

Waking Up to A New Future

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The Beginning of The 21st Century

In a recent essay, Philip Bobbit¹ claimed that just as the 20th century began with World War I the shooting of Prince Ferdinand in Sarajevo, the 21st century has begun with the cruel events of September 11.²

While there have many recent challenges to the nation state – the evolution of human rights, the emergence of transnational corporations, environmental problems that can only be solved through global agencies and action, to mention a few – it is the rise of the virtual nation that represents perhaps the biggest challenge. Al-Qaeda (not to mention global multinational corporations) is the first, but there will be many more.

Bobbit's solution is the development of a stronger state, within the bounds of today's nation-states. Only strong states can challenge the virtual outlaws. But does Bobbit's solution go far enough? I don't think so. Rather, the argument I make is that the challenges of globalisation cannot be met by backward steps downward to the nation, but by an evolutionary jump to the world state or at the very least strong global governance.

What this world state should or will look like, becomes the crucial question for this century. Will we be beholden to it, ready to sacrifice our lives for it, or are there other ways to organize our identity, are other myths at play?

In the western mythos two archetypes are always at play. One is the land of Cockaigne, fruit and leisure for all. It is a pastoral vision, pre-modern, listening and sharing are central – humans live with nature. The other

is the Land of Arcadia, more complex, living off nature, every improving. In the first, communication and relationship solve our problems. In the latter it is technology. These two images wrestle with each other. The USA has been the exemplar of the latter. But the former does not disappear, it is the alter ego, ever in the wings, inspiring the 60s flower children, inspiring green activists, and now expressed through Oprah and the cultural creatives.³ Which one will dominate is another of this century's big questions.

But there are two other myths as central as Cockaigne and Arcadia. The third myth is that of the apocalypse, the end of the world. Humankind has sinned, fallen away from the true path, and must now suffer. Recent comments on New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina by Christian extremists in the USA illustrate this.

The fourth myth is that of modernity, or realism, indeed, it is the non-myth, the truth before our eyes, the reality by which all other histories and futures are judged. It is real power – economic and political - that defines the present and future. But strangely, it is in the language of realism that the utopian seeds of global government are forming. To stop the outlaws, extra territoriality is required. To deal with the real problems, more than a list of policies is needed. Other worldviews must be engaged with.

Moving to a world governance system, means that the national hegemony must accede some of its sovereign powers to a global governance regime. Just as the colonists united to defeat England, now the entire planet must unite. Much can be gained from the experiments of the colonists. First the federal system of

JOURNAL OF FUTURES STUDIES

checks and balances and layered governance is insurance against the return of the monarch. Second, the innovative energies of the Americans and third, the alter ego of the West, the feminist movement, silicon valley, the new age movement, the cultural creatives, to mention a few – can now become global resources.

But this does not mean that American arrogance, the belief that it alone is right, and that others do not matter or are somehow lesser, must remain unchanged. Every historical hegemon becomes blinded to its own arrogance. They insist since they have succeeded, others must be less, forgetting that at times success can also be the final rung on the ladder of failure. Moreover, the roads used for expansion are also the same avenues that the other uses to enter the imperium. England "languaged" the world through English and now the natives return to the Mother, transforming England. It is worth noting that in the UK, Indian restaurants employ more people than coal mining, ship building and steel manufacturing together.⁴ And, remembering Rome, the question is who are the barbarians? Will they succeed? Can reducing civil rights; increasing budgets for security and arms be the answer? Of course not. The answer is to become even more global, but authentically global, allowing real communication, a conversation of civilizations (Cockaigne) and remaining focused on the variables that have allowed technological innovation (Arcadia).

For this one must learn to listen. This is something that many adults refuse to do. But when they don't the children scream even louder and louder, using more pathological tools. This means thinking like others, understanding their concerns. It does not mean losing sight of one's foundational values – gender equality, human rights, for example – but expanding them. Cultural relativism is not an excuse for

abusing human and nature rights.

