The prologue was the invention of Greek playwrights.

On an empty stage, before the play begins, a character appears and provides the context that enables the audience to understand the ensuing drama. The play itself often recounted a calamity that emerged – inevitably – from the facts provided during the prologue.¹

In one sense, a prologue is entirely superfluous because the each author provides a rich and compelling context of understanding for their presentation. Yet the idea of a prologue also makes sense. Although each presentation stands on its own, there are connecting themes that underlay, and give added meaning to, these chapters which make up the scenes and acts of the upcoming play.

One theme is calamity. Stories of disaster and disruption provide the ground of understanding. They are clustered into three groups -- the acts of this play: war and conflict; the financial meltdown; and finally issues of leadership and the illusion of containment.

What sets the stage for them is the persistent and dominating myth of rationality which functions as the “blind eye,” opening the way for the destructive enactments and catastrophes explored herein. This myth, which persists in spite of overwhelming evidence, is itself rooted in the Enlightenment project that has held sway over Western thought since the 17th century. Armed with ultimate faith in reason and science, Enlightenment thinkers took aim at dogma. Through the application of reason to orthodoxies, tradition and unquestioned convention, the Enlightenment aspired to emancipate people from barriers to free thought.

Our presentations illustrate how belief in rationality becomes its own dogma, one that can itself inhibit thought and obscure any understanding of forces that reside in the primitive register of the psyche. It becomes an essential calcifying ingredient of the defensive posture that holds awareness of the impact of irrationality. These nine acts illustrate how flight from underlying emotional realities is both a manifestation of suffering as well as a source of further suffering.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prologue
Psychoanalysis provides another connecting strand. Each scene examines social and organizational life through the lens of psychoanalytic thinking. Freud was, himself, firmly rooted in the Enlightenment. His unwavering faith in science and reason, as famously expressed in his critique of religion, saw the unquestioning mind as imprisoned by infantile forms of thought and feeling. Ironically, while Freud’s work was an expression of Enlightenment thinking, it also exposes the limits of its deepest moorings – the ideals of pure rationality and objectivity.

Psychoanalysis exposes the precariousness of reason and demonstrates its vulnerability to all sorts of regression. In spite of all intention, the unconscious residue of infancy and childhood exacts an inevitable, ever-present influence on adult states of mind. At the cultural level, regression is always an imminent danger, evidenced by how often common bonds are affirmed by finding a victim or culprit on whom to displace communal hostility and anxiety.

Act I uses a wide aperture to explore questions of war and conflict. Each scene surfaces the curious, paradoxical "dance" of hope and despair contained in psychoanalytic thinking. Only through integrating awareness of our vulnerability, our primitive states and our “darker sides,” it tells us, can we hope to avoid or mitigate calamity. Conversely, certainty in the objectivity and truth of one’s own viewpoint predisposes us to tragedy. The projective dynamics stimulated by self-idealization, in turn, enforcing cycles of denigration and destructiveness.

Mario Perini invites us to consider that although psychoanalytic approaches to addressing peacemaking can arouse omnipotent fantasies of transformation and righteousness, its authentic realization leads to more modest and grounded aspirations. Einstein and Freud echo this point in two cameo appearances recalling their famous exchange about whether psychoanalysis contained the seeds of world peace. Invoked by both Perini and Volkan, Freud answers Einstein’s hopeful question starkly: “violence is inevitable.” Efforts to replace brute force by the “might of an ideal” were doomed. Yet he also offers hope that some measure of our dark forces might be diverted into other channels: “whatever makes for cultural development is working also against war.”

Each scene in this Act is aimed at just such refinement by presenting ways in which psychoanalytic perspectives can help people attain deeper understanding of, and hence empathy for, the other. Shmuel Erlich looks beyond the typically pejorative accounts of terrorist mentality to appreciate how it is rooted in the struggle to find a meaningful self in today’s world through identification with an ideology. He puts the dynamic into a broader

cultural context by linking their struggles with widespread threats to selfhood that are connected with widespread social fragmentation and dislocation in today’s world. Vamik Volkan reviews many years of inspiring work with large scale conflict by focusing on the violent re-emergence of old (sometimes ancient) trauma in the fragile relationships between large groups. He offers an intriguing account of diplomats, psychoanalysts and policy makers working together to develop a deeper appreciation of the underlying emotional underpinnings of large, seemingly intractable, conflict situations.

