

Understanding Our Moment in History

William Van Dusen Wishard
WorldTrends Research, U.S.A.

Nukes in North Korea. Emerging global fundamentalism. Artificial life creating its own civilization. A global AIDS epidemic. Continuing Arab-Israeli chaos. Endangered life forms. India and Pakistan—a nuclear shoot-out? An electronic "Global Brain." The end of the Homo sapiens epoch. Jihad versus McWorld.

Is it possible to step back from the complex issues that dominate the news, and understand the meaning of our moment in history? We must try. For it is increasingly clear we are not just facing a few critical problems here and there. We appear to be at some major junction in human affairs. Part of discerning how best to go forward lies in comprehending the significance of our particular historic moment.

Two people provide helpful perspective.

In 1954, only nine years after the greatest military triumph in human history, Adlai Stevenson asked in a speech at Columbia University, "Are America's problems but surface symptoms of something even deeper, of a moral and human crisis in the Western world which might even be compared to the fourth, fifth and sixth-century crisis where the Roman Empire was transformed into feudalism and primitive Christianity? Are Americans," Stevenson queried, "passing through one of the great crises of history when man must make another mighty choice?"

Three years later, Peter Drucker noted, "No one born after the turn of the century has ever known anything but a world uprooting its foundations, overturning its values and toppling its idols."

America did not evaluate these assessments when they were offered. But it becomes increasingly clear that it is only within the context provided by such reflections that we can fully comprehend what is happening to America and the world.

Three Transforming Trends

At least three trends are at the heart of the transformation suggested by Stevenson and Drucker.

First trend: For the first time in human history, the world is forging an awareness of our existence as a single entity. Nations are incorporating the planetary dimensions of life into the fabric of our economics, politics, culture and international relations. The

shorthand for this is "globalization."

Globalization is generally viewed as the worldwide integration of economic, financial and political factors. But it is far more than that; far more than non-western nations adopting free markets and democratic political systems. At its core, globalization means that the full scope of western ideas and modes of living are gradually seeping into the fabric of the world. At the same time, everyone on earth has to adjust to Western technology. No nation today can develop outside of the Western—dominated information technological context. As this happens, existing cultures, traditions, institutions and historic relationships are threatened. In some cases they are even disappearing. As Daniel Boorstin noted, "Rapidly developing countries are those that are most speedily obsolescing their inheritance." Thus, the essence of globalization is about identity; it goes to the very psychological foundations of a people.

Many believe that globalization, if pursued wisely and cooperatively, represents the world's best chance to enrich the lives of the greatest number of people. India, for example, is a prime example of how globalization can benefit a nation.

But we must recognize the contradictions inherent in globalization. On the one hand, it represents a shrinking of the globe that requires us to expand our worldview and sense of identity. In America, such an expansion of outlook happened once before. At the time of the American Revolution, most people found their identity in relation to the state they lived in, be it Georgia, Virginia or Massachusetts, but not with something called the United States. Even after independence, it was not until after the Civil War that a distinctly American identity emerged.

All the world is experiencing a similar process today. Easy travel, television, the computer and Internet—and especially seeing our globe from the perspective of the moon—have taken this expansion of awareness to a wholly new dimension. We are being forced to identify not simply with our nation, but also with other peoples, cultures and nations.

But there is a reaction. We feel a threat to an older and more habitual identity. This threat tends to force us backward to the familiar patterns of the past. In a time of upheaval and reorienta-

tion, we reach inward for the security of past certainties, both politically and spiritually. In the process, life-giving themes that once resonated in the soul of our ancestors get reduced to hollow clichés. It is happening across the world as exponential change overwhelms traditions and beliefs. This reaction undergirds the fundamentalist sentiment, whether in America, India, or the Middle East.

A certain element of this reaction to globalization was seen in part of America's response to 9/11. It was a visceral, gut reaction of "survival," which, as crisis frequently does, brought out the finest in countless Americans. The flag-waving of the year that followed 9/11, however, was not so much patriotism (love of country) as it was a reassertion of a fading identity, a reassurance that the old underpinnings are still there. This grasp for fading underpinnings is affecting all peoples as globalization intensifies the crisis of identity. The crying need is for political leaders who see beyond the immediate pressures of office, and have some sense of how to address this crisis.

