

# **WORLD FUTURES: TRENDS AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN STATE, EDUCATION AND CULTURAL ECOLOGY**

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**Keywords:** World view, world order, evolution of consciousness, crisis of perception, social transformation.

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## **Summary**

The historic period we are now entering can be characterized as the culmination of an era of global transition—a transition of both worldview and world order. This era of transition entails unprecedented threats but also, more importantly, unparalleled opportunities. It represents a crisis of perception and social order that can culminate either in a complete breakdown or in a qualitative breakthrough in our collective existence as the human species. Our individual and collective choices in the coming years will determine the quality of this period of transition as well as the price we have to pay for it. The historic era which humankind is now entering provides every individual, institution, and community with unmatched opportunities for participating in the writing of the planet's future.

## **1. Introduction**

This section aims at opening a perspective to the future of humankind, showing the multifaceted reality of our global paradigm and suggesting ways to address the prospective needs of our collective future as a species. The transformations that must take place in our sociopolitical organization, in our cultural habits, and in our systems of education are as far-reaching as they are interconnected; they are all elements in a single mesh of human paradigm. The articles in this section will deal with topics as varied as the process of globalization and information society, the nature of historical change, the emergence of global governance, methods for futures scenario and planning, and the futures of world demographics. While diverse in their topics, the reasoning behind these

articles underlines the unity of their concern: the global crisis of perception. This article will seek to give an overall picture — a map, if you like — for placing the phenomenal events and developments of the twentieth century in perspective. The article addresses the process of social transformation in the context of the evolution of consciousness, a process that has been reaching for its culmination during the past one or two centuries and is now coming to its climax with its implied changes in worldview and world order. It is hoped that this writing will provide the reader with a backdrop against which the issues addressed in the articles in this section can be put into a holistic perspective rather than being isolated issues of concern for humankind.

## **2. History Revisited: The Ever-Advancing Civilization**

Our view of history has always lingered somewhere between two options: at best, history is viewed from an evolutionary perspective as a process of growth with certain laws of development; at worst, history has been seen, from a reductionist viewpoint, as a successive collection of random events acting stochastically upon each other.

Both of these options, however, are limited in their explanation of the direction of the course of history. Neither of them (not even the evolutionary view) has seriously considered a teleological point of departure: viewing humanity as the arrowhead of the evolution of consciousness on this planet, an organic system that passes through stages analogous to the developmental periods of human beings: infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. In view of our paradigmatic historical situation today, this alternative perspective on human history may provide a far more insightful and productive prospect of our journey as a species (see *The Grand Patterns of Change and the Future*). That journey has brought us to the threshold of our long-awaited coming of age as a unified human race.

At such a paradigmatic crossroads of history, the central issue facing all people, whatever their nation, religion, or ethnic origin, is not an essentially pragmatic one but rather a spiritual one: that of laying the foundations of a global society that can reflect this oneness of human nature. In this view, the unification of the inhabitants of this planet is not a remote utopian vision — nor is it a matter of choice. It is the next phase in the process of social evolution, an inescapable historic unfolding towards which all past experiences of humankind as well as the present dilemma have been impelling us. Not until this fact is openly accepted and consciously incorporated into all our efforts can any of our social, political, or economic ills and concerns find lasting solutions. For, in their essence, all problems of this age are global and universal, not particular or regional.

## **3. A Century of Light**

To acknowledge the unifying forces that have unresistingly dawned during the past century is not to deny the contrasting darkness of the horrific features of that same period: the systematic extermination of unnumbered human beings, the forward march of weapons capable of destroying entire populations, the propagation and experimentation of ideologies that retarded spiritual and intellectual life of a whole section of humankind, the partly irreversible damage caused to the physical

environment of our planet — these number among the most blatant and visible aspects of the darkness that has accompanied the unfolding of the past century. But, by far, the most damaging blow to human life has been dealt by teaching generations of children to think of violence, indecency, and selfishness as qualities of individual freedom.

While acknowledging these manifestations of darkness, however, one would be well advised to bear in mind that darkness is not an phenomenon with independent existence. Darkness does not diminish or put out the existing light. Rather, by contrasting light, it delimits the areas that have not yet been properly touched by light. The apparent ferocity that has repeatedly ravaged humanity's life during this period has not prevented the simultaneous advancement of the creative potentialities of human consciousness. In fact, it has provoked the awakening of the masses of people to the hollowness and insubstantiality of the limited allegiances that have kept nations apart and have been the cause of so many totally unnecessary conflicts and suffering. Perhaps, the historians of future and more mature times will find such line of thought more plausible and informative when interpreting the historical position of the twentieth century, the "century of light" (see *Multilayered Scenarios, the Scientific Method and Global Models*; and *Epistemology and Methodology in the Study of the Future*).