In one workshop in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, when 150 Muslim leaders were asked their preferred futures, they responded in ways that would make a western Green happy. Gender partnership, economic alternatives to capitalism, self-reliant electronically linked communities, ecological sustainability and a global governance system were their key issues.⁵

And while the world has changed in the past decade (toward the security-conspiracy discourse), there is a lot to build on. Indeed, Riaz Hassan argues that it was the move to spirituality amongst Muslim groups that marginalized Al-Qaeda and others.⁶

While we have been able to watch the transformation of England to the point where the foreign minister is willing to declare curry as the national dish, the transformation of the US is still far from complete.

The first steps have already been taken. Minority majority states are emerging in the form of multicultural cities such as Sacramento. However, further evolution has not occurred. This is for two reasons. One is that Other cultures insist on their authentic rights that solidify culture, instead of globalizing, universalising it. This is the immigrant culture using religion as an intellectual weapon, as defensive text. Instead of engaging with other cultures (the host and other minority cultures), imagined more rigid pasts are evoked. The majority culture reacts similarly, imagining an earlier purity.

The way out is not the imagined past but a move to a spiral future, remembering history but creating alternative futures. What is needed is an evolutionary jump.

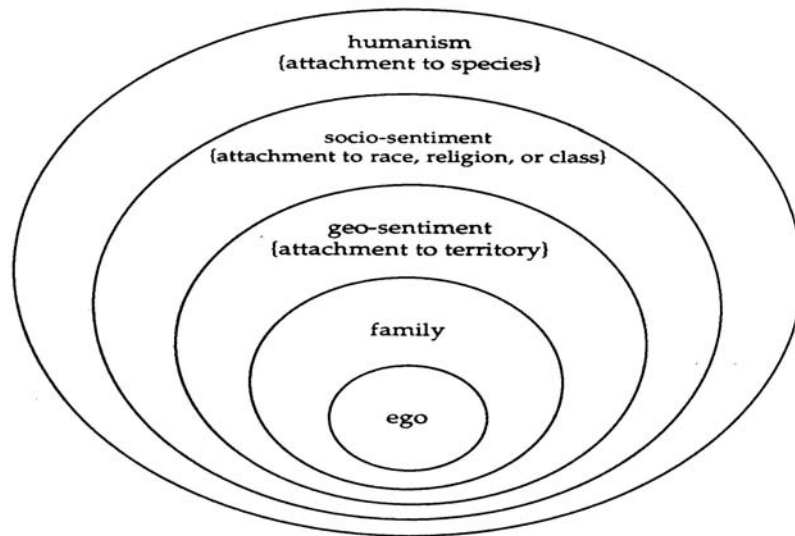
This is moving from ego to family to national to religious to social to human sentiment. And finally to a neo-humanist sentiment. This is expanding our circle of compassion to include more and more of others.⁷

WAKING UP TO A NEW FUTURE

Sarkar's Neo-Humanism **The Liberation of Intellect**

neo-humanism

(love and respect for all beings, animate and inanimate, in the universe)



Here the ownership and imagination of territory is not just physical but as well goes beyond religious (the Caliphate); social (race – the 1000 year Reich, the clash of civilizations) and ultimately it is species based – the Gaian view.

Neo-humanism imagines a new ethos in which we become lighter, our identities far more fluid, opening up to our full humanity, not resting in religion, nation or race.

But it is not neo-humanism that is emerging as the new paradigm rather it is uni-culturalism that is on the rise. Uni-culturalism has come back with such a vengeance that there are even calls to electronically tag the suspicious. Multiculturalism is forgotten, some say even killed. Is a neo-humanism, a transculturalism possible?

Interlude

Writing this piece causes fear. As I open my

notebook, I see the passenger next to my look in alarm as she sees me write the words above. What I am doing writing about Al-Qaeda. I see her fear and save the document. I read the current issue of Time and hear of Muslims in America having this eerie feeling of being watched. At Singapore airport, I say goodbye to my family. The airline staff asks me with a bit of nervousness why they are not going with me – is he a? – they think. I stay calm telling them that my wife and children are going to London and I to Taiwan. They breathe easier.