Thus we are confronted not so much with a crisis *between* civilizations, as Samuel Huntington has suggested, but a crisis *within* civilizations. It is a monumental crisis of identity and worldview. None of the categories of the past—social status, religion, ethnicity, culture, heritage, region, nation in and of themselves alone—is an adequate context of thought and action in an era that is rapidly becoming global.

This is not simply an American challenge. To varying degrees, every nation on earth faces this test. While Iraq is a unique situation, this crisis within nations is part of what has been going on in the Middle East for decades. Everything about an emerging global civilization appears to threaten the identity, social fabric, and even the existence of Islam, which, we must remember, comprises a billion people. So some people lash out at what they see as the generator of globalization. And while we must deal forcefully with threats to our life and safety, we must do it with the realization that, in the broader context, and in our different ways, America and the peoples of the Middle East face the same challenge. That challenge is how to adapt past traditions and institutions to radically new conditions; in essence, how to adjust our worldview. Maintaining world order and stability under such uncertain conditions is the critical challenge, especially for America and Europe, and perhaps India. We are going to need what analyst Robert Kaplan calls a "global constabulary force" simply to maintain a modicum of order.

In the end, however, the test of globalization is a profoundly human, not technical, challenge. As Arnold Toynbee suggested long ago, "Technology can bring strangers physically face-to-face with one another in an

instant, but it may take generations for their minds, and centuries for their hearts, to grow together. Physical proximity," he concluded, "not accompanied by simultaneous mutual understanding and sympathy, is apt to produce antipathy, not affection, and consequently discord, not harmony." Therein lies the human challenge of globalization. Meeting this human challenge is critical, for we do not have generations, much less centuries, in which to adjust.

Second trend at the heart of the transformation: We have entered a new stage of technology development that is without precedent in the history of science and technology.

At least since Francis Bacon in the seventeenth century, we have viewed the purpose of science and technology as being to improve the human condition. As Bacon put it, the "true and lawful end of the sciences is that human *life* be enriched by new discoveries and powers."

Indeed it has. Take America. During the last century, the real GDP, in constant dollars, increased by \$48 trillion, much of this wealth built on the marvels of technology.

But along with technological wonders, uncertainties arise. (Let me interject here that five years ago I had a quadruple heart bypass using the most sophisticated medical technology. So I'm a believer!). The question today is whether we are creating certain technologies not to improve the human condition, but for purposes that appear to be to replace human meaning and significance altogether?

Ray Kurzweil predicts that by 2030, \$1,000 worth of computation will be a thousand times more powerful than the human brain. A decade after that, he says, you will be talking to someone who may happen to be of biological origin, but whose mental processes are a hybrid of their biological thinking process and the electronic process embedded in their brain—the two processes working intimately together. By 2050, a computer with the intelligence equivalent to the combined intelligence of everyone on earth—ten billion people—will cost only \$1,000. By that time, other technological visionaries tell us, supercomputers will go so fast that some "Omega Point" will be reached, and all life will be transformed beyond anything we can even begin to imagine today.

BT's Ian Pearson predicts that once the human genome project is completed, "a combination of man and computer search will be able to identify the genes needed to produce a people of any chosen characteristics." Someone, somewhere, Pearson says, "will produce an elite race of people, smart, agile and disease resistant." Pearson calls such an optimized human "Homo Optimus."

Thus arrives what some scientific intellectuals call the "Post-human Age." This post-human era emerges

from disparate activities. Kevin Kelly says the "realm of the born—all that is nature—and the realm of the made—all that is humanly constructed—are becoming one." Sherry Turkel sees the "reconfiguration of machines as psychological objects and the reconfiguration of people as living machines." James Hughes sees the "right to a custom made child" as merely the "natural extension of our current discourse of productive rights." Hughes contends that women "should be allowed the right to choose the characteristics [of their child] from a catalog." Perhaps Jaron Lanier best assesses what is happening when he says, "Medical science, neuroscience, computer science, genetics, biology—separately and together, seem to be on the verge of abandoning the human realm altogether... it grows harder to imagine human beings remaining at the center of the process of science. Instead, science appears to be in charge of its own process, probing and changing people in order to further its own course, independent of human agency."

Gregory Stock carries Lanier's thought to its ultimate conclusion. Stock sees a time soon emerging "when humans no longer exist... Progressive self-transformation could change our descendants into something sufficiently different from our present selves to not be human in the sense we use the term now."

