

The World has Entered a New Zone of History: An Assessment of Global Trends

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My work is what's called "trend analysis," looking at the long-term technological, historical and psychological trends that are reshaping the world, and-to the extent one person can do it-put them in some understandable context.

As I've looked at global trends, I've asked myself this question: Is the world simply passing through what appears to be an extremely dangerous and difficult period of multiple crises, after which life will return to a more familiar normalcy? Or do these converging crises signal the end of the world, as we've known it, and the emergence of a totally new context of human existence?

The more I look at the events of the past two centuries, the more it appears clear that we're living through the most significant shift of orientation, of worldview, to take place at least since the Middle Ages gave way to the Renaissance. Others have compared the U.S. condition with what happened when the Greco-Roman gods lost their hold on the classical imagination, and, over centuries, a new spiritual dispensation emerged. Whatever the comparisons with the past, it seems clear the world has moved into a new zone of history.

Such thoughts are by no means original with me. In 1952, seven years after the greatest military triumph in history, Rollo May (1953), one of America's leading psychologists, wrote, "The chief problem of people in the middle decade of the 20th century is emptiness. Our middle of the twentieth century is more anxiety-ridden than any period since the breakdown of the Middle Ages. We live at one of those points in history when one way of living is in its death throes, and another is being born."

Two years later, Adlai Stevenson (1956) gave a talk at Columbia University in which he asked, "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 sixty-century crisis when 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?"

Peter Drucker's (1957) view at mid-century was that "no one born after the turn of the [20th] century has ever known anything but a world uprooting its foundations, overturning its values and toppling its idols."

And, of course, before these men, similar concerns about a changing worldview were offered by Thomas Hardy, Oswald Spengler, W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, James Truslow Adams, and Arnold Toynbee, to mention but a few.

So what I'm suggesting is not my thought alone. We stand on the shoulders of giants. These are not lightweight or insignificant personalities. They understood that the American and Western orientation was changing at a foundational level, a psychological and spiritual level-an understanding that seems to elude today's would-be leaders.

And so in the following comments, I want to consider what I see as some of the core elements of this shift, and their possible consequences.

Globalization

When we think of globalization, we immediately think of the worldwide integration of economic and financial factors-the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and jobs moving from one part of the world to another part.

But what really is globalization? Simply put, it's the *shrinkage of the world*. Think YouTube. Think Internet. For the first time in history, one person, can write or film something that everyone in the world can see, if they have access to a computer. One person reaching millions, even billions. World-famous anthropologist Philip Tobias (1999) says this capacity-the computer and Internet-is the most significant social development since the invention of writing over five thousand years ago. It's a *totally new form of communication*. Throughout history, radically new forms of communication have always created far-reaching changes within the societies in which they occurred.

As the world shrinks, *everything is becoming more intermeshed*-economics, politics, culture, traditions and religion. Regional concerns become world issues. Thus, age-old perspectives and worldviews no longer anchor us. And it's now happening very quickly-faster than permits many people to adjust.

Thus for the first time in history, we humans are forging an awareness of our existence as *a single entity*. Nations are struggling to incorporate the planetary dimensions of life into the fabric of their economics, politics, culture and international relations, and even their religions.

Globalization is changing the distribution of geopolitical power. Since 1945 and the end of World War II, the U. S. has been the dominant world power and the guarantor of at least a certain degree of stability and security. The major world institutions-the IMF, World Bank, U.N., NATO-were conceived and controlled by the U.S. But globalization has been creating other centers of economic and political power. Brazil, Russia, India, China and other nations are forming economic and security alliances outside the framework of these older institutions. Thus the U. S. is increasingly only one of several centers of geopolitical power, albeit the strongest conventional military force.

In my view, perhaps the most acute effect of globalization is the global crisis of identity taking place. It has taken a series of crises in France, Holland, Britain,

Germany, and increasingly the U.S., for the issue of *identity* finally to be recognized as central to the contemporary global crisis. The former French president stated on national TV that his country faces "an identity crisis," a crisis that increases as large numbers of immigrants from Asia, Africa and the Middle East crowd into France and Europe.

As immigration increases, the stories and myths that form the basis of national identities tend to wane. The result is a form of national angst. As *The Times* of London quotes one British historian, "A white majority that invented the national mythologies underpinning modern European culture lives in an almost perpetual state of fear that it and its way of life are about to disappear." The Catholic Church in Europe is facing the distinct probability of Islam eventually becoming the largest European religion. The fear of such demographic shifts and their potential consequences is the subtext for everything else happening in Europe today.

