

Review

Half the Sky

By Sheryl WuDunn & Nicholas Kristof

Reviewed by Kavita Nandini Ramdas

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Women Hold Both Sky and Solutions

Review by Kavita Nandini Ramdas

HALF THE SKY:
Turning Oppression
into Opportunity for
Women Worldwide

Sheryl WuDunn &
Nicholas D. Kristof
320 pages, Knopf, 2009

Sheryl WuDunn and Nicholas Kristof's book *Half the Sky* is an absorbing narrative of stories that are rarely heard: a New Jersey teenager is

raising awareness about the status of girls in poor countries, an Afghan schoolteacher is leading a learning insurgency, and a former first lady of Somalia's hospital is saving the lives of mothers in Somaliland. These and other vignettes bring to life the struggles and courage of unforgettable women who are, as the book's subtitle suggests, turning oppression into opportunity.

Half the Sky begins by outlining the most egregious ways in which human rights are violated: trafficking and slavery, prostitution, rape and honor killings, and maternal mortality. The authors do not flinch from describing experiences that are horrifying testimony to the deeply rooted gender inequality that persists around the globe.

The book also explores the reasons for such discriminatory practices—including attitudes toward religion and traditional cultural beliefs—effectively stoking the reader's growing sense of moral outrage. We learn, for example, that the world's leaders are effectively ignoring the 500,000 women who die each year either giving birth or trying to cope with unplanned births, by relegating maternal mortality to a "women's issue."

After convincing the reader that this state of affairs can no longer be tolerated, the authors use the latter part of the book to share what they believe are some of the most promising strategies for changing this brutal reality. Their top three choices: investing in education, microfinance strate-

gies, and the effective exercise of political will. They also argue passionately for greater investment at the grassroots level, a cause the Global Fund for Women has championed for more than 20 years.

The fervor of the book can be attributed to the authors' self-confessed status as recent converts to the cause of women's rights. This is both the book's greatest strength and its greatest weakness. Although it offers valuable insights into the lives of individual women, the book may frustrate readers seeking deeper analyses of the complex factors that contribute to extreme gender discrimination.

To paraphrase Karl Marx, women struggle for their rights not in circumstances of their own choosing but within a broader historic, socioeconomic, and political context. In describing the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) as "the world capital of rape," for example, the book rightly calls attention to the terrible violence faced by women there. Yet the reader is not led to reflect on the fact that the experience of Congolese women is inextricably linked to the larger struggles of the DRC. The culture of violence in the Congo has roots that include vicious colonial occupation, the fallout of the Rwandan genocide, ongoing mineral extraction by multinational corporations, and an arms race fueled by the United Kingdom, France, and the United States, who are among the largest suppliers of small arms to various factions. Finally, the DRC experience is not contrasted with other recent mass rape incidents, such as in the former Yugoslavia, which could have led a reader to reflect on how this phenomenon extends far beyond the world's poorest countries.

Similarly, the chapter titled "Is Islam Misogynistic?" could have been more clearly linked to the previous chapter—"Family Planning and the 'God Gulf.'" There, the authors do touch on the way in which evangelicals and right-wing Christian extremists contribute annually to the deaths of women by refusing access to contraception and insisting on "abstinence only" strategies. A

chapter titled "Is Religion Misogynistic?" might have been more effective in exploring the multiple ways in which most of the world's religious and cultural traditions have found "divine" reasons to justify and continue the systematic oppression of women. Instead, the chapter on Islam comes perilously close to reinforcing widely held negative stereotypes about Muslims.

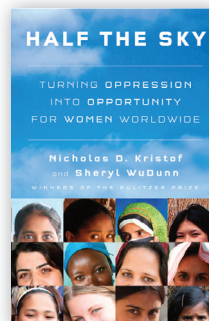
The book misses the opportunity to make the critical point that the realization of women's rights depends on the existence of secular civil space that is only possible after societies have achieved genuine separation of church and state. That separation

was crucial for the gradual emancipation of women in the West, a struggle that has taken centuries. Women in the developing world are trying to achieve their rights in compressed time frames—most of their societies gained independence from European colonizers barely 50 years ago.

What the book does effectively is to make the foreign terrain of

women's rights accessible to an average American. Although they may not have intended to, the authors blow a fresh wind into the sails of the women's movement right here in the United States, for much more needs to be done at home as well as overseas. Violence against women in the United States continues to be a leading public health menace, women and children make up 70 percent of the poor, and women still constitute a mere 14 percent of the U.S. Congress.