What Can Transform?

The question continues to haunt. What will transform the USA? Terror did nothing but wake up the sleeping giant. Hurricane Katrina has been reduced to a managerial disaster preparation issue. America's globalisation is being quickly nationalized; just as with the Yugoslavs who in the face of trauma quickly

JOURNAL OF FUTURES STUDIES

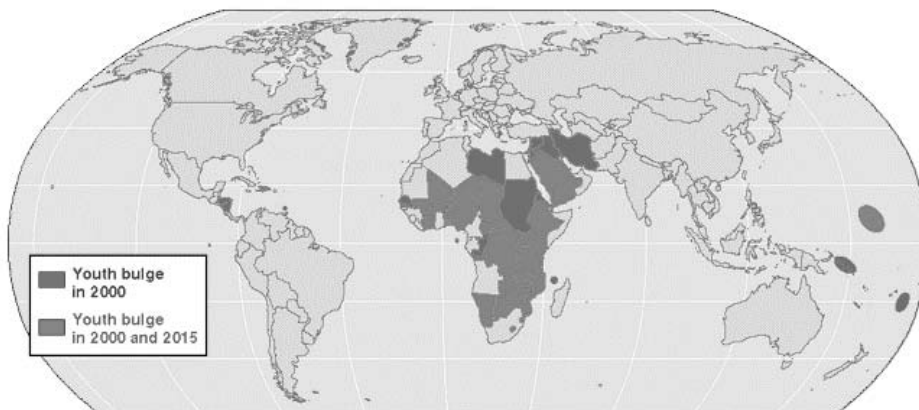
became Serbs. Americans have in the past few years forgotten their alter ego. Fear brought out first the animal jungle self and then the super-ego, the right to fight till the death. The issue of world imbalance and the injustices the USA and others are responsible for has, quickly disappeared. In Asia also, the evil was too easy to find in Bin Laden and others. Their own despotic states, the need to universalise tradition, to spiritualise, to globalise are lost in a blaze of conspiracy theory. There is collateral damage everywhere.

Why, then, be hopeful of a world government, of expanding shared identities instead of heightened differences? Why hope, not for the globalization of technology but the emergence

of Gaia Tech - technology for the earth, technology developed in the partnership model (outside of corporatist science)?

I am hopeful because the other scenarios are too terrible to think about. "Cowboy Jihad" is the likely future – endless hot and cold wars, fought with new types of technology, from air-planes to biological to nuclear and later gene wars. Each threatening not just the planet but what it means to be human, staining our evolution. With a youth age boom predicted in Saudi Arabia in the next 10-20 years and with the end of oil in sight, the image of young, angry, unemployed Muslim men with no direction only a desire for self-sacrifice, there will be no "business as usual"⁸

Countries With Youth Bulges in 2000 and 2015^a



Latin America

Dominican Republic
Grenada
Haiti
Honduras
Nicaragua

Sub-Saharan Africa

Benin
Botswana
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Central African Republic
Chad
Comoros
Congo, Democratic
Republic of the
Congo, Republic of
Cote d'Ivoire
Eritrea
Ethiopia
Kenya
Lesotho^c
Malawi

Mali
Mozambique
Namibia
Niger
Nigeria
Rwanda
Sao Tome and
Principe
Senegal
Sudan
Swaziland
Tanzania
Togo
Uganda
Zambia
Zimbabwe

Middle East

Gaza Strip
Jordan
Lebanon
Libya
Iran
Iraq
Saudi Arabia^b
Syria
West Bank
Yemen

Asia/Pacific

Marshall Islands
Solomon Islands
Tonga

^aA country is considered to have a youth bulge if the ratio of the population aged 15 to 29 to the population aged 30 to 54 exceeds 1.27.

