André GOODFRIEND | András Sándor KOCSIS

The Diamond Axis Bends But Does Not Break

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A Correspondence Book

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In memory of my unforgettable grandfather, Sándor Tóth,
and my parents

With gratitude to my wife, Erika,
and my two wonderful sons, Erik and Bence

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"The Seas of Sorrow Boil with a Rage, Magyar!"

Two years ago, András Sándor Kocsis published his book on the Nelson Principle, which extols the virtue of the unusual, the unexpected, the surprising action over familiar, well-known, rehearsed procedures. The fate of the principle's namesake is a reminder that applying it entails risks – often the victor remains on the battlefield. The author formulated the principle while studying the works of Zbigniew Pietrasiński, a renowned researcher in leadership theory, though its roots go much further back: even Jesus warned his disciples, "It must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh" (Matthew 18:7).

Now the reader holds in their hands a book born entirely in the spirit of the Nelson Principle. Two people, one Hungarian and one American, speak to each other; their messages alternate online – one the sender, the other the receiver – then switching roles. Their words do not vanish into the void, as the internet does not forget; everything that happens within the network's domain leaves a trace.

The conversation was initiated by András Sándor Kocsis, who, prompted by a sudden idea, sent from Budapest on February 16, 2025, the concluding essay of his book on the Nelson Principle to André Goodfriend, originally from Arizona. In it,

he affirms his belief in the four values he considers most important: **solidarity, freedom, the rehumanization of politics, and political elegance**. The receiver replied without delay, and a response to that quickly followed, shifting the discussion from the timeless realm of philosophy to the events unfolding in the world today – thus began a vivid exchange lasting until March 26, 2025.

This book documents the steps of that exchange. When the conversation began, neither party knew it would become a book. But as the alternating, reactive, sometimes concordant, sometimes disputing messages unfolded, it became evident – especially to a seasoned publisher and editor like Kocsis – that they held the potential for publication. The resulting work invites readers to imagine themselves in a virtual living room stretched between Arizona and Budapest, following the friendly verbal sparring of André and András.

Who are these two individuals whose dialogue we are witnessing?

András Sándor Kocsis is a well-known figure in Hungarian intellectual life, playing multiple roles: sociologist, publisher, visual artist, and ever-willing philanthropist who firmly believes in the possibility of a better world.

André Goodfriend, who today simply describes himself as a "humanist," served as an American diplomat for more than three decades, including as the Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Budapest from 2013 to 2015.

Though their messages chain together across sender and receiver roles, there are no sharp ideological divides between them – what stands out more are differences in style and per-

sonal history. The values articulated in the opening message matter deeply to both. For Kocsis, they appear in incomplete, imperfect forms; for Goodfriend, they serve as guideposts to be pursued. Both respond to the history, culture, and unique position of the other's nation in the community of states – though in the case of the United States, this unfolds on a different scale and in different dimensions than with tiny Hungary. Kocsis, seemingly seeking to compensate for his country's smallness, investigates along a world-political horizon, presenting Hungarian themes primarily through the lens of his own family history. Goodfriend, meanwhile, offers deeply empathetic analysis of the historically shaped fate of the Hungarian nation and, as an American patriot, shows evident pride in what his homeland, as an heir to the Enlightenment, can offer the world as an example.

The texts of this conversational series, the diversity of the topics discussed, the vitality of the interlocutors, and their humanistic yet rational worldview all make this book worth publishing – not only in Hungarian for the Hungarian readership, but also in English for an international audience.

What distinguishes this book from other similar ventures is the era in which its texts were written. Human life on Earth has always unfolded within the frameworks of changeability, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. But the participants in this dialogue are united in their conviction that with the emergence of the COVID virus, a new era has begun in human history – one in which looming Chaos threatens to devour Order.

In his introduction to the book, Kocsis recalls a conversation we had, in which, drawing on Dániel Berzsenyi's imagery,

I expressed doubt that we were strong enough to calm the world's boiling "woeful sea". Now, having read this book, I believe more strongly that a time will come when the inhabitants of the Earth may finally live in peace and abundance, no longer trembling before the monsters they themselves have unleashed.

GREGORY MCNAMEE

Speaking Freely

During the first two decades of this century, I taught a course in writing to economics students at the University of Arizona, and for all those many years I was both baffled and annoyed by something I would witness at the close of every lecture: students would leave the classroom, immediately take out their mobile phones, and walk off to the next class with their eyes glued to the screen, never looking away. Why dozens of students were not hit by bus or streetcar or bicycle during their hypnotized travels, I do not know, but I continue to marvel at it.

I say annoyed because I have long believed that the components of a good higher education are these, in more or less this order: an excellent library with librarians and professors who can guide a student toward the best and most essential reading in that student's discipline, and adjacent disciplines as well; talented lecturers who remember in their every conscious moment the medieval motto *Ut doceat, ut moveat, ut delectet* – teach, move the heart, and delight – and act on it; and finally, and as important as any other criterion, a cohort of intelligent students who, on leaving a class, will sit and talk together about what they had just heard, parsing and refining and even correcting the lecturer's message, making it memorable, absorbing it (or sometimes rejecting it) as one's own.