Adds Kurzweil, "When machines are derived from human intelligence but are a million times more capable, there won't be a clear distinction between human and machine intelligence - there's going to be a merger."

Hans Moravec echoes this prospect. "I find it impossible," he says, "to believe it makes sense to continue, as human beings, in our exact same form... The immensities of cyberspace will be teeming with very unhuman disembodied superminds, engaged in affairs of the future that are to human concerns as ours are to bacteria."

Seen in its broadest perspective, what is being proposed here is nothing less than the cancellation of the five thousand-year quest to create a moral order for human existence; and the self-destruction of humanity under the guise of something some people say is "evolution." It will not materialize in the next decade, but this is what is being developed for our grandchildren. And much of it proceeds without any public discussion or knowledge, to say nothing of consent.

Ray Kurzweil argues that because their intelligent machines are produced by humans, and humans are the product of natural evolution, intelligent machines will also be the product of evolution.

How are we to think about such a prospect? Personally, I believe these scientists mistaken in their belief that what they are predicting is part of natural evolution. Natural evolution over the eons was not underwritten by the prospect of commercial profit or military

application, as is the research of those now suggesting the merger of man and machine. Nor is it clear that just because humans create some technology, that technology is a result of evolution. Humans have created technology that could destroy the planet, which is hardly evolution. Planet Earth will presumably come to an end some day, but that will be within Nature's larger evolutionary process for the universe itself.

What the advocates of a post-human age seem to leave out is the entire range of human emotions and motivations. They appear oblivious to their own potential for hubris and ego-inflation. The *Washington Post* offers an example. The *Post* quotes Microsoft researcher Steven Shafer, formerly a professor at Carnegie Mellon University, as saying that while at Carnegie Mellon, he always felt, "teaching steals from research time." At Microsoft, however, Shafer seems happier. "To me," he confides, "this corporation is my power tool. It's the tool I wield to allow my ideas to shape the world." *My power tool*—a classic example of the inflated power drive, or what the great theoretical physicist, Freeman Dyson, described as the "technical arrogance that overcomes people when they see what they can do with their minds."

What we appear to be experiencing is Lord Acton's well-known political maxim applied to the scientific world: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." And when we are talking about redesigning human beings, we are clearly talking about absolute power.

Contemporary scientists and technologists talk of "progress." But their "progress" is totally in terms of adapting to the "inevitability" of more powerful technology. There is no discussion of progress in terms of human purpose and needs, or of the meaning of being a human being in an age of total technological capability. And certainly no talk of the seventy percent of humanity who do not have enough electricity to turn on a light, let alone run a computer. Indeed, discussion of the effect of the technological imperative on moral, social or psychic progress is blaringly absent, except perhaps for George Gilder's utopianism. For others, the height of progress is to augment human attributes and transfer them to silicon or its successor.

So we have come to dismiss the counsel of the scientific father of our age. Wrote Einstein, "Concern for man himself and his fate must form the chief interest of all technical endeavors." His contemporary, Jacob Bronowski, shared his view: "It is not the business of science to inherit the earth, but to inherit the moral imagination, what we are as ethical creatures; because without that, man and beliefs and science will perish together." Thus, Bronowski concluded, we "have to cure ourselves

of the itch for absolute knowledge and power."

In the long sweep of time, it appears we have created a scientific culture that is an immense complex of technique and specialization without the guiding moral framework to which Einstein and Bronowski referred. The highest standard is efficiency. The defining ethic is the pragmatist's dictum: "If it can be done, it will be done." It is as Kevin Kelly suggests, "We have become as gods, and we might as well get good at it." But we may be closer to being "good at it" than Kelly knows. Bernard Knox has a view of what it means to be a "god" with which Kelly might agree. In the Introduction to the Penguin Classic edition of the *Iliad*, Knox says: "To be a god is to be totally absorbed in the exercise of one's own power, the fulfillment of one's own nature, unchecked by any thought of others except as obstacles to be overcome; it is to be incapable of self-questioning or self-criticism. But there are human beings who are like this. Pre-eminent in their particular sphere of power, they impose their will on others with the confidence, the unquestioning certainty of their own right and worth that is characteristic of gods." Is this not an apt description of those who accelerate the pace of change for humanity while pursuing the "technological imperative" at whatever human cost?

