



Possibilities for the Future

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ABSTRACT *Planetary futures are explored in the context of two scenarios. The Artificial Society led by dramatic developments in information and genetic technologies and the Multicultural Society driven by concerns for inclusiveness and equity. These scenarios are explored in context of structures of power, the weight of the patterns of history.*

KEYWORDS *genetic engineering; globalization; labour; multiculturalism; scenarios; technology*

Introduction

Attempts to forecast global futures fall into three or so camps. Most extrapolate from the present focusing on variables such as population, resource capacity and distribution of wealth. Technology, economics and power are seen as the key drivers. From these a range of scenarios are posited (Rich/Poor divide; The Long Boom; Global Collapse). Others focus less on the trends and more on aspirations – what images people desire the future to be like. Community-oriented, deep democracy, appropriate technology and individual self-actualization tend to be the descriptors of this more idealistic future. The driver is generally human agency. A third set of forecasts focuses neither on trends or aspirations but on other forces, either the transcendental (Hegel's Geist moving through history or the return of the avatar/Jesus, for example) or evolution (survival of the fittest). The future that results is because of the grander scheme of things.

What is often lost in these attempts to understand the future are the structural constraints and structural possibilities. Few scenarios go beyond the dictates of the present (trend extrapolation), the dictates of vision (aspiration scenarios) and the dictates of teleology (the transcendental/evolutionary).

Structural approaches

If we begin to explore the long term, from a macro-historical (Galtung and Inayatullah, 1997) view, there are a range of possibilities that define the shape of

the long term. Structural approaches explore the parameters of the possible future. What is probable, not because of current trends (although these are often defined by structural forces) or agency or the transcendental, but because of real historical limits.

Simply stated, there have been four structures.

- World Empire – victory of warrior historical power – coercive/protective – sensate – patriarchy – *ksattriya*.
- World Church – victory of intellectual power – normative – ideational – patriarchy – *vipra*.
- Mini-systems – small, self-reliant cultural systems – ideational – androgyny – *shudra*.
- World economy – globalizing economics along national divisions – sensate – *vaeshyan*.

The question is, which structure is likely to dominate in the next 25 to 50 years?

The first option is unlikely given countervailing powers – that there is more than one hegemony in the world system and that there is a lack of political legitimacy for recolonization. The human rights discourse, while allowing intervention in failing nations, still severely delimits nation-to-nation conquest.

The second option – a world church – is also unlikely given that there are many civilizations (from Muslim to Christian to Shinto to modern secular) vying for minds and hearts. While the millennium has evoked passions associated with the end of man, and the return of Jesus, Amida Buddha or the Madhi, the religious pluralism that is our planet is unlikely to be swayed toward any one religion.

The third option is possible because of the potential decentralizing impact of telecommunication systems and the aspiration by many for self-reliant ecological communities electronically linked. However, small systems tend to be taken over by warrior power, intellectual/religious power or larger economic globalizing propensities. In the context of a globalized world economy, self-reliance is difficult to maintain. Moreover, centralizing forces and desire for power at the local level limit the democratic/small is beautiful impulse.

The fourth option – the world economy – has been the staple for the last few hundred years but it now appears that a bifurcation to an alternative

system or to collapse (and reconquest by the warriors) is possible. Crises in environment, governance and legitimacy all reduce the strength of the world system.

Which globalism?

Our present world views suggest that current problems cannot be solved in isolation leading to the strengthening of global institutions, even for local parties, who now realize that for their local agendas to succeed they must become global political parties, globalizing themselves, and in turn moving away from their ideology of localism and self-reliance.

Thus what we are seeing even in the local is a necessity to move to the global. There is no other way. The issue, of course, is which globalism? Thus, globalism is not merely the freeing of capital, but the freeing of ideas (multiculturalism – challenging the western canon, modernity, secularism, linear time) and eventually the globalization of labour.

While the latter is currently about fair wages for workers throughout the world (in terms of purchasing power), it also means that for elite workers movement throughout the world is now possible – university positions in varied nations, or moving from International non-governmental organization (INGO) to INGO, multinational to multinational, nation-hopping and passport collecting. This could eventually lead to a real globalization of labour and the creation of the Marxist dream – a world where workers unite and challenge capitalist power.

Globalized labour is even more likely given the rapid ageing of western societies, where to survive economically, they will need a massive inflow of immigrants to work to support the retirement bulge. Historically, the median age has been 20, but it is quickly moving to 40 plus in OECD nations. Who will purchase the stocks sold by babyboomers as they begin to retire and pay for their leisure lifestyles (Peterson, 1999)? Only elites in developing nations are likely to do so.

Choices for the new globalism

For the West there are three choices. The first would be to import labour, open the doors of immigration

and become truly multicultural and younger. Those nations who do that will thrive financially (the US and England, for example), those who cannot because of local politics will find themselves slowly descending down the ladder (Germany and Japan, for example).

The second choice is to dramatically increase productivity through new technologies, that is, fewer people producing more goods (or a mix of immigration and email outsourcing). While the first stage is the convergence of computing and telecommunications technology (the Net), nano-technology is the end dream of this.

The third choice is the re-engineering of the population – creating humans in hospitals. This is the end game of the genetics revolution. The first phase is: genetic prevention. Phase two is genetic enhancement (finding ways to increase intelligence, typing second, language capacity) and phase three is genetic recreation, the creation of new species, super and sub races (Inayatullah and Fitzgerald, 1996; Foundation for the Future, 2000).