Those students of mine foreclosed the possibility of that shared learning by retreating into technology, which, for all the promise of AI, isn't the same thing as that conversation but instead is our prime agent of loneliness. Half a century ago, when I was an undergraduate and we barely had electronic calculators, it was different. In that long-ago era, I was fortunate to number among my fellow students the supremely intelligent André Goodfriend, who ranged across a broad landscape of intellectual disciplines: communications, philosophy, ancient and modern languages, literature. I brought to the table a dual track in both classics, with an emphasis in ancient Greek, and anthropology, both subjects that engage me strongly to this day. In political matters, I had the sense that André was progressive but not dogmatic. I was somewhere on the border between socialism and anarchism, deep enough in that Stalin's agents would have executed me in the Spanish Civil War. One of our fellow *Stammtisch* participants was Catholic enough to give the pope a run for his money, conservative enough that T. S. Eliot would have begged for mercy. One was a fundamentalist Christian, another militantly atheist.

And yet we talked, and talked, and talked, and drank endless cups of coffee, and learned from one another. And by talked, I mean precisely this: We listened. We did not half-listen, using the other half of our attention to cook up brilliant retorts. We *listened*, and when it was our turn to speak, we spoke, argued, and – once again – learned.

In this lively set of exchanges, André Goodfriend speaks with – and listens to, and learns from – András Sándor Kocsis, one of those broadly situated European intellectuals who, at

home in many disciplines and steeped in many books, deserves a place at the table alongside the likes of Bernard-Henri Lévy, Umberto Eco, Susan Sontag, Roberto Calasso. Kocsis is a social scientist by training, a publisher by calling, an artist by necessity, and someone who in the days of William James might have been called a meliorist, someone who believes that human beings can become better, if only they'll work at it a bit.

In one essay, Kocsis seems to argue that capitalism is a permanent feature of the economic world today, and he may well be right: certainly the former enemies of capitalism – I am thinking in particular of China and Russia – have adopted some of its worst elements, even as champions of capitalism – in particular the United States – have joined in the race to transmute or even transmogrify that erstwhile bastion of freedom into its most authoritarian, pitiless, predatory version. Goodfriend counters with the view (and I think Isaiah Berlin might agree) that the ideal of freedom, Kocsis's real subject, should not be inextricably linked to any particular economic system. In that assertion lies the possibility of another meliorist thought: that perhaps one day, à la the galactic utopia of the old *Star Trek* television series, we won't need capitalism, or a welfare state, or even economists, because we will have figured out how to share the wealth of the planet and, *pace* Elon Musk, even the universe.

The signal point of interest here is not the fact that two capable, extraordinarily intelligent men of good will are talking. People talk all the time. People talk too much. It is that these two are *listening*, practicing thesis and antithesis and dialectic, looking at the world as it is and as it might be. Neither is afraid to argue. Neither is shy of contesting data offered as fact.

But neither is wedded to a position that cannot be changed by more and better information (as the American writer Samuel R. Delany puts it, "Any problem that can be corrected by more sensitive and intelligent education is fundamentally a problem of misinformation"). Neither is dogmatic. Neither is immovable. Neither shouts.

To my sorrow, I have not been to Hungary, so I cannot say firsthand what things are like there. But I can tell you that in the United States, much public discourse is just the opposite: bad information, misinformation, disinformation is shouted, ever more loudly, until we cannot sleep for the din. To pick up on a Kocsis keyword, we do not *exchange* but instead seek to overcome and overwhelm. It does not help that the sitting president, setting the tone, is an adept at lying and bluster, backed by a cohort of Americans who insist that facts do not matter. Nor does it help that Americans' educational attainment is sliding, that most adults read at the level of children, that a tiny percentage of the population subscribes to a newspaper. Against that background, it is difficult to imagine, with Kocsis and Goodfriend, that politics can ever be rehumanized, that we can ever overcome anomie, that we can cultivate democracy anew.

For all that we need hope. For that we need conversation, true conversation. Read on in this book, and glimmers of light shine through to illuminate this dark time. May that light prevail, and may we all find someone with whom to talk and from whom to learn.

Introduction

There are many signs suggesting that the ideologies which once offered comprehensive explanations of the world have fulfilled their purpose – and can no longer provide valid interpretations or answers to today's most pressing questions. I hope that my sketch of the "Fourth Way," the Nelson Principle, might contribute to the birth of new ideas. Because thought, dear Hamlet, does not sicken action – it brings it to life.