This issue of identity is an underlying dynamic between the Arab world and the West. Arabs are asking themselves, "Will globalization, based on the Western, rationalistic, consumerist, postmodern ethos, ultimately mean *the end of Islam?*" Such unknowns form a significant part of the psychological dynamic fueling terrorism.

Profound questions arise for all people as globalization collapses the national, racial and religious boundaries that heretofore protected-and even defined-identity. "Who am I? Who is my group? Do I even have a group any more? What does 'national allegiance' mean in a global era? What does 'race' mean in a world where people of all ethnicities are increasingly inter-marrying? What is my sense of who I am and what I believe when computerized global information systems merge all religions, philosophies and cultures into a grab bag of different possible beliefs?"

The whole human race-whether pre-modern, modern, or postmodern-is involved in a vast process of redefining identity. Some move forward into the future, some cling to the past, both of which create new social tensions.

Technology

We all know that the explosion of new technologies is a primary force driving global change. While elementary forms of technology are older than *Homo sapiens*, the first systematic approach to science and technology was expressed by Francis Bacon in the 17th century: Bacon wrote that the "true and lawful end of science is that human life be enriched by new discoveries and powers." Four centuries later, Einstein (1935) echoed Bacon, and emphasized that "concern for man himself and his fate must form the chief interest of all technical endeavors."

Let me interject here that I'm no Luddite. A decade ago I had a quadruple heart by-pass using the latest medical technology. So I'm sold.

But questions arise as to whether we really know what we're doing. Is Einstein's dictum-concern for man himself and his fate must form the chief interest of all technical endeavors-is this what propels scientific research today?

Doubts are being expressed. The *Economist*, probably the most authoritative news magazine in English, asks, "Is the speed of technology development exceeding humanity's moral and mental capacities to control it?" *Newsweek* (1995) magazine

says flat out that "information overload is outstripping our capacity to cope, antiquating our laws, transforming our mores, reshuffling our economy, reordering our priorities and putting our Constitution to the fire."

Why do they make such statements? For one thing, the experts tell us that the pace of technological change doubles every decade; that because technological change is growing at an exponential rate, the 21st century will see one thousand times more technological change than did the last century.

What does such rapid change do to us as individuals? Psychologists have long known that subjecting people to more change than they can fit into their mental picture of life causes serious psychological problems. Thus the U.S. government estimates that half of all Americans will require some form of psychological counseling at some point in their lives. Some experts even say that by generating such rapid change, we are tampering with the preconditions of rationality.

But something else is going on. I once had dinner with Alvin Toffler, author and futurist. I asked him, "What is the result of everyone having access to all philosophies, all social and political theories, all knowledge, all spiritual beliefs, all news simply by the press of a computer button." He replied, "It's the end of truth."

Toffler wasn't suggesting that truth doesn't exist any longer. Rather, he meant that we're at a point where truth is no longer accepted as "self evident," as it says in the U.S. Declaration of Independence. It's ever more difficult to achieve a consensus on what is truth. We certainly don't know the truth of why the U.S. went into Iraq. But even more, where is the truth regarding abortion, same-sex marriage, or even what constitutes a family. Increasingly, truth is in the eye of the beholder.

Even more, information technologies fragment collective systems of belief, whether political, religious or philosophical. This is why our political parties are increasingly less effective. It's also why two former Speakers of the U.S. House of Representatives, Tom Foley and Newt Gingrich, one a Democrat and one a Republican, agree that the House of Representatives is, in their word, "dysfunctional." More people have more access to more information-or opinion-with which to make up their own minds on an issue. Whose "truth" are we talking about....the forty-eight million U.S. Christian fundamentalists who believe the world will literally end in our lifetime; the scientists who believe we are entering the "Post-human" era as they create a specie "superior" to the human being; the postmodernist who believes reality is but a social-linguistic construct?

Or what about our children? What are we doing to them? One effect is that our technologies have speeded up the pace of life so much that books are now written for seven-year-old children advising them how to recognize stress in their lives, and what to do about it. Clearly, parents no longer control the information environment in which their children grow up; and such control has been a prime function of parenthood ever since Rousseau proposed childhood as a special category of life with its unique needs. Indeed, many researchers of the effects of technology on children say we have now come to the "end of childhood" as a special category of growth.

As we look to the future of technology, what is our responsibility to coming generations? Some scientists are seeking to create certain technologies not to improve the human condition as Einstein urged, but for purposes that appear to be to *replace*

human meaning and significance altogether. Some of the world's most brilliant scientists are seeking to create what they call the Post-Human Age. Create something they think is better than the human being.