This is the creation of the artificial society. The convergence of computers, telecommunications and genetics, seeing genes as information and finding ways to manipulate this information. The main points of this future are:

- genetic Prevention, Enhancement and Recreation – new species, germ line engineering and the end of ‘natural’ procreation;
- soft and strong nano-technology – end of scarcity and work;
- space exploration – promise of contact or, at least, species continuation;
- artificial intelligence – the rights of robots;
- life extension and ageing – gerontocracy and the end of youth culture;
- internet – the global brain.

The underlying ethos is that technology can solve every problem and lead to genuine human progress. In the long run, this creates a new globalization, where the very nature of nature (once stable, now dramatically alterable) is transformed.

Coupled with changes in nature are processes that are changing the nature of truth. Post-modernism and multiculturalism all contest stable notions of truth, instead seeing reality as a more

porous, based on individual, cultural and epistemic perception, essentially political. Reality as well is less fixed, whether from quantum notions of what is essential, or spiritual notions of life as microvita, as perception and empirical, or from virtual reality, where the world around is no longer the foundation for knowing and living what is.

Taken with the problematic nature of sovereignty of self and nation, the stability of the last few hundred years of the world economy/interstate system are suspect.

What this means is that globalism as the agenda of neo-liberalism has gone far beyond the original programme (or perhaps fulfilling the deep code of the programme). Technologies and the reductionist scientific process that are embedded in them are creating a new world where nothing will have a resemblance to what we historically knew, making humans superfluous.

Other scenarios

But returning to our structural perspective, alternative scenarios are possible. This is the Collapse, the convergence of new technologies gone wrong, the technological fix creating even more problems – new viruses, new species, for example. Nuclear meltdown, virtual stock markets delinked from real economies and postmodern cultural depression, even madness, are further problems.

Next is the globalized multicultural society – the vision of the social movements. Globalization, in this future, would extend to the liberation of not just capital but, as mentioned above:

- labour (the right to travel and work eventually eliminating visas and passports);
- culture (news, information, meaning, ideas, worldview) moving from South to North, and not just as commodities for liberalism to allay its colonial guilt. The long term implication is the creation of a gaia of civilizations, each in authentic interaction and interpenetration of the other, each needing the other for survival and ‘thrival’;
- a global security system, that is, for issues such as war, terrorism, global climate change, viruses, and new problems being created by the globalization of capital and technology.

This world – a communicative/inclusive vision of the future – would have the following characteristics:

- Challenge is not technology but creating a shared global ethics;
- Dialogue of civilizations and between civilizations in the context of multiple ways of knowing;
- *Prama* – balanced but dynamic economy. Technological innovation leads to shared cooperative 'capitalism';
- Maxi–mini global wage system – incentive linked to distributive justice;
- A soft global governance system with 1000 local bio-regions;
- Layered identity, moving from ego/religion/nation to rights of all;
- Microvita (holistic) science – life as intelligent.

The underlying perspective would be that a global ethics with a deep commitment to communication could solve every problem.

This would then be a systems bifurcation where the world polity would become decentralized – either networked or loose confederations or multiple hegemonies – and the world economy as well would be decentralized. Culture would move from uniculturalism to multiculturalism to human culture (our genetic similarities are among the surprising benefits of the mapping of the human genome, (i.e. there is no genetic cause for racism and racial differences). It would be a future with a non-strategic governance partnership society.

However, while the aspirations for a soft world governance system are laudable – during times of intense transformation, plastic time, where there is a struggle between worldviews and processes – there is a new centre, a reordering of power. Abuses of power do not so easily go away. Exploitation can be reduced but its elimination is unlikely.

The structural reality is that over time what will emerge will be a world government system with strong localism. That is, the communicative-inclusive vision of the future does not adequately address issues of power; it is focused far more on aspirations. This world polity will likely have a world constitution with basic rights such as language, basic needs, culture and religion enshrined.

It would be a stronger version of the communicative-inclusive society, that is, with some teeth with it, in the form of a functioning world court, for example – perhaps a balance to the four types of power referred to above. This system would be a planetary system and not an empire since there would be no single state hegemon nor would there be conquest *per se*.

Still, it is the creation of an artificial society with deep cleavages between those with access to wealth, information and genetic technology that remains quite likely. The elite will be from the North, older, and will be able to extend their life span by 30 to 50 years. Outside the walls of technocracy will be the 'others'.

And it is the fear of others that will define the polity of the artificial society. Two political systems are likely – a world empire (the rise of a new Napoleon using genomic and net warfare as the main methods of conquest) or a world church/technocracy (a religion of perfection with gene doctors becoming the holders of life and liberty). In the communicative-inclusive future, there will either be a soft governance system or a stronger world government system. From a structural view, the latter is far more likely.

Many unanswered questions

How will the new technologies and resultant cultures evolve? Who will control them, how will they be used? Will social movements be able to successfully resist elite science (concentrated intellectual and military and technocratic/economic power) using culture and technology to create inclusive futures? Will a more public and responsible post-normal science develop (that includes the subjective and the ethical)? Will multiculturalism transform the West or will the artificial society beat back the invading others?

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