^bSaudi citizens only; does not include the large number of guest workers.

^cLesotho did not have a youth bulge in 2000.

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WAKING UP TO A NEW FUTURE

Nevertheless "Back to normal" is the hoped for scenario in the West and by nation-states everywhere. Back to the middle class doing ok, the rich doing very well, and well, to hell with the poor. Nothing needs to change and terrorists are just loonies – the Islamic KKK.

There are other competing accounts. Along with the psychological (Muslim madness) is the religious - that the terrorists are demonic forces, sub-humans. There is also the political. This is the new wave of fascism. First the West defeated German Nazism and Italian Fascism. Once these bit the dust then came communism. That too is disappearing into the fog. But the new enemy is Islamic fascism. It is authoritarian. Neither moderate Muslims nor alter-ego westerners can engage with this sort of extremism. While both groups dislike the night clubs of Bali - with drunken westerners, young girls and boys for sale, drugs everywhere – neither group would contemplate mass murder. Even Hare Krishna devotees - some of whom saw the carnage in Bali as Krishna seeking justice for the barbecuing of dead animals that is Australia's favourite past time - would never actually engage in such violence. Islamic extremism is authoritarian, not allowing other voices, using the dogma of history for its own purposes. And while Islam espouses against a priestly class, Islamic fascism creates the new priestly class – the cleric, the mullah, who can give the fatwa at will. But who listens?

Who Listens?

Hundreds of millions of unemployed third world youth listen. They have no jobs. Their governments are corrupt. The doors to the first world are closed. And when they do try to escape, in Australia, Ministers of Immigration like Philip Ruddock and Prime Minister John Howard dance with glee, using the Navy to bring them down. When even the Armed Forces cry for dignity, they remind the world: these refugees are queue jumpers! The number of these youths will grow and grow. 98% of everyone who will be born in the foreseeable future will not be Caucasian but Asian and African.⁹ From accounting for 50% of the world's

population in 1850 or so, Caucasians will account for less than 5% by 2150.¹⁰ They will age but the third world will stay relatively young. Thrown away by the best, cheated by their own governments, it is only the voices of the fascists that make sense – it is all America's fault or the Jews, or the... So the real issue is not religion per se but the failure of the world economy. With polluted cities, pillaging landlords, water shortages, where is hope? Which leader can imagine a new system - one that is inclusive, innovative and concerned for economic distribution. Clearly, no one in the West can – those at the seats of power cannot see through the eyes of the other. For the millions dying of starvation in Iraq there was not one tear. George Bush has not apologized to Iran for giving Iraq the means to make chemical weapons. Neither has he suggested that Donald Rumsfeld be tried for crimes against humanity. Of course not. But as long as the double standard continues, as long as the West cannot or will not find its moral voice, whether because they are loonies, or because of the rise of the new fascism or because of structural injustice, the waves of unrest will continue. We all change, or we are all go down.

Interlude

I am in a taxi cab in Melbourne. The driver from the Middle East says welcome brother. Our conversation turns to the world situation. "It is too bad Bin Laden does not have nuclear weapons," he says. "They would then understand." It is the story of humiliation. I can see it in his eyes. He is in Australia but he is not. Driven out from his homeland he has no dignity. A Chinese taxi driver, while not wishing for nuclearization, cannot stop condemning the USA. "It serves them right," he says. But there is one driver, from Pakistan, who could care less. "I just want to be happy and left alone," he says. And interestingly, he alone has been directly discriminated against. Fired from Woolworths for refusing to work even more hours than the normal immigration must work. After months of working week days and weekends, he complained and was given his marching papers. But

JOURNAL OF FUTURES STUDIES

this did not lead to him hating Aussie managers. There is agency. He knew his talents. He just wanted to be able to express them. And knew eventually he would.

Evolutionary Pathways

Gaia tech is our way out. All of us. Even if we carry different passports, or multiple passports, there is really no other place to go. Of course, ultimately the earth will have to become an outward expansionary spaceship, but in the meantime Mother Earth might be a better image.