Listen to what some scientists are saying:

Marvin Minsky, cofounder of MIT's Artificial Intelligence Laboratory: "Suppose that the robot had all the virtues of people and was smarter and understood things better. Then why would we want to prefer those grubby old people? I don't see anything wrong with human life being devalued if we have something better" (as cited in Wishard, 2000, p. 222).

MIT's Sherry Turkel (1984) sees the "reconfiguration of machines as psychological objects and the reconfiguration of people as living machines."

So how are we to view such statements? What are we really dealing with? How is it that a tiny percentage of humanity-a few scientists-takes it upon itself to radically alter what has been known for the last forty thousand years as a "human being?" This is not science fiction we're talking about; it's what is happening with some of the best and brightest scientists in the world, and they expect to see the results of their work within the lifetime of our children and grandchildren.

We hear much talk about the coming Great Singularity, the Omega Point, the emergence of a new global consciousness. Complexity theorist Ralph Abraham (2007) says "when you increase connectivity, new intelligence emerges...a quantum leap in consciousness." Computer designer Danny Hillis tells us "now evolution takes place in microseconds...We're taking off." It seems you just add connections and-presto-a quantum leap in consciousness. But not everyone agrees. As Steven Talbott describes it, "These are the sweetly sung promises of salvation through digital information."

Richard Tarnas (2002), professor of psychology and philosophy at the California Institute of Integral Studies, and author of the highly acclaimed *Cosmos and Psyche*, also takes a different view. He suggests, "Purveyors of such future scenarios are blissfully 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," Tarnas concludes, "one can be certain one's plans will not go according to schedule...and that their visions are likely to be highly inaccurate-though not without consequences."

It is clear that in *some* realms of scientific research, we are no longer concerned with meeting any human need, nor is there any defined ethical framework within which R&D takes place. Consider Jaron Lanier's (1997) comments. Lanier coined the term "virtual reality" and founded the world's first virtual reality company. Writes Lanier, "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."

One is reminded of the words of Barbara Ward and Rene Dubos (1972), the great microbiologist, humanist and Pulitzer-prize winning author. "Civilizations commonly die from the excessive development of certain characteristics which had at first con-

tributed to their success." he wrote. "Our form of industrial civilization suffers from *having allowed experts to make growth and efficiency, rather than the quality of life, the main criterion of success. . . if things are in the saddle, it is because we have put them there...* the demonic force in our life is not technology per se, but our propensity to consider means as ends." [Emphasis added]

The Spiritual/Psychological Shift

We come now to the very core of the shift in orientation and worldview we're talking about, and that is the spiritual/psychological shift that has been taking place for at least the past two centuries. Understanding this shift is not simply a nice theoretical exercise. The future of planet earth is at stake, and we thus must understand ourselves at a deeper level.

When people and nations shift from one period of history to a new period, that shift doesn't take place in outer space somewhere, out in the ether. *The basic change takes place inside of us as human beings.* It is we who are changing, even though we may not be aware of it. For the change is taking place at the level of our unconscious life. What is happening is that a new sense of ourselves, our relation to each other, to the world, and to transcendent reality is being born within us. The danger is that in our overemphasis on cognition, rationality and objectivity, we'll fail to see what's unfolding in the irrational and subjective side of our collective personality.

Such epochal changes have taken place before in history, and two Western examples may help us understand what's taking place today.

Eighth century BC Greece and the *Iliad*. In the *Iliad*, gods, representing certain attributes, roam the battlefield giving orders to Hector, Achilles, Paris, and all the rest, "Do this, do that." This was not a literary construct by Homer to enliven the story. This was the way eighth century BC people saw reality; they projected inner images on to the outer plane of life. The same type of projection is seen in the Old Testament.

Four hundred years later, by the time of Plato, those Greek "gods" had been internalized and were now "archetypes." Aphrodite, who had been the goddess of beauty and love, became the psychological prototype of beauty. Plato, in fact, represents a psychological breakpoint in Western history, as attributes that had been attributed to the "gods" in the earlier Greek mind were described by Plato as "archetypes," or basic patterns of life.

Such a development represents a seminal psychological advance of worldview or orientation similar to what's happening to the world today.