As a young man, I read *Creative Leadership* by Zbigniew Pietrasiński, in which the author explains the secret behind Admiral Nelson's success – how on February 14, 1797, at Cape St. Vincent, he defeated the Spanish navy. By disobeying the orders of the English fleet admiral, Nelson executed a daring and unconventional maneuver with his squadron, significantly contributing to victory. His boldness, and his conception of victory as a duty, would later prove decisive again at the Battle of Trafalgar. Though mortally wounded, Nelson died knowing he had fulfilled his duty. I've never forgotten the rule-breaking Nelson, and the principle: never hesitate to leave the beaten path – seek instead the untraveled ways to success. It's as if Pope Francis, during his visit, was encouraging the same when he said: "Do not be afraid to go against the current!"

Thinking differently has followed me all my life and has led – and still leads – to ongoing conflicts. I used to be like the excellent Communist Szilárd Újhelyi when he was arrested. For weeks in prison, he could only think of one thing: trying to figure out what mistake he had made. He couldn't imagine that his comrades had unjustly imprisoned him – so the error must lie within himself. I've felt the same. I often didn't understand why others didn't understand me. I assumed it was because I was saying foolish things. I don't aspire to the laurels of the great János Bolyai, but it does encourage me to recall that even his non-Euclidean geometry wasn't understood by his contemporaries. It could only appear as an appendix to his father's work *Tentamen*. Yet this "appendix," as he put it, created a new and different world from nothing.

My goals are more modest. The program outlined in the Nelson Principle rests on four pillars. Separately, they may seem trivial, but together – so I hope – they form a new quality. These four principles are strong and effective only when used together. H_2 by itself is not life-giving water – only with O. It's a commonplace truth that one of humanity's fundamental values is **solidarity** – helping those in need. But in my view, solidarity is not the same as charity. Solidarity, as I interpret it, is "innate," part of our attitude system. Charity, on the other hand, is learned behavior. In practice, however, they often serve the same purpose, and we needn't strictly distinguish between them.

Let's stay with concrete practice. Tolstoy also disliked when someone preached love for all humanity. A few examples, just for illustration. I'm not trying to boast, and I certainly don't

seek praise – but if I didn't share these stories, how could I hope for others to follow?

I work closely with Gábor Iványi, head of the Oltalom Charity Association – a man who wants to help every person in need. He helps me to help. He's an endless source of ideas and has a vast heart. He once called me from a village near Kyiv, Ukraine. He was at a refugee camp with hundreds of women and children in dire straits. I asked how I could help. He said he wanted to bring 35–40 mothers and children to Budapest for three days to give them some joy. For that, we needed a bus – about €600. I sat down with my wife Erika, and within half an hour, we wrote a letter and sent it to friends. In four days, we raised 1.7 million forints. I then called Péter Fekete and asked if he could help us get discounted tickets for the Ukrainian guests to see a circus performance by Ukrainian artists in Budapest. Thirty-eight people were coming. He said the show starts at 3 PM. It turned out that none of the Ukrainian guests had ever been abroad. The children didn't even know the word "circus." At the end of the show, six Ukrainian performers came out to greet them. It was touching and joyful.

Later, I called István Tamás at the Palace of Wonders, who had already supported the refugees generously. I told him we wanted to show our Ukrainian guests the Palace, and he welcomed them free of charge. Accommodation was covered by my friends' donations, meals were provided by Gábor's team, and there was even enough left to give each person 2,000 forints a day in pocket money.

When Gábor returned from Ukraine, I visited him on Dankó Street. He spoke of shocking experiences, including a

village where half the houses had been destroyed by Russian shelling. He suggested we bring fruit trees for each ruined home as part of the rebuilding effort. I said it was a beautiful idea. Before I even reached the end of the street, I called back: "You can come for the trees in May." Gábor said: "András, you're crazy, I can't keep up." But it wasn't anything magical. I remembered that my son Erik, who runs an organic farm, had recently bought 120 trees from Gyula Kovács, founder of the Tündérkert movement and savior of ancient Hungarian fruit varieties. I called and asked if we could buy 150 trees for Ukraine, referencing my son, and if he could give us a discount. He asked, "Will you be passing through Beregszász?" "Of course," I said. "Why?" "Because that's where I grew up," he replied, smiling. "Unfortunately, I can't give you trees right now – but in two months, when the saplings are ready, I'll give them to you. And don't speak of discounts. I'll give them for free."

Gábor also mentioned visiting a village named Andriivka, where he noticed a statue of a WWII hero whose head had been blown off by the Russians. The grotesque image of a headless soldier evoked his legendary sense of action – he promised the locals he would ask me to sculpt the head anew. At first, I found the idea strange. I recalled how many beheaded Buddhas I'd seen in the Far East – a symbolic destruction by invading Burmese forces. And then it came to me: the statue in Andriivka should not be reconstructed "as if nothing happened," but should visibly bear the scar – a bronze head reattached to the stone body as a war memorial. Unfortunately, I only received a poor-quality photo of the original statue, but I did get the