As part of the "god" question, we have yet to give serious consideration to the issue Peter Drucker raised a half century ago: "The problem created by the breakthrough of scientific knowledge to the core of human existence is not political. It is spiritual and metaphysical. It poses the question: What is the meaning of knowledge and power? What is the meaning of human existence and of human spirit . . . Both knowledge and power, traditionally seen as ends in themselves, must now become means to a higher end of man. Both knowledge and power must be grounded in purpose—a purpose beyond the truth of knowledge and the glory of power."

Future generations depend on whether we are capable of understanding the significance of Drucker's questions, and answer them. As a human family, our very existence depends on whether we address such questions before embarking on "surpassing" *Homo sapiens* and introducing a "post-human" civilization.

Will such a scenario as Kurzweil et al's project come to pass? Probably not. According to Bill Joy, Kurzweil himself puts humanity's chance of surviving the post-human technological scenarios at only, "a better than even chance of making it through."

A critical factor appears to be left out of all such discussion, and that is the whole realm of the unconscious domain. In recent decades, psychology has made great gains in understanding the conscious functioning of the brain. Less attention, however, has been given to the dynamics of the unconscious. While certain groundbreak-

ing work has been done, no one of the stature of Jung or Freud has been able to take their investigation of the unconscious to a significantly new level. Indeed, with notable exceptions, the implications of Jung's exploration into the collective unconscious—that foundational layer of unconsciousness common to all humanity—are blithely dismissed by some, and generally ignored by others in the scientific community. By definition we know far more about our conscious life than the unconscious, even though the salient features of consciousness remain unknown. Yet the unconscious may well determine far more of our collective activity than does the conscious.

One result, according to Richard Tamas, professor of psychology and philosophy at the California Institute of Integral Studies, and author of the highly acclaimed *The Passion of the Western Mind*, is that as scientists and technologists pursue their vision of technological transcendence, "unconscious factors are ignored. It's just these unconscious factors that will eventually disrupt the developmental trajectory so confidently predicted by technologists." Tamas then offers a thoughtful comment about the psychology behind the quest for technological transcendence: "Purveyors of such future scenarios are blissfully—and often manically—unaware of the deeper psychological impulses driving their quest, the shadow side of their aspirations, and the superficiality of their understanding of either evolution or consciousness. When one is unconscious of so much, one can be certain that one's plans will not go according to schedule. A deeper knowledge of history would tell them that, but historical myopia is a self-affirming attribute. This does not mean that their visions are harmless, only that they are distorted and, in that sense, likely to be highly inaccurate—though not without consequences."

Unconscious factors are already manifesting themselves. It was in the '50s that one of the greatest psychologists of the 20th century, C.G. Jung, first diagnosed the "pathological" character of Western art and culture. The Hannibal Lecter series is only the latest expression of this type. Thirty years ago, major corporations did not have to think much about mental health. Now, mental and emotional health is the fastest growing component of corporate health insurance programs. Corporations are providing employees with special rooms for relaxing, meditation, prayer, taking naps or listening to music.

Other indicators tell of further disturbances. The suicide rate among women has increased 200% in the past two decades. Teen suicide jumped 300% between 1960-90. Books are now written for eight year-old children advising them how to recognize the symptoms of stress, and to deal with it in their own lives. Character controlling drugs are taken like aspirin. Rage has assumed a culture-like place in the national fabric. The hard truth

is, our very mode of life has now become our principle cause of emotional and mental disorder.

Why is this happening? One clear reason is the overload of accelerated change that is swamping people. "Future shock" is taking its toll. Psychologists have long known that glutting people with more information and change than they can absorb and process clearly leads to various forms of emotional or mental instability.

Yet, according to Kurzweil, what we are experiencing is not simply the acceleration of the pace of change, but *the acceleration of acceleration* itself. In other words, change growing at an exponential rate. He estimates that the rate of technological change doubles every decade; that at today's rate of change, we'll experience one hundred calendar years of technological change in the next twenty-five years; and that due to the nature of exponential growth, the 21st century as a whole will experience almost one thousand times more technological change than did the 20th century.

