

# Macrohistory and the Future

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This special issue of the Journal of Futures Studies is focused on Macrohistory and the future.

Macrohistory is the study of the grand patterns of change.<sup>1</sup> Macrohistorical analysis asks: what are the shapes of historical processes? Are they linear, meaning that the critical changes are irreversible and that evolution is progressive. Or are they cyclical, meaning that history is constituted by a rise and fall or expansion and contraction pattern, such that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Or is history spiral-like, with the shape of history folding back on itself: tradition is critically transformed with progress in some areas possible.

Along with basic patterns, are issues related to the pivotal variables that push history. Are these variables exogenous or endogenous or some version of both/and or neither. And: what stages of history do these pushes create, and how do new stages emerge from previous stages. Macrohistory is nomothetic (repeated cases, many units of analysis, with one variable) and diachronic (through time). Macrohistory is certainly not a humble enterprise. Indeed, Galtung writes that the macrohistorian is to the historian what Einstein is of the run-of-the-mill physicist.<sup>2</sup>

What macrohistory means to futures studies and futurists is the focus of this special issue.

For Futures Studies, macrohistory can be seen variously. 1. As enhancing our capacity to anticipate the future. Texts by macrohistorians give us glimpses of where to look for change, just as emerging issues analysis provides us with the details of change. 2. As enhancing scenarios. Macrohistorical patterns provide the rigor

of plausibility to fanciful scenarios. By understanding alternative theories of social change, the futurist has a better sense of whether to expect a cyclical downturn or a spiral transformation, for example. 3. As providing the Big Picture - the why and how and where and when of individual and collective change at inner and outer levels. 4. Macrohistory, by focusing on different theories of change, from different epistemes (ways of knowing) forces us out of our own tunnel visions of the future (and past). Macrohistory thus opens up the future even as it structures it.

Thus macrohistory should be seen as a foundational part of Futures Studies, as crucial as the Field's other pillars (anticipation, alternatives, transformation, and ways of knowing).<sup>3</sup>

As might be expected, articles in this issue do not take a uniform line. Tony Judge focuses on inner macrohistory. Philip Daffara applies macrohistory to city futures. Jim Dator and Yongseok Seo ponder the next stage of human evolution, seeing Korea as a potential leader in creating a new stage after the Information Age, what they meme as the Dream society. Jay Weinstein uses Sorokin's grand theory to propound an alternative form of globalization, that of coming to species consciousness. Walter Anderson examines the futures of Enlightenment, asking if "evolution is the macrohistory of all macrohistories."

Bill Halal, Anodea Judith and Jay Earley outline their own macrohistories. Each seeks to give us the tools and patterns to help resolve the current and coming planetary challenges.

The special issue closes with reports by Mayuree

Vathanakuljarus on technological foresight and Sally Fawkes et al on a Health Education Conference where Futures Studies was explicitly used in one of its streams. Jennifer Coote concludes with Futurewatch.

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### **Notes**

1. For more on this, see Sohail Inayatullah, *Understanding Sarkar: The Indian Episteme, Macrohistory and Transformative Knowledge*. Leiden, Brill, 2002.
2. Johan Galtung and Sohail Inayatullah, *Macrohistory and Macrohistorians*. Westport, Ct, Praeger, 1997, 8.
3. See, Sohail Inayatullah, "Teaching Futures Studies," *Journal of Futures Studies* (Vol. 7, No. 3, February 2003), 35-40.