



Book Review

A Transformation Journey to Creative and Alternative Planetary Futures

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The author, Victor V. Motti is an active, articulate and widely respected voice in the futurist community all over the world. Just over 16 years ago this reviewer became familiar with him through his frequent and highly perceptive comments on the World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF) listserv; a principal forum for members of this well-established global futurist community. Eventually his brilliance and engagement with colleagues would come to be recognized by his peers at the WFSF leading to his assuming the directorship of that organization. Motti's experience in the WSFS, and its truly international community has provided him with deep understandings of the field that, along with his own personal intellectual journey, has led to an expanded sense of global consciousness that has now chronicled in this book.

Each of the book's seven chapters chronicles Motti's informed views on what is indeed an expansive journey into many of the essential philosophical and contemporary theoretical underpinnings found in foresight/futures studies. It's an excellent book for any futurist or futurist aspirant, and can serve as a useful introduction to the field as a course textbook. His analytical frameworks are especially useful in providing rigor and structure to what is too often perceived as a field that can drift excessively towards, fad, fashion, subjectivity and speculation. As a foresight/futures studies practitioner who has been informed by an eclectic group of scholars and professionals in the field, his analytical precision is welcomed.

Motti is a bona fide systems thinker with the ability to analyze an issue, and then synthesize, incorporating new perspectives that raise the level of understanding or at least set the table for further investigation. This value-added approach (literally bringing values into his essays such as embracing decentralized organization and "No Killing" advocacy) provides a springboard for cultivating critical thought among readers, again very useful in a classroom setting. The theme of transformation is woven throughout the chapters, providing a rich medium in which the reader can consider the innumerable possibilities for profound global change.

There are occasional references to some rather marginal sources that run beyond more likely findings. In the first paragraph of his second chapter's section on "Accelerated Evolution of the Future", he references the Framingham Heart Study that predicted women were to become shorter and stouter. In fact, it is nutritional changes that have come to increase physical stature significantly in both sexes quite independent of genetics. The case of North Korea and South Korea offers a perverse experimental design supporting evidence of nutrition's role. In famine-plagued North Korea, there has been no change in physical stature. The average South Korean female is now taller than the average North Korean male.

Motti's "accelerated evolution of the future" thesis swerves back onto firmer ground with the observation that evolution will be governed henceforth by culture rather than by nature.

In Table 2.3 (STEEP matrix collects a list of drivers and of barriers), the technological barriers cell, does not note the rise of two information ecosystems between China and essentially the rest of the world. When coupled with their blocking and suppressing Western analogs like Google in general and Gmail in particular, it is analogous to constructing an informational "Great Wall" that extends beyond the stark differences in writing systems (alphabetic-linear vs. ideographic-spatial). Thus two distinct information ecosystems have emerged that show

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little signs of reconciling. They have their own respective cultural attitudes that can clash as with the dispute over Chinese software and device manufacturer, Hwawei's 5G systems, which makes it both a significant social and technological barrier. This also highlights the squishy categorical boundary that exists between the social and technological.

The third chapter includes a fairly technical presentation of a forecasting method greatly influenced by the work of Nobel Prize winning behavioral economists Kahneman and Tversky. Motti should be lauded for including this useful decision-making template that underscores how irrational economic (and other) forecasting so often is. Working through the weighting and probability formulae he uses in this chapter is difficult for the non-quantitatively reader inclined to wade through. The slog would be greatly relieved by augmenting with Michael Lewis', *The Undoing Project* (2016), as a companion volume. The Lewis book is much more of a storyteller narrative that better clarifies how human irrationalities in decision-making such as the "halo effect" (aka "irrational exuberance) operates to amplify and extrapolate the faintest of trends to presumption and on to occasional disaster. Packaging this chapter with the Lewis work, itself not a large volume, would make for highly engaging discussion in a classroom or workshop setting.

Motti's fourth chapter, "Disconnecting Humanity from Killing" borrows heavily from the works of Glenn Paige, someone this reviewer is acquainted with as he was a faculty member at the University of Hawai'i Political Science Department during my studies there. Motti blends some of Paige's work with some forensic genetics, to suggest that human killing is not necessarily a determined fate. Motti's builds his non-killing argument on rather thin scaffolding and the issue can be better fortified beyond what the chapter can offer. The attempt to link genetic legacy to subsequent social structures and processes particularly in inherited behavior is an interesting area for research but is very much in its infancy. At this point it might best be to consider the words of genetic science pioneer, Dr. Ruth Hubbard, in declaring ". . . trait is not fate."

Chapter five, "The United Shift of Asia" reviews the prospects of Asia's rise. Motti regards Asia much along the lines of how the imperial powers of Western Europe regarded the "Orient". This reviewer regards a nation as a dialect with an army, and linguistic identity runs strong throughout that half of the world. The experiences of Japan and Korea being under the ancient cultural sway of China, yet firmly-to-militantly insistent on having no Chinese kinship. Japan shifted long ago from emulating China to embracing the trappings of Western fashion and technology, and, for a time, imperialism; yet has retained its unique cultural identity throughout. Koreans have resolutely asserted their unique national character despite division. Then there are the profoundly different cultures and political/economic systems of China and India. Again, this chapter is a useful point of departure for further discussion, but might be supplemented by, for instance, Fareed Zacharia's *The Post-American World 2.0* (2011) that might frame global shifts towards transformation.

Chapter 6 is a compact piece in a compact book touching primarily on the emerging field of applied neuroscience and how it might lead to new levels of consciousness. This is a pertinent and increasingly prominent area for exploration with neuroscience research broadening along many interdisciplinary lines including the role of genetics. Motti selectively touches on a few of those lines though once again, this fast moving field requires further elaboration with one possible useful augmentation being selections from *The American Journal of Bioethics – Neuroscience*. This suggested source is dynamically informed by issue debates arising from both the research and applications of neuroscience that futurists should include in their respective toolboxes.

Chapter 7 essentially works as an appeal for synthesizing empirical scientific findings with intuitive guidance within the futurist community. He strongly advocates coupling empirical knowledge with human imagination and creativity; a position generally aligned with that of the pioneers of human knowledge past and present. This attitude is found in the works of Albert Einstein and Motti's fellow engineer/social thinker Buckminster Fuller. While previously established as a virtue to cultivate in the advancement of humanity, it is worth reiterating among futurists as a key element in advancing foresight practice. Similarly the specialization vs. generalization dichotomy is rendered moot in futures thinking. The chapter concludes with a section titled, "Humble Self-Confidence" addressing that most difficult of preferred traits in applied futures, that being the ability to actually influence decision-makers charged with managing societies and ultimately the planet itself. As with other portions of the book it offers a point of departure for further exploration into the wider areas of leadership and relationship building for to effect preferred futures.

To conclude, this is a provocative book in the most positive sense of the word. It offers a fairly comprehensive journey to that least familiar but most open and likely of futures; the transformative.

References

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- Zakaria, F. (2011). *The post-American world: Release 2.0 (international edition)*. New York.