Now, project forward the predicted million-fold increase in the speed of computers and the resulting ratcheting up of the pace of life over the next two or three decades, and one ends up asking, "How much more of this can the human metabolism take before individual psychological dysfunction creates collective social breakdown?" As it is, multiplying social pathologies already indicate that individually and collectively, psychological integrity is under extreme pressure. No society can progress and prosper once it drops below a certain level of emotional and psychological balance. Whether America is near that point is hard to say, but long ago as astute a person as Daniel Patrick Moynihan viewed the United States as exhibiting "the qualities of an individual going through a nervous breakdown."

It is not as if we have not been warned—including by some of the founders of futures studies—about the consequences of overreaching. In a prescient comment, Herman Kahn and Anthony Weiner concluded their 1967 magnum opus by observing that in the final decades of the twentieth century, "we shall have the technological and economic power to change the world radically, but probably not get very much ability to restrain our strivings, let alone understand or control the results of the changes we will be making." Alvin Toffler noted in 1970 that by "blindly stepping up the rate of change, the level of novelty, and the extent of choice, we are thoughtlessly tampering with the environmental preconditions of rationality." John McHale expressed a similar concern: "Like severe traumatic shock, the 'culture shock' or change may numb our perceptions of its full import and obscure the implications of its forward consequences." By 1977, Daniel Bell concluded that the "fundamental question is not one of the machine, but of [human] will."

Centuries before Kahn et al, however, everything in human myth and religion warned about trying to become as the gods. These myths and stories caution that there are limits to both human knowledge and endeavor; that to go beyond those limits is self-destructive. No one knows exactly where such limits might be. But if they do not include the effort to create some technical/human life form supposedly superior to human beings, if they do not include the capacity to genetically reconfigure human nature, if they do not include the attempt to introduce a "post-human" civilization, then it is hard to imagine where such limits would be drawn.

We must remember that myths are more than fanciful stories left over from the childhood of man. They emanate from the unconscious level of the psyche, that level which connects us to whatever transcendent wisdom may exist. It is a level at which, as quantum physics suggests, there may exist some relationship between the human psyche and external matter. Mind and matter may be but two dimensions of some larger reality, some fundamental pattern of life common to both that is operating outside the understanding of contemporary science. In other words, we may be fooling around with phenomena that are, in fact, beyond the ability of humans to comprehend. For the record of five thousand years of human experience suggests that at the heart of life is a great mystery that does not yield to rational interpretation. This eternal mystery induces a sense of wonder out of which all that humanity has of religion, art and science is born. The mystery is the giver of these gifts, and we only lose the gifts when we grasp at the mystery itself. Nature will not permit arrogant man to defy that mystery, that transcendent wisdom. In the end, Nature is going to win out.

Some people are already searching for the wisest way to approach such potential challenges as the new technologies present. Bill Joy, cofounder and former chief scientist of Sun Microsystems and described by the *Economist* magazine as "the Edison of the Internet," suggests in his celebrated *Wired* article that we have reached the point where we must "limit development of technologies that are too dangerous, by limiting our pursuit of certain kinds of knowledge." His concerns are based on the unknown potential of genetics, nanotechnology and robotics, driven by computers capable of infinite speeds, and the possible uncontrollable self-replication of these technologies. Joy acknowledges the pursuit of knowledge as one of the primary human goals since earliest times. But, he says, "If open access to, and unlimited development of, knowledge henceforth puts us all in clear danger of extinction, then common sense demands that we reexamine even these basic, long-held beliefs."

Perhaps it is fitting to conclude these comments on science and technology with some remarks Freeman

Dyson offered when honored by the Templeton Foundation. Dyson quoted Francis Bacon who remarked, "God forbid that we should give out a dream of our own imagination for a pattern of the world... The subtlety of nature is greater many times over than the subtlety of the [human] senses and understanding." Dyson ends with Bacon's own final words: "Humbly we pray that this mind may be steadfast in us, and that through these our hands, and the hands of others to whom thou shalt give the same spirit, thou wilt vouchsafe to endow the human family with new mercies." "Mercies," not powers.

Third trend at the heart of the transformation: A long-term spiritual/psychological reorientation. This reorientation is the basis for suggesting that what we are facing is not a crisis between civilizations, but within civilizations. This holds true for all civilizations today—for what once was called Western Civilization, for Islam, as well as for the Chinese and Hindu civilizations, albeit this crisis moves at a different pace in different parts of the world. In fact, what once was called a "civilization" is increasingly a less apt description of any particular peoples. For a civilization presumes a shared worldview, commonly accepted standards of conduct, a shared perception of values, and above all, a collective spiritual expression that represents life's highest meaning.