It is critical that the message we take away from this book is not simply horror at the epidemic of global gender violence and injustice. *Half the Sky* reminds us that women also hold solutions to our world's greatest challenges. If Sakena Yacoobi and the girls of Afghanistan can risk their lives to overcome illiteracy, poverty, and violence, then we must be their allies by holding our own governments, corporations, and philanthropic sectors to their promises to realize women's rights. That would make the sky that women hold up a little lighter and our collective futures much brighter. ■



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How Scale and Innovation Can Coexist

Review by Debra Dunn

THE DESIGN OF BUSINESS: Why Design Thinking Is the Next Competitive Advantage

Roger L. Martin
256 pages, Harvard Business School Press, 2009

Many books and articles support the view that an organization must choose between creating value through innovation and creating value by building scale and wringing out cost. The thinking styles and capabilities required for success appear to be diametrically opposed. Innovators are right-brained people who rely heavily on their intuition, whereas the leaders of large, efficiency-oriented organizations achieve results through rigorous, continuously repeated analytical processes and reject decisions based on instinct and judgment.

In *The Design of Business*, Roger Martin contends that organizations can balance intuitive originality and analytic mastery in a dynamic interplay that he calls design thinking. This approach is necessary, according to Martin, to maintain long-term competitive advantage.

As the dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto and an advisor to many CEOs, Martin has worked with and studied a wide range of organizations. He has come to embrace the design thinking approach after seeing its powerful impact in a diverse array of companies. The vivid articulation of these company stories, paired with some very useful conceptual frameworks, makes *The Design of Business* both compelling and actionable.

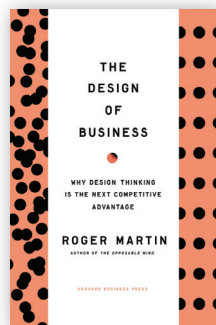
Martin anchors many of his concepts in a framework depicting the way knowledge advances. He calls this the knowledge funnel. Knowledge begins with the contemplation of a mystery, advances through the development of a heuristic based on experience, and finally gets refined into an algorithm that can be reduced to software. Movement through

DEBRA DUNN is an associate consulting professor at the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford University and an advisor to business and social entrepreneurs. She previously grappled with the tension between innovation and scale from every angle as a senior executive at Hewlett-Packard.

the knowledge funnel is necessary to scale up innovation, but to keep innovating, a firm must return to the mouth of the funnel.

As organizations move down the knowledge funnel, they tend to become driven by an analytical approach to management that is incompatible with exploration of new mysteries at the top of the funnel. This is the crux of the conflict between innovation and scale. Martin does not claim that it is easy to overcome this conflict, but he offers several examples of companies who have done just that. Although no cases from the nonprofit sector are included in the book, the ideas are equally applicable there.

P&G's journey to become a design thinking organization provides a strong counterpoint to the view that innovation and scale cannot coexist. In 2000, the company's



stock price was declining precipitously, revenue growth had ground to a near halt, acquisitions were slowing down, and most of its biggest brands were losing market share. For the first time in the company's 165-year history, the board fired the CEO. In June 2000, the board promoted A.G. Lafley as the new CEO.

Lafley quickly recognized that P&G's innovation engine was stalling. To reverse the slide, P&G had to become more innovative, but the expense side of the value equation also had to be addressed. Lafley set about to tackle innovation and efficiency simultaneously by turning P&G into a design organization. In 2001, he appointed Claudia Kottchka as the company's first-ever vice president for design strategy and innovation, with a mandate to build P&G's design capability and act as the company's champion of design thinking. Martin provides deep insight into how Kottchka and Lafley tackled this transformation.

The results speak for themselves. According to P&G's recent annual report, virtually all organic sales growth over the past nine years came from new brands and new or improved products. P&G has also established significant scale advantage at all levels. These achievements have been accompanied by strong financial results.

Unlike P&G, RIM, the company that invented the BlackBerry, was structured as a design thinking company from the outset.

Founded in 1984, this fast-paced, high-tech pioneer manages the tension between innovation and scale through a co-CEO model. Founder and President Mike Lazaridis is a design visionary, and co-CEO Jim Balsillie leads the business side. This duo has been effective at actively pushing knowledge down the funnel while continuously returning to the mouth of the funnel, trying to discover new things or see things in a new way. The speed of RIM's movement through the funnel has resulted in competitive advantage in both cost and innovation.