An example closer to our time is the psychological shift from the Middle Ages of Dante and the building of the great cathedrals of Europe, to the worldview of Petrarch and the Renaissance. It was an epic shift from emphasis on the vertical perspective-man's relation to a God in heaven-to a horizontal perspective-man's relationship to the natural phenomena of Earth. The historian Will Durant (1953) summarized this shift saying, the Renaissance "replaced the supernatural with the natural as the focus of human concern." The Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt (1860) makes a similar point. Burckhardt saw the man of the Middle Ages, primarily "conscious of himself as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation-only through some general cat-

egory," become a "spiritual individual, and recognized himself as such," attuned to the subjective side of life.

This distinction is exemplified in the difference between the magnificent cathedral of Chartres, where, on the one hand, no sculptors' names adorn the different statues, and no one knows who was responsible for this or that portion of the great church, and, on the other hand, the subsequent advent of men such as Giotto and Pico della Mirandola, who represent a new mood of the individual self. This was a major psychological development. Even religion was reshaped by this new sense of individual consciousness when Martin Luther translated the Bible into the common vernacular of Germany so that each person could follow the dictates of his own conscience.

In my view, the Western world has been experiencing a transition of similar scope at least over the past two centuries, and perhaps longer. One sees it most clearly in the cultural change that has taken place. Culture is a reflection of what takes place in the subjective realms of the psyche, in the unconscious. It's a window into the soul. Historically, at the heart of any major cultural orientation is some sort of relationship with transcendent reality, which in the past has been codified as religion.

You can see the beginnings of the disillusion with this relationship, with transcendent reality, as it was then expressed, at least during the Enlightenment and the elevation of reason as life's highest authority. During the nineteenth century, this disillusion is increasingly articulated. In *Les Miserables*, Victor Hugo announces that the phrase "God is dead" is the fashionable belief among the elite social class of Paris. In 1850, in *Dover Beach*, Matthew Arnold laments "the retreating sea of faith." That same year, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Poet Laureate of England, warns of the "spiritual abyss that is to come."

So when Nietzsche (1883) proclaimed in 1883 "God is dead," he wasn't announcing a new thought; he was expressing a psychological reality for most of Europe's "creative minority." Nor was it surprising that as the 20th century opened, Thomas Hardy should write "God's Funeral," a poem noting "our myth's oblivion," and asking "who or what shall fill his place?"

I've mentioned "creative minority," and it is crucial to any major transition, so I want to comment on how I see its significance.

Throughout history, every society has had people of vision and talent who were on the "leading edge" of society. They set the pace, and the mass of people follow. In our time, the "creative minority" consists of the artists, writers, scientists, musicians, TV/Hollywood elite, educators, technologists...all those who create the patterns of the future which the rest of us, including the politicians, follow. These are the people who take the rest of us into fresh dimensions of life and experience, whether creative or destructive.

It's these people who plant the seeds of a new orientation or worldview. Even, one might say, of a new relationship with transcendent reality. The spiritual temperature of a country is not revealed by some opinion poll that tells us how many people say they believe in God. It's far better measured by comprehending the consciousness, the attitudes, and the inward searching of the "creative minority."

Generally speaking, in Europe and the U.S., the "creative minority" is secularized. You can see the increasing disillusionment of the "creative minority" with traditional

religious dogma...not necessarily with the symbolic truth that the religion attempted to express, but with the dogmatic strictures that came with it. The old expressions of truth no longer resonate in the deeper levels of the "creative minority." And once again, we hear the old Roman cry reported by Plutarch, "Great Pan is dead."

And, indeed, Hollywood and TV are giving us gruesome images of mayhem, extreme brutality and "end of the world" scenarios. But Hollywood wouldn't be projecting such images of destruction if they didn't resonate at the depths of the collective American soul. We're the ones who pay to watch this fare.

The hard reality is that destruction of the old is an integral-if painful-part of the creation of the new. Thus, we have a certain angst as we sense a great loss of what has given us deepest meaning and fulfillment. That's what Peter Drucker was referring to in his comment quoted at the beginning of this paper "...a world uprooting its foundations, overturning its values and toppling its idols." Gone or greatly eroded are the psychic structures that have supported such values as honor, integrity, modesty, fidelity, moderation, humility, self-discipline, restraint, trust, self-denial, and a belief in some higher transcendent authority, all of which have been the essential underpinning of *every* creative culture. These values are being turned into their opposite. Nothing illustrates it better than a statement reported by *Business Week* quoting a New York ad agency executive: "No one's really worrying about what his or her tasteless ads are teaching impressionable youth. Hey, I'm in the business of convincing people to buy things they don't need." Thus it would seem that the "Seven Deadly Sins" have become the "Seven Cardinal Virtues."

