

## THE COOPERATIVE SOCIETY: THE NEXT STAGE OF HUMAN HISTORY

### Book Review

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<b>Edition</b>	..	Second Edition
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<b>Paperback</b>	..	148 pages
<b>Publisher</b>	..	Emile G Nadeau; 2nd ed. edition (October 1, 2018)
<b>Year of Publication</b>	..	October, 2018
		ISBN-13: 978-0998066233
		ISBN-10: 0998066230
<b>Price</b>	..	\$11.26

The authors of this book have rich experience in the field developing, researching, writing, and teaching about cooperatives and community development in the United States and in developing countries.

The book is presented in four sections and in all 15 chapters. The **first section A** on The Cooperative Society hypothesis depicts that in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, we may be on the threshold of a new stage of human history – the cooperative society. The cooperative society is a potential new stage of human history, characterized by economic and political democracy, cooperative international relations, and a symbiotic relationship with nature. The cooperative society would replace our current stage of history, which is characterized by a small number of large countries and for-profit corporations that dominate the world economy; a mix of authoritarian and democratic governments; a low quality of life for many of us; conflict-based interaction within and among nations; and a destructive relationship with the environment.

The second section B is on “**Measuring the transition to The Cooperative Society**” with eight smaller chapters. The authors have begun this section of the book with the special quote from the introduction to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights approved by the members of the United Nations in 1948: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” The commitments made by all States in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are in themselves a mighty achievement, discrediting the tyranny, discrimination and contempt for human beings that have marked human history. The authors have selected the measures for analyzing the transition to a cooperative society with some specific selection criteria e.g. not burying the reader in too many variables or too much complexity, Including a range of social, economic, political, and environmental measures to create a balanced review of the transition etc. Based on these criteria, the authors identified seven primary measures.

The seven measures in the form of chapters, representing economic, political, social, and environmental components of a transition to the cooperative society are : 1) Concentration of economic power, 2) Wealth and income inequality, 3) Deaths from conflict, 4) Democracy, 5) Population change, 6) Quality of life, 7) The environment.

Chapter one on Concentration of economic power describes that the most recently available data in 2018 indicate a slight decrease in the economic strength of cooperatives and a slight increase in the strength of large corporations compared to the 2016 data. The data presented in this chapter indicate that the number of cooperatives in the world is approaching three million, and the number of co-op memberships is about two billion.

Chapter two on Wealth and income inequality, highlights that Wealth and income inequality in the world is extreme. There are a few positive signs related to the income of the very poor and to an emergent “world middle-class,” but the super-wealthy are super-wealthier than ever and most of the planet’s inhabitants are scraping by just above the bare minimum.

In chapter three authors concluded that the level of conflict around the world has dropped dramatically since the middle of the 20th century. War deaths have decreased dramatically since the end of World War II, and homicides are down sharply since the beginning of the 21st century when systematic worldwide data was first collected. In 2016, war deaths were estimated at a little over one per 100,000 population per year, compared to over 20 deaths per 100,000 in the first half of the 20th century. Between 2000 and 2016, the rate of worldwide homicides per 100,000 decreased from nine to a little over five.

This chapter talks about the number of democracies in the world and shifts in the trends. The number of democracies accelerated after World War II, and again in the 1980s and early 1990s with the addition of some developing countries and of states that had been part of the Soviet Union. Based on these data, the population of democratic countries was about the same as that of all non-democratic countries in 2014. Despite these differences, long-term trends clearly indicate a historical shift away from autocracy and toward democracy.

Chapter five on Population Change describes that the world population has reached 7.6 billion in 2018 and According to the United Nations, the world’s population will reach 11 billion people by 2100. A rising population puts pressure on resources such as food, housing, health care, and a range of other goods and services, and tends to degrade the air, water, and land on which we depend. However, there is a myth about the consequences of an increasing world population that is important to note and expose.

Chapter six concluded that Quality of life has improved since 1990. Quality of life is an important aspect of the cooperative society. Both the Human Development Index and progress on the UN Millennium Development Goals indicate that fewer people around the world are living in extreme poverty, and that a variety of health and education indicators are also improving. The UN Sustainable Development Goals Program is intended to continue these improvements from 2016 through 2030.