Martin provides evidence that although it is difficult, it is possible to balance exploration and exploitation. The well-developed cases provide enough specificity to serve as a rough road map for leaders interested in pursuing the design thinking path. Martin also dives into the organizational issues of structure, process, and cultural norms, areas that tend to get in the way of design thinking and need to be addressed.

As someone who wears the scars of many battles fought for innovation during 22 years at Hewlett-Packard, a company that succumbed to the natural bias toward scale, I'd give most companies poor odds of achieving the balance Martin espouses, but they will be better for trying. ■

An Environmental Provocateur

Review by Denis Hayes

WHOLE EARTH DISCIPLINE: An Ecopragmatist Manifesto

Stewart Brand
336 pages, The Viking Press, 2009

Stewart Brand, author of *Whole Earth Discipline*, is described on the book cover as an icon of the environmental movement. He actually isn't and doesn't want to be. Brand (who, in full disclosure, is a friend) has always been much more of an iconoclast than an icon.

In *Whole Earth Discipline*, he combines his deep concern for the environment, his pugnacious search for windmills to tilt at,

DENIS HAYES is president of the Bullitt Foundation. He organized the first Earth Day celebration on April 22, 1970, and currently chairs the 180-nation 40th anniversary Earth Day in April 2010. During the Carter administration, Hayes was the director of the Solar Energy Research Institute (now the National Renewable Energy Laboratory).

and his technological optimism to produce an intriguing, confounding, utterly Brand-type book. By that, I mean a full-throated assault on conventional wisdom, laced with enough ironic riffs and personal confessions of his own past errors to disarm most critics.

Brand came to public attention 41 years ago by publishing the wildly successful *Whole Earth Catalog*, a practical guide for back-to-the-land refugees from suburbia. The catalog questioned virtually every attribute of 1960s middle-class suburban America and offered a telephone directory-sized,

annotated compilation of equipment for rural self-reliance. Ultimately, the back-to-the-land movement proved to be vanishingly small, over-fond of drugs, and stuck in a historical cul-de-sac.

In *Whole Earth Discipline*, Brand examines and embraces the scientific basis of some of the principal problems that scare the hell out of environmentalists. Indeed, his bottom line on global warming is among the bleakest I've ever read, and it's probably correct. The book questions assumptions that most modern environmentalists take for granted (such as

that a sustainable future will rely mostly on renewable energy sources or that sustainable diets will depend on organic crops) and proposes solutions that make most environmentalists gasp (such as nuclear power, genetically modified foods, and urbanization as a complete solution to population growth).

What makes this book different from the embarrassing essays of faux environmentalists like Patrick Moore and Bjorn Lomborg (who come to conclusions similar to Brand's) is that Brand's environmental values are long-standing and sincere, and he

DOG-EARED

"Are You Talking to ME?"

Review by Mal Warwick

THE SILENT LANGUAGE

Edward T. Hall
209 pages,
Anchor Books, 1990

If you're a born and bred American and you've lived in any non-Anglophone country, you may have realized after a time that the local people you met didn't just speak a different language—they were really *weird*. They acted in all sorts of ways that struck you as irrational, frustrating, and eventually annoying. They stood too close to you, or too far away. Their voices were too loud, or too soft. They were vague about such basics as time, distance, and probabilities. And after months of this disorienting behavior all around you, you may have wondered whether you were going mad. In a sense, you were. You were suffering from what has come to be called "culture shock"—a sometimes-traumatic condition that results from the removal of familiar cultural cues. In its worst manifestations, culture shock can make you feel as though you've been detached from reality.

This concept was brought home to Americans by returning Peace Corps volunteers in the 1960s and 1970s. Because volunteers had been immersed by design in local cultures, they brought culture shock to light for many Americans. Fortunately, even before the first Peace Corps volunteers were posted overseas, a cultural anthropologist named Edward T. Hall had studied the roots of culture shock in great detail and published his findings in a compelling book, *The Silent Language*. Those of us who served in the early years of the Peace Corps benefited directly from Hall's insight. In my training program in 1965, *The Silent Language* was required reading.

Hall spent years exploring nonverbal communication. With examples drawn from the U.S. military in World War II and foreign aid workers in the 1950s, as well as from his own research in Southwestern Indian communities, the South Pacific, and Iran, Hall helped us understand "the broad extent to which culture controls our lives." He made us accept the sad reality that communication is about a lot more than simply words.