This is certainly in keeping with classical Chinese philosophy, which posits two contrary principles, the bright *yang* and the dark *yin*. Of these it is said, that always when one principle reaches the height of its power, the counter-principle is stirring within it like a germ. Thus whenever a civilization reaches its highest point, sooner or later a period of decay sets in. But the apparently meaningless and hopeless collapse into a disorder without aim or purpose nevertheless contains within its darkness the germ of a new light.

Just as the Modern Age never would have yielded its promise had not there been a certain destruction of the Middle Ages, so must there come the passing of what we've known if the future is to fulfill its potential. Thus what the world faces is not so much a crisis *between* civilizations, as a crisis of civilized life itself.

Historically, this destruction/creation process has unfolded over a very long period of time, over centuries. However, with the advent of electronic information technology, which transmits not only information but also psychic states of being, the pace of change is being accelerated. The psychological/spiritual shift is most advanced in Europe and the U.S. But it's basically taking place throughout the world. Changes in India are becoming visible. People no longer accept their station in life as inevitable or a prelude to their next incarnation. They want to enjoy the fruits of life now. In China, as a "search for meaning" becomes a national preoccupation, there's a renewed emphasis on Confucius, even by the Communist leadership. In Africa, whose spiritually instinctive and naturalistic approach to life was replaced by the rationality of European education and civic administration, there is a growth in Christianity, which, psychologically, has been alien to the African psyche. Certainly a part of what's happening in

the Middle East is caught up in this larger process of disintegration and re-integration, despite the other difficult factors present in the Middle East.

In the U.S., I think there are two primary reactions to this spiritual/psychological shift. The first is religious fundamentalism, which I see as a cry of the soul against the secular, materialist, nihilist ethos reflected in our culture. It is a search for some spiritual interpretation of life. Unfortunately, it is psychologically regressive. All religious fundamentalisms are a reaching back to earlier centuries for symbolic expressions of eternal truth that were in keeping with the consciousness of humans 2000 years ago, but which no longer resonate in the collective soul of 21st century humanity, which lives in a totally different world than did the people of antiquity. As James Russell Lowell (1890) so eloquently put it: "Truth is eternal, but her effluence, with endless change, is fitted to the hour; her mirror is turned forward to reflect the promise of the future, not the past" (pp. 49-53).

"Spirituality" is a symptom of the same search. Spirituality is a cry of the soul for some transcendent ground of Being, as opposed to the empty, soul-destroying themes expressed in contemporary culture. Spirituality, however, still needs to mature to the point where it includes the shadow side of the human character; for inclusion of the shadow side is essential in order to make a person spiritually "whole." That's why confession has been so important to the Catholic Church...to help bring the shadow into the light. Spirituality needs to find its equivalent.

Conclusion

What might be some of the elements of the new worldview, the fresh orientation seeking expression?

It is global. It recognizes the world as the primary context for defining human and national relationships, individual and collective identity, as well as value, meaning, purpose or ultimacy of any sort, as Brian Swimme has so cogently written.

It sees people as individuals...not as members of some race, class, gender or nation. It honors individuals for what they are. It's non-judgmental, but entering into the truth, meaning and depth of what others have to offer. It accepts that we are part of one whole.

It sees humanity as an integral part of Nature, not as something separate from Nature that can manipulate and exploit Nature regardless of the effect on the biosphere. It recognizes and values the *archetypal correspondence* that pervades all forms of life on earth and in the cosmos.

Rather than denying our individual and national "shadow side" and thus forcing it into unconscious projection, the new worldview is acutely aware of our "shadow side," and seeks to integrate it into the fullness of our personality so that there is a new wholeness of being. It sees the shadow both in terms of our individual self, and its collective expression. If a global age is going to work, if we're going to build the planetary civilization that is emerging, then individuals and nations must understand and come to terms with the dark side of personal and national character.

Finally, the new orientation sees the need of some relationship with Transcendent Reality as essential to a balanced, complete personality, as well as to collective cohesion, purpose and significance.

There is a new dimension of Truth attempting to unfold itself for the world. It's happened before in history, and now it's our turn to live at a time when a fresh orientation is emerging for the whole of the human family.

With this new unfolding of Truth comes an enlarged necessity of Duty...a duty to understand what's happening, and to engage in the war within our own soul, as well as within the collective soul of our nations. Then might come a heightened hope that we can avoid the technological dangers and destructive wars that seem to threaten human existence today. Then might come a new consensus of humankind. Then, and perhaps only then, will we bring to birth a new era of deeper meaning and greater unity for future generations.

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