Act II considers several financial crises, where the myth of rationality returns in new guises. Siren songs of vast wealth have consistently clouded awareness of the toxic and corrosive processes operating in modern organizations. It is difficult to imagine a sequence of events that more vividly demonstrates the dangers of over-reliance on the rationality of markets or economic actors than the most recent economic implosion.

Burkard Sievers explores primitive states of mind that underlay our economic crisis and describes how rationalistic approaches to curing it may, paradoxically, prolong the dreamy disconnection from reality that led to the crisis in the first place. As Sievers’ analysis would anticipate, the siren song breeds short memory. Even now controversial practices of the credit-bubble are returning to financial institutions, encouraging companies and consumers to assume crippling levels of debt by offering credit with few conditions and allowing repayment of debt with more debt.

Efforts to understand the context of the financial crisis inevitably raises questions about the capacity of our organizations to contain anxiety. Practitioners of psychodynamic consulting often encounter images of rational managers and rational management practice. In spite of rigorous methods and quantitative models that guide decision making, the workplace is profoundly shaped by emotional reality. Howard Schwartz describes the downward spiral of General Motors in terms of unconscious self-idealization through which it lost touch with reality; a prophetic article that was written well ahead of GM’s final collapse into bankruptcy. Mark Stein introduces a different perspective on psychoanalytic understanding of organizations. Considering the impact of Oedipal dynamics on Enron’s leaders, he contributes an invaluable new dimension of understanding of the largest corporate failure in history to that point.

Act II underscores how organizations and communities, like individuals, develop defensive routines and patterns in order to manage frightening emotion. These patterns can undermine

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3 Financial Times.com *Fears grow about overheated US debt market*, December 1 2009
the capacity for adaptation and change. As the nine scenes so vividly illustrate, the success and viability of our social institutions is deeply connected to the methods used to contain the deep, and often painful, anxieties that are stimulated in the workplace.

As our play nears conclusion the focus narrows to spotlight the leader. Act III explores the meaning of leadership and how leaders are used to contain and symbolize the shared hopes and fears of community life. Building on Freud’s original insights about how group life is shaped through identification between leader and follower, Susan Long reviews various images of leadership that have emerged from psychoanalytic thinkers.

The psychological space between leader and follower is saturated with symbolic meaning and deep emotional currents. Wesley Carr, who was at the center of the unfolding drama of Princess Diana’s death, provides a moving description of how shared images of the “institution in the mind” functioned to link people to one another around shared purposes. His reflections on the event demonstrate that the unconscious negotiation of shared reality often occurs through the collective meaning conferred upon leaders.

The final scene brings us up to the current moment of Barack Obama’s leadership and asks what it augurs for the future. Larry Gould discusses the interplay of psychological dynamics underlying the behavior of leaders, cross-currents that arise from oscillation between differing states of mind. In contrast to the massive idealization and colossal expectation that propelled his ascendency, the reality of Obama’s leadership is the focus of Gould’s presentation. It serves as a reminder of the inevitable fallibility of leaders, the consequences of human vulnerability in the exercise of authority, and the need for followers and leaders alike to recognize their common humanity rather than revert to primitive expectations and embittered disappointment.

Psychoanalytic thought contains the insight that we participate, often unknowingly, in creating our own misfortune. Clinging to the myth of rationality, and thus enforcing denial of the unconscious, irrational strata of human life, sets the stage for the often catastrophic events considered in this play and in countless other situations as well. Our authors have shown that denial of irrationality is not only an effort to escape suffering, but when played out in social and political life it also becomes a source of suffering and oppression.

I conclude by turning to how this volume itself serves as a prologue -- how past and present, as presented by our authors, is also prologue to the future. The challenges of managing emotional states in social institutions are great; vastly more so with accelerating rates of social, organizational and economic change. The authors underscore the importance of being able to
think about, and integrate an understanding of, unconscious and irrational forces into our policies and decisions. Although there seems to be a widespread yearning for meaningful work and relationships, there are worrisome signs that the capacity to symbolize, to reflect, to analyze and to interpret experience is diminishing in the cultural sphere. How we ultimately relate to the darker sides of experience will play a major role in the extent to which our futures will rhythm with the past.

Now, it is time for the play. The stage is set for the drama to begin. A solitary dark beam illuminates it...