Such a condition certainly no longer exists in America. When we talk of an "American worldview," whose worldview are we talking about? Are we talking of the worldview of some forty-eight million fundamentalists who, according to *Time* magazine, believe the world will come to an end in their lifetime? Or the postmodernists who believe there is no reality; that life is but a social construct? Or Michael Brooks and others who see everyone eventually linked to an electronic consciousness and "Global Brain" via the Internet? Or the intellectual who believes rational intelligence is life's highest authority? Or those who assert we have reached the end of the *Homo sapiens* epoch? Or the traditional Christian who believes the chief end of man is to "Glorify God and enjoy Him forever"?

One could go on, but the point is clear. The crisis within civilizations is a spiritual and psychological crisis that, in America, has been building for at least the past century. We are now reaching some sort of critical moment.

Historically, all religions have been a collective, not an individual phenomenon. The *psychological* function of religion has been at least threefold: to validate a certain moral order within a given civilization; to offer myths that connect a civilization to life's transcendent dimension; and to link the individual's conscious life with its unconscious grounding.

How is the spiritual and psychological life of today's

America best gauged? By public opinion polls that tell us well over ninety percent of the American people say they believe in God? By how many people attend a place of worship? By the proliferation of over 1500 so-called religions in America, including some anomaly called "Catholic-Buddhists"? By bookstores' bulging sections on "spirituality"? That is one way to look at America's spiritual condition.

Another way is to examine America's culture and what it is telling us. Here we find a different story. This is important, because culture is to a nation what dreams are to an individual—an indication of what is going on in the inner life, in the unconscious realm, which is the crucible of consciousness. In this sense, the unconscious is the crucible of civilization.

An obvious crucial theme of American culture since the First World War has been the supposed "meaninglessness of life," a thought antithetical to any authentic religion. We see it in *The Great Gatsby* as Daisy says, "I'm pretty cynical about everything. I think everything's terrible anyhow. Everybody thinks so—the most advanced people. And I know . . . Sophisticated—God, I'm sophisticated!" This was written in 1925 as new technologies were creating new industries, and the stock market was booming. Daisy's lament was followed in the '50s by Holden Caulfield in *Catcher in the Rye*, and later by Rabbit Angstrom in John Updike's novels. Indeed, nothing could denote the alienation of twentieth-century American literature better than the name of Updike's main character, "Angstrom." As the poet Archibald MacLeish, a former Librarian of Congress and three-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize, described Western post-war art and philosophy, "life had been found out at last—life was absurd."

What does the creation and marketing of such cultural artifacts represent? The fact is, there *would not* be a market for the alienated and psychotic themes of America's movies, TV and literature if such themes were not resonating with something going on in us as a people. Culture is simply a mirror held up to a people's psychic life. Taken as a whole, Western art, literature and cinema have long revealed a profound reorientation taking place in the depths of the Western psyche. As F. Scott Fitzgerald's biographer, Andrew Le Vot, wrote about the meaning of *The Great Gatsby*, it is "not men who have abandoned God, but God who has deserted men in an uninhabitable, absurd material universe." In one sense, *The Great Gatsby* represents a turning point for America. Its publication and subsequent resonance in the American psyche signaled that while there are still millions of Christians in America, the historic religion of America and the West was no longer the informing dynamic in the soul of America's "creative minority" who give us our literature, theater, cinema, music, science and

education. At the same time, in Europe T.S. Eliot, Wassily Kandinski, W.B. Yeats and others were signaling the same message. The "falcon cannot hear the falconer," with the result that we are "hollow men."

Thus it is no surprise to learn that when thoughtful Muslims view the West, they see the de-Christianization that has taken place. They see the social and psychological crises that have accompanied secularization, modernization and the western worship of technology. And while we may say—as some do in Washington—that we must "change the psychology of the Middle East and bring them into the modern world," thoughtful Muslims are concerned that the Western model of modernization may ultimately mean the very extinction of Islam.