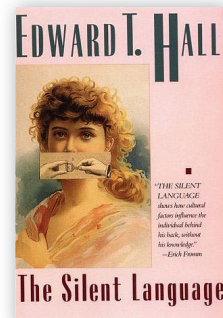
MAL WARWICK is a Berkeley, Calif.-based author, consultant, and trainer who specializes in fundraising for nonprofit organizations. His most recent book was *Fundraising When Money Is Tight: A Strategic and Practical Guide to Surviving Tough Times and Thriving in the Future*.

As Hall noted, "Almost everyone has difficulty believing that behavior they have always associated with 'human nature' is not human nature at all but learned behavior." In the more than three years I worked as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador (1966 to 1969), I thought of that book alarmingly often: when every queue I entered dissolved into a mob; when I was given directions to a destination and told it was either "near" or "far" even though it wasn't; when a pledge I'd taken for a promise was instantly forgotten.

Truth to tell, though, comprehending the underlying logic of this sort of cultural clash didn't help me feel any more relaxed. I went just as crazy as anyone. Still, familiarity with Hall's teachings continued to help me through the years. Those insights

made it possible for me to get outside my white, middle-class skin during my later years of work in community organizing and political campaigns in districts with heavy ethnic minority populations.

All this experience came rushing back to me this summer when I read Hall's obituary in *The New York Times* (he passed away July 20 at the age of 95). The article prompted me to reread *The Silent Language*. Boy, was I surprised! To



be sure, Hall had placed great emphasis on time and space as elements in intercultural communication. But I'd completely forgotten about the rest of the book, which lays out a complex and detailed anthropological theory about the nature and "vocabulary" of culture. Once Hall launched into a discussion of his theory, he started losing me.

So what we've got here, it would seem, is a failure to communicate, and, not to put too fine an edge on things, in a book about communication. I stewed over this conundrum for several days. Then it hit me. The simple truth is that Hall never intended for me to read or understand his theory. He wasn't writing for an intelligent lay audience. Instead, he was writing for an academic audience. This helps me understand what has long puzzled me: why social scientists' findings are so rarely reported in plain English. It's because they have no intention of making themselves understood except to a limited academic audience. Finally I understand how communication really works. Or doesn't, as the case may be. ■

doesn't slant his ideas to boost his speaker fees or to attract corporate consulting.

The environmental movement has made such minimal progress in recent years on major global challenges that a serious rethinking is in order. And who better to lead it than iconoclastic Stewart Brand? That's what makes the book's conclusions so sad. His arguments are provocative but unconvincing. The author's fluid prose and disarming personal anecdotes are beguiling. The chapters display breadth. But the whole just doesn't add up to his conclusions.

For example, Brand embraces a nuclear-powered future while dismissing the associated weapons proliferation. A world in which nuclear power contributes meaningfully to reducing carbon-based fuels in the next few decades is a world in which hundreds of tons of plutonium are annually shipped through the corrupt arteries of commerce, and in which sophisticated nuclear knowledge is very widely dispersed.

How can one endorse nuclear power for the world and not even mention Iran?

The answer, basically, is Brand's trademark technological optimism. He conflates nuclear expansion with a nimble skip to "Generation IV" reactors. (All current reactors are Generation II.) With a serious commitment, Generation IV reactors might be commercially available by the 2030s, by which time global warming will have cooked our goose if we haven't already built an economy relying heavily on solar energy, affordable storage, and smart power grids.

Brand's discussion of how to deal with the world's growing population follows a similar pattern. He believes that, because of the power of urbanization, the world population will level off at about 8 billion, "followed by a descent so rapid that many will consider it a crisis." Brand is lonely in his belief that the world's population will peak at 8 billion and virtually alone in forecasting a precipitous decline (at least in the absence

of war, pandemics, or widespread starvation). To urge environmentalists to shift our emphasis away from trying to gain assistance for family planning and women's rights to "softening the impact of the depopulation implosion" gives new meaning to "Hail Mary pass."

Despite these problems, there is much to admire in *Whole Earth Discipline*. Brand starts every section with an open mind, and his is a very bright and curious one. He introduced me to several fascinating people I'd never heard of, like Steven LeBlanc and Robert Neuwirth, whose books I have now ordered.

That I draw radically different conclusions from Brand's after reading his book is almost beside the point. His goal is to make people rethink their premises, double-check their data, and revisit their logic. In the introduction, Brand writes, "My opinions are strongly stated and loosely held." This is a book to be read with a critical, engaged intellect. But, as Brand himself would tell you, before forming any strong views on these crucial global issues, be sure to read more than one book. ■