In the seventh chapter the authors have evaluated a range of ways in which human activity has increasingly degraded the planet’s land, air, and water with special focus on two negative impacts humans have had on the environment: species extinction (that is, killing off plants and animals that otherwise would still be around today), and climate change (raising the surface temperature of the earth by increasing the amount of carbon dioxide and related greenhouse gases in the atmosphere). The consequences of the polluted environment are not only warmer temperatures, but also other negative changes, including increasing droughts, forest fires, rising ocean levels, other extreme weather events, and accelerated species extinction.

Chapter eight is presented with the purpose to summarize the trends presented in the first seven chapters of the book, to provide an overview of whether or not we humans are moving toward or away from a more cooperative society, and to identify a set of targets for progress on these measures to be achieved by 2030. The seven measures presented in this section of the book provide mixed evidence as follows: the “score” of these measures is: • 3 negatives – concentrated economic power, unequal distribution of wealth

and income, and damage to the environment • 3 positives – reduced conflict, increased democracy, and improved quality of life • 1 neutral – population growth

The Third Section C on **Taking action comprises of seven chapters. The authors say that** as human beings, we have the power to shape the world in which we live. Because of this ability, we can act strategically to evolve into a more humane society.

Chapter 9 on Decentralize economic power, provides ways and means of decentralize economic power. Some of the important techniques could be i) Grow cooperative businesses by Improve measurement of co-ops and co-op performance, Improve the legal and regulatory environment for co-ops, Strengthen community-level, national, and international support for cooperatives, Improve cooperative development and financial assistance, Develop targeted strategies for co-op sectors, countries, and job creation opportunities, ii) Expand social enterprises etc.

“What can us as individuals do to reduce income and wealth inequality?” discussed in Chapter 10 on Reduce inequality in household income and wealth. The authors have presented many cases and incidents with practical way out to deal with this insurmountable problem. Within a country, the taxation system and the array of economic- and social-support programs are the key factors that influence income and wealth inequality. Progressive income and wealth taxes reduce the gap between the rich and the rest of us. At the same time, they generate revenue that can be used to improve the economic conditions of a large majority of citizens through a variety of means: access to affordable health care; education; food and housing assistance payments; and retirement benefits.

Chapter 11 on Reduce conflict mainly deals with the prime objective to reduce homicides in our own neighborhoods and communities. It is seen that much of the violence in the world centers on the Middle East and Afghanistan. The authors have appealed the resourceful International organizations and developed countries to extend incentives and sanctions which could help to reduce conflict and increase democracy in other parts of the world.

Chapter 12 on Expand democracy addresses the question, how do we expand democracy into the rest of the world? With the examples of many countries the authors suggested that democratization can be accelerated in other countries by the policies of governments and economic leaders in democratic countries.

The authors have provided many strategies that we as individuals, communities, countries, and international organizations can do to “bend the curve” of population growth downward in Chapter 13 on Reduce population growth.

Chapter 14 on Improve the quality of people’s lives says that by taking small actions as citizens, voters, members of religious and nonprofit organizations, and consumers we can make life better for millions of people in the world. Through these roles we can take actions to support the right of people in every country to have decent lives in keeping with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Chapter 15 on Create a more sustainable environment presents very pragmatic ways to reduce global warming, Limit species extinction etc. which would ultimately lead to safe and sustainable environment. The main conclusion presented in section D is that at this point in human history, there are divergent trends, some moving toward increased cooperation and others undermining it. On the plus side, cooperative businesses appear to be growing in number and global influence, on the negative side, a relatively small number of for-profit corporations dominate the global economy. As humans, we can shape our own history. That is the ultimate message of this book. We as a species are not destined to destroy ourselves and our planet. We can make the transition from a destructive society to a cooperative one. And we can make major progress on that transition between now and 2030.

The authors have presented the book to be read by a broad range of people, especially those who are interested in the state of the world today, where things may be headed in the near future, and what we can do to improve conditions for our species and the planet. In particular, the audience for the book includes:

- People who are active in cooperatives, mutual insurance companies, social enterprises, and other not-for-profit organizations
- Progressive elected officials and government employees at all levels
- socially responsible business leaders and employees
- Citizens who are active in their communities
- Faculty and students at secondary schools, colleges, and universities.

E.G. Nadeau and Luc Nadeau certainly embrace values of the Enlightenment, but emphasize as well the importance of cooperative organization as a promising pathway to future human progress. The efforts taken by the authors to present the book in professional way deserve appreciation and compliments.

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