This contributes to what is a particularly relevant aspect of this worldwide spiritual/psychological reorientation—the increasing presence of fundamentalism, whether Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim or Shinto. It is worth considering this trend, as it is obviously a growing force in national politics and world affairs. It is also ever more clear that fundamentalism is only one of several expressions of a gathering global psychic epidemic—three other manifestations being the searing fury of terrorism, the projection of ancient archetypes fueling the Arab-Israeli madness, and the quest for technological transcendence discussed earlier. (Lest one question the existence of such a phenomenon as a "psychic epidemic," one need only remember the experience of the collective German psyche in response to Hitler during the 1930s.)

At least 60% of Americans believe the prophecies of the Book of Revelation will come true. Opinion polls tell us that thirty-six percent of the American fundamentalists who support Israel do so because they believe Israel must control all of Palestine before Christ will return. A well-known senator argued on the floor of the senate that Israel should maintain control of all of the Palestinian territories "because God said so. Look it up in the book of Genesis." The "Left Behind" series of books is a publishing phenomenon, having sold over forty million copies.

For Christian fundamentalists, the Book of Revelation is a focal point of reference. It spells out the "end times," the Apocalypse, and it is taken literally by millions of people. Herein lies perhaps the basic difference between fundamentalists and what might be termed traditional Christians. The latter take Revelation symbolically, as did St. Augustine, not literally. This difference between literalism and symbolism is at the core of the difference between fundamentalists and traditionalists, be they Christian, Muslim, Jewish or Hindu. All fundamentalisms tend to divide the world between insiders and outsiders, between true believers and unbelievers, the saved and the sinners, "us" and "them."

The implicit question raised by the Book of

Revelation is, what is meant by "end times"? Those who interpret Revelation literally believe it means the end of the world. As suggested earlier, at least forty-eight million Americans believe it will happen in their lifetime. But another interpretation might be that it means the end of the Christian eon. The Church fathers long ago prophesied the end of the Christian epoch, but no date was given as to when it would happen. The meaning of the Apocalypse may not be the end of the world, but the end of a particular way of interpreting transcendent reality, while a new spiritual dispensation emerges. It has happened several times before in history.

The word "apocalypse" comes from the Greek meaning "revelation, an uncovering of what has been hidden." According to the late depth psychologist Edward Edinger who wrote a book on the psychological meaning of Revelation, there are four features of the image of the Apocalypse: revelation, judgment, destruction and renewal. Revelation discloses new truth about life. Judgment assesses the state of contemporary conditions in light of this new truth. Destruction is the collapse of old forms that are no longer effective within the context of the new truth. Renewal is the recreation of civilization according to the requirements of the new truth. The Western psyche has focused on the destruction aspect of the Apocalypse, virtually ignoring the renewal that is to follow.

Against this background, from a *psychological* point of view, the story of the 20th century might be seen as the working out of these four features of the meaning of the Apocalypse. In all areas of life, humanity has gained more new truth about nature and the workings of the universe in the 20th century than in all previous history combined. Against the background of this new understanding of nature and the universe, we have judged the effectiveness of former beliefs, relationships and institutions. This assessment is at the heart of the spiritual search taking place in America today. It is the cause of our redefining the status of social relationships, or the role and authority of the nation-state. Then has come the destruction or collapse of old forms of *how* we have organized our affairs, forms that are no longer effective in light of the implementation of our *new* discoveries. This collapse is seen in our need to reinvent all our institutions, from education to new modes of self-government. And finally comes the birth of some new pattern of civilization based on the new truth or understanding. A harbinger of this new birth is seen in a greater openness and opportunity for the individual, whatever his or her background or social status. It is also seen in our expanding sense of identity as we learn more about other cultures and peoples.

Given this interpretation, it appears the Apocalypse

does not mean the physical end of the world. Rather, it suggests the end of a particular view of the meaning of human existence, while some new dispensation comes into fulfillment. For those with a literal rather than symbolic interpretation of Revelation, it is literally world shattering. As Edinger wrote, however, "Revelation lays out the final scenario of the end of the Christian eon, and describes symbolically the concluding events of the Judeo-Christian myth, the myth that has been the womb and metaphysical container of Western civilization."