There are choices of course, evolutionary ones. We can stay on the path of USA hegemony – neo-liberalism, western values, with some minor dialogue when things get too difficult. This is the divided world – eventually leading to the "Big Dog, High Gate" scenario, not with real dogs but sensory telemetry and rfid technology (google for the real world, knowing where anyone and anything is).

Or, we can go the Caliphate route, that is, create a religious empire, an Islamic global empire. The rights of women would decrease dramatically, as would technological innovation since it is the past that is evoked. Of course, it need not be Islamic. Jerry Falwell or India's BJP have similar visions – a time of purity, in the past, when patriarchs ran the world, and children were obedient. Or, we could destroy ourselves.¹¹

I wish for none of these alternatives. Gaia tech is my preferred future, and I believe the preferred of many on this tiny, fragile planet.

There is a lot to do if we want to move towards this expanding image. I see three areas of necessary transformation.

First to engage in the evolutionary struggle to become neo-humanist. To do so, we have to let go of identities we have spent hundreds of years earning. These are identities that tend to give us our reason to believe. These are the identities that give us community, however, pathological. Sports Illustrated writer Michael Silver finds the beauty of America through the patriotism of Football. The agony of 9/11 is

erased partly through the redemption gained from warrior struggle. Yet, while in the short run patriotism eases the pain, as each nation follows its own patriotism, collectively we are ruined. Instead of facing individual aloneness by challenging our addition to ethnicity, religion and national territory, we feast on the symbols of isms.

It is these isms that prevent us collectively to jump to the next level of human evolution. Individual we may transform but just as one cannot have social equity in a sea of capitalism, one cannot have neo-humanistic individuals in an ocean of national and religious patriots. Thus, even as individuals become more neo-humanist, loosening the binds of geographical sentiment, the structures and incentives that exist reinforce nationalism. More is needed.

Ibn Khaldun, the 14th century philosopher, wrote that to retain power, *asabiya*, or the sinews that bind, unity is required.¹² The cheapest unity is gained through the creation of enemies, real or imagined. The deepest unity is what the planet calls on us today for – a unity that deals with our very real strategic problems. On the grand challenges facing us – water, energy, climate, safety, dignity, to mention a few.

Thus, we need a unity based on our common humanity.

However, and this is the second factor, this does not mean forgetting injustices, that some are more equal than others, but focusing on fairness. This means Equal access, equal opportunity within a framework of rights for humans, plants and animals. Fairness also means a world criminal court. Of course, over time this means moving more and more to a non-violent culture, including our views towards animals. But step by step. Thus, we need to authentically address global imbalances. This means neither believing someone is poor because they are lazy nor believing they are poor because some one else is rich. There is agency and there is structure. This means seeing life from a paradoxical view, holding multiple positions at once, seeing contradictions, indeed, moving from the flat land of the obvious to depth.

WAKING UP TO A NEW FUTURE

Depth

Depth comes understanding the many levels of reality. The fundamentalist exists at the worldview level – the Big Picture – and since cannot see the level of social science causes, moves into conspiracy land. The empiricist western leader lives in flat land, wanting immediate solutions, outcomes – he cannot see history, culture, the weight of the past, and the misery of history. And when he does, he slips into good versus evil talk, or rational versus irrational. The academic can see the social, economic and technological factors that explain events like terrorism, but she or he cannot understand the pain that every day people feel, and live in. She or he understands the system but does not live it, and thus cannot understand the deeper archetypes at play here. The visionary can see the play of factors, of humanity dying to break out of its straitjacket, searching for a new metaphor or a new story, but she or he too rarely has the capacity to change the litany, our day-to-day turmoil. Thus, a depth view means holding multiple positions, multiple factors, and not being overly swayed by any of them.

