Estonians. I am apparently not alone in this appraisal of Estonian culture. Theroux (2011, p. 86) offered a complimentary analysis when he turned to an observation offered by the noted psychologist, Erik Erickson:

> . . . Erikson once offered the idea that “a nation’s identity is derived from the ways in which history has, as it were, counterpointed certain opposite potentialities; the ways in which it lifts this counterpoint to a unique style of civilization . . .

The contradictions faced by the Estonians were in Rorty’s terms not just those that can disintegrate a civilization (or society). Rather, they are contradictions that are accepted as being contingent (shifting with the times and conditions of the social system). These contradictions, in other words, are not a sign of a society’s weakness, but rather a sign of its capacity to absorb and embrace profound differences. Such a society is strong, with the potential agile capacity to adjust and adopt to rapidly changing and unpredictable conditions.

I must, at this point, become an ironist myself and point to the opposite conclusion that is articulated in the second half of the sentence Theroux quotes from Erikson: does the counterpointing of opposite potentialities instead let a civilization “disintegrate into mere contradiction.” (Theroux, 2011, p. 86). Theroux soon turns to the fundamental question: “what did all the contradictions [in Estonia], never mind the pain, lead to? Are [the Estonians] the weaker for it or stronger? Were they stimulated by it all or simply subdues? More importantly, is the nation now a vital and progressive body, growing by the day, or a white elephant?” (Theroux, 2011, p. 86) Though I am inclined to believe that Estonians have effectively handled the contradictions, Theroux’s questions must remain unanswered.

I am unwilling, however, to halt my analysis at this point—leaving us without any affirmation regarding the way(s) in which irony interplays with freedom and helps to determine a nation’s future. Is the country of Estonia vital and progressive or a white elephant? There might be an answer to Therouz’s questions, that is offered in a general manner by Rorty—who replaces the modern notion of enduring truth (a dualist frame) with a utopian thought in its continually evolving form (Rorty, 1989, p. xvi):

> A historicist and nominalist culture of the sort I envisage would settle . . . for narratives which connect the present with the past, on the one hand, and with utopian futures, on the other. More importantly, it would regard the realization of utopias, and the envisaging of still further utopias, as an endless process—an endless, proliferating realization of Freedom, rather than a convergence toward an already existing Truth.

Is Rorty’s utopian vision aligned with what I witnessed in Estonia following the Soviet collapse? What connects the present with the past – and with an envisioned future in the country of Estonia? While I certainly witnessed the regression to a dualistic frame, I also saw the remarkable ability of many Estonians to embrace both hope and skepticism. Without becoming too Pollyanish about the challenging circumstances to be found in Estonia, I found that there was societal “glue” that enabled citizens of this

newly independent country to embrace both hope and skepticism. I suggest that this glue was found in the enduring culture of Estonia – and in particular in the music of Estonia. It is remarkable to note at almost any level how music (and related art forms) can hold and convey contradictions and irony – whether it be the bitter-sweet ballad portraying something about lost love, or the heroic anthem of a nation that has lost its sovereignty.

In the case of Estonia, the role played by music in its own quest for sovereignty is noteworthy. As Theroux (2011, p. 5) notes: "Music is a big Estonian thing. In tea shops, in restaurants, on street walls, one constantly comes across fliers, sheets and handouts for concerts, pop shindigs, *musikah*, and shows for rock groups." In my own time in Estonia, I would rarely walk down a street in Tallinn without hearing a musical group in rehearsal and I fondly recall the tradition at Tartu University of multiple choral groups singing across a ravine.

Music has meant much more than this in Estonia. Often called "the singing revolution", the story of Estonian independence begins with the "illegal" singing of nationalist Estonian songs at a major song fest during the early 1990s. Without any violence, the Estonians softly but firmly asserted their national identity and demand for independence through their music and related art forms. I had the distinct honor of attending a concert at the Tallinn Symphony Hall that featured the music of Arvo Part (the noted Estonian composer), with the orchestra being conducted by Neeme Jarvi (the noted Estonian conductor). The concert hall was electric with the return of both the music of Part and the musical leadership of Jarvi. While many other factors contributed to the intermixing of hope and skepticism – and the sustained drove toward independence despite the skepticism—I witnessed not just the manifestation of Ironic courage but also one of its sources in the music of Estonia.

In bringing this essay on hope and skepticism to a close, I am left with hope that culture (and music) can provide the ironic blending of hope and skepticism. Estonian music and culture can provide Rorty's bridge between the past, present and future. At the same time, I am skeptical about my own optimism, for I fully acknowledge the power of regressive authoritarianism and the appeal of a dualistic frame or (in a state of disillusionment) a multiplistic frame. Midst my own embracing of both hope and skepticism, I choose to believe and move forward with a commitment to the enduring virtues of a free society—a social system in which citizens have difficult but important choices to make about both individual rights and collective responsibilities. Freedom comes with a price, but it also comes with great potential rewards.

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