This same process took place as the ancient gods of Rome gave way to Christianity. This is what Adlai Stevenson was referring to in the comment at the start of this essay. During the shift in the Roman world, the poet Lucretius wrote of the "aching hearts in every home, racked incessantly by pangs the mind was powerless to assuage." Sounds pretty much like today. This process took several centuries to work itself out after the Roman period. As Toynbee noted, the contemporary process has been under way at least since the eighteenth century. With the advent of instantaneous global information technologies, it has been vastly accelerated, for information technologies transmit not only information, but psychic states of mind as well.

To summarize what we have been discussing: (1) Globalization—possibly the most ambitious collective experiment in history; (2) a new stage of technology, the objective of which is to supplant human meaning and significance; and (3) a long-term psychological and spiritual reorientation. These are only three of the basic trends moving us between two historic epochs. It is because of the magnitude and significance of such trends that this essay argues that the crisis is not between civilizations, but within civilized life itself. *Thus the next three decades may be the most decisive thirty-year period in human history.*

How do we respond to such a situation? America is already responding in the most sweeping redefinition of life in its history. All our institutions are being redefined and restructured. Corporations are redefining their mission, structure and modus operandi. In education, countless new experiments are underway, from vouchers to charter schools to home schooling. The legal system is being assisted by the increasing use of alternative dispute resolution (ADR). Functions formerly executed by local governments are now undertaken by civic and charitable organizations. Numerous steps have been taken to redress the severe environmental imbalance we have created. More citizens are involved in efforts to help the elderly and those in poverty. In fact, Peter Drucker estimates that well over fifty percent of all adult Americans donate a portion of their time to non-profit social efforts.

Against the background of the three trends mentioned earlier, perhaps this is a modest start, but at least

it is a start. Clearly, there is another level of effort to move to. As Bill Joy suggests, such efforts must include a decision whether or not to continue research and development of technologies that could, in Joy's words, "bring the world to the edge of extinction." Obviously, such an examination must be done in a global context if it is to be valid.

But another question is, how are individuals to live in a world that is changing faster than our institutions can assimilate? How do we maintain anchorage and balance when we are in between two historic ages?

The starting point is understanding, simply to understand the underlying changes taking place in the world and in us as individuals. As it says in Proverbs, "With all thy getting, get understanding." This may sound a bit too simplistic, but there is a psychological reason the scriptures say this. The great scriptures of the world are not the expression of the rational intellect as it has evolved over the past five hundred years. Rather, they are the expression of the unconscious, more particularly the collective unconscious. So it is our link with the source of transcendent wisdom that is telling us to "get understanding." We must get it not simply on the intellectual level, but we must assimilate it so it becomes a part of us.

The reason for this is that there seems to be a transformative effect about absorbing understanding. Intellectual understanding does not change us deep inside. Assimilated understanding does. Unless our understanding aligns our approach to life with the needs of the times, it is of minimal ultimate value.

Possibly one place to start is with some of the subjects considered in this article—globalization, where technology is taking us, what is our culture telling us, and what is the meaning of the spiritual/psychological reorientation taking place. A further category could be added, which limited space has precluded this essay from discussing. That is the increasing separation of human life from most other manifestations of life, and the virtual war humans have waged against non-human life, be it the sea, the soil, the sky or other species. This essay has offered certain views on these topics, but others may come to different interpretations.

In summary, we live between two ages. There is a new epoch of human meaning struggling to take shape for all humankind. Through the chaos and the killing, through the heartache and inner emptiness, the birth of a heightened consciousness is fighting its way out of the womb into the light.

The womb that nurtures this New Time is nothing less than the human unconscious, especially the deepest strata that is the source of humanity's greatest potential. The key to unlocking this deeper realm is to know ourselves in a new and deeper way; to become aware of life's

opposites—the persona and the shadow, the good and evil, the loves and hatreds—that dwell within each of us, all of which constitute the totality of who we really are. The task is to strengthen the dialogue between consciousness and the limitless creative powers of the collective unconscious, wherein resides life's highest meaning.

Some eternal, infinite power is at work in each of us, as well as in the universe. This power is the source of renewal of all man's most vital and creative energies. With all our problems and possibilities, the future depends on how we—each in his or her own unique way—tap into that eternal renewing dynamic that dwells in the deepest reaches of the human soul.

Such is part of the meaning of our moment in history.

Correspondence:

1805 Wainwright Drive, Reston, VA 20190, U.S.A.
vwishard@worldnet.att.net

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