For example, the flat land view is that the Palestinian suicide bomber is evil or deranged. As we move to the systemic we understand it is the day-to-day brutality against Palestinians (their right to movement curtailed, for example) that creates injustice. The lack of sovereignty, their urges as a people, lack of jobs. At a deeper worldview level, it is the vision of paradise, of a particular jihadist reading of Islam that creates the bomber. On the Israeli side, it is the fear of annihilation, the lack of security and the sense of being a chosen people. At the deepest level is the issue of trauma, the Jewish trauma from the Holocaust and the Palestinian trauma resulting from not having a homeland. Stopping suicide bombing must occur at many levels – the individual psychological; the systemic (Palestinian statehood); the worldview (challenging the dogmas in right wing Islam and Judaism) and the myth level (creating a new story of what it means to be Israeli or Palestinian).

Along with transformed identity and a fairer society is a vision of the future. It is this vision that can pull us, give us hope, and move us from the present. To create this vision is of course a new type of leadership. This is the moral lived spirituality as developed by the activist and philosopher, PR. Sarkar. He wrote of a new type of leadership: serving others, courageous, innovative, and intellectually sharp – a new type of person: in Sanskrit, the *sadvipra*.¹³

"These *sadvipras* will work for the good of all countries, for the all-around emancipation of all humanity. The downtrodden humanity... is looking up to the eastern horizon, awaiting the *sadvipras*' advent with earnest zeal and eagerness. Let the cimmerian darkness of the interlunar night disappear. Let the human being of the new day of the new sunrise wake up in the world."

Even while living the poverty of Calcutta and jailed by the government of Indira Gandhi, Sarkar was confident that humanity would make the evolutionary jump and reflect upon itself, that we would successfully create a world governance system based on Gaia tech – gender partnership, balanced between spirituality and material advancement, a concern for our long term ecological sustainability.

And if we don't? what are the alternatives? Another few hundreds years of the nation-state, jungle capitalism, racial/religious/ national identity? A savage empire (of the Islamic caliphate or the American)? Or is it business as usual, with developments in nano-tech, artificial intelligence, genetics, aging, globalisation¹⁴ (including humanity reflective of its evolution), and the mind-body-spirit meditation revolution, imagining a world where nothing changes, becomes harder and harder to maintain?

Let's envision an alternative world. And step by step create it.

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JOURNAL OF FUTURES STUDIES

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Notes

1. Philip Bobbitt, "Great Ready for the Next Long War," *Time* (9 September 2002), 74-75.
2. Certainly 1990 makes more sense – the fall of communism and the rise of the Digital era.
3. www.culturalcreatives.org
4. Local Government Association 2000. www.lga.gov.uk
5. Sohail Inayatullah, "Leaders envision the future of the Islamic Ummah," *World Futures Studies Federation Bulletin* (July 1996), Coverpage.. See, Sohail Inayatullah, "Futures Visions of Southeast Asia: Some Early Warning Signals," *Futures* (Vol. 27, No. 6, July/August, 1995), 681-688;
6. See Hasan's *Faithlines: Muslim Conceptions of Islam and Society*. Oxford University Press, 2002.
7. P.R. Sarkar, *Neo-Humanism- the Liberation of the Intellect*. Calcutta, Ananda Marga Publications, 1981.
8. http://www.cia.gov/nic/NIC_globaltrend2015.html#link7
9. Sally Neal, *Social Trends: Implications and Opportunities*. Queensland Government, Department of Primary Industries. www.dpi.qld.gov.au/business/Welcome.html.
10. <http://www.lifeissues.org/international/v9n5.html>
11. See Margaret Atwood's *the Handmaid's Tale* for this scenario, and Oryx and Crake for brilliant breakdown. Comments from Pat Kelly. 279/2005. P.kelly@qut.edu.au
12. For more on Khaldun, see Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Trans. Franz Rosenthal. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1967.
13. See Sohail Inayatullah, *Understanding Sarkar*. Leiden, Brill, 2002.
14. Michio Kaku, *Visions: How Science Will Revolutionize the 21st Century and Beyond*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998.