The question remaining is how much more pain and damage must be suffered before the stubborn humankind willingly and wholeheartedly accepts the ideal reality and ethical character that singles us out from the rest of creation and makes us a single people. Interestingly, this particular issue was the main theme of the Czech Republic president Vaclav Havel's address to the UN Millennium Summit in the beginning of September 2000. The courage to plan our future—our educational, social, cultural, political and economic systems—on such a belief is neither utopian nor unrealistic. Acknowledging the subtleties of our social and spiritual evolution is, in fact, the most refined form of realism that we must be willing to entertain. We cannot afford otherwise.

#### **4. World Order and Global Awareness**

It would be a misrepresentation and misinterpretation of historical facts to maintain that humankind has never learned from its mistakes or that history has been a mere outcome of stochastic coincidences. This would show a complete lack of appreciation of all the achievements of the human race. It is true, however, that we have been very slow in learning from our mistakes.

One of the most important learning processes has been that of human governance and social order—that is, the process of learning to manage the human society in a meaningful and sustainable manner (see *The Futures of the United Nations and Structural Possibilities of World System Transformation*). This learning process accelerated considerably during the past century. It was in the aftermath of the Second World War that a number of leaders finally found it possible to begin consolidating the foundations of world order and look for possibilities of global governance. This aspiration was realized in the establishment of the United Nations Organization. While certainly inadequate in relation to its final and ideal objectives, this new system of international conventions and its supportive agencies was now endowed with crucial powers that were regrettably absent in the short-lived and lame League of Nations.

Regardless of what skeptical observers may conclude, the UN system's primitive tools of international peacekeeping and global governance have progressively developed and have already demonstrated an ability to cope with increasingly complex international issues. Alongside these developments, democratic institutions of governance have steadily grown and been consolidated throughout the world and in an increasing number of countries. The fact that practical consequences and results have, for the most part, been modest and even disappointing does not in any way nullify the historic and irreversible change of direction in the way human affairs are being organized. World order is on a no-return road to its next evolutionary leap (see *Globalization and Information Society — Increasing Complexity and Potential Chaos*). This realization has been slowly but irresistibly forcing itself on the minds of people and has, since the conception of the United Nations Organization, been reinforced and amplified by the work of such organizations as the Club of Rome and the UN Commission for Global Governance.

An accompanying quality to the change of world order is that of global awareness — the increasing consciousness of our planet's inhabitants that, deep down, all our pressing dilemmas are global in scope and universal in essence. One of the most striking examples of this is awareness of human rights. The disclosure of the horrifying sufferings of the victims of a perverse ideology during the Second World War caused a global sense of shock, a deep sense of collective shame. Traumatic as this experience was, it gave birth to a new kind of moral commitment to the rights of the world's inhabitants. This commitment was formally institutionalized in the work of the United Nations. The creation of the Commission on Human Rights and its associated agencies would have been inconceivable to the rulers of the nineteenth century. This gave impetus and supported a growing number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to dedicate their work to the cause of human rights and to bring pressure towards the establishment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the foundation of normative international standards.

The parallel process within economic life has been equally ground breaking. First, as an outcome of disasters caused by the great depression during the first half of the twentieth century, a number of governments found it necessary to adopt legislation that could ensure some sort of minimum social security. These resulted in measures such as social welfare programs, systems of financial control, reserve funds, and trade regulations— means for protecting national societies from a recurrence of such devastation. After the Second World War similar measures and organizations emerged on a global level and with a worldwide mandate. Such institutions include: the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, as well as a wide network of other development agencies designed for the rationalization and advancement of the material prosperity of the whole globe. These international tools that the human race has, up till now, been capable of devising are, at best, crude and primitive; however, they have been capable of showing the masses of humanity that it is both theoretically and practically possible to reorganize the use of our planet's wealth to entirely new conceptions and definitions of need.

The extension of education to the masses and its acceleration has amplified greatly the effect of these developments. On the one hand, national governments and local

administration have become more willing to allocate a greater portion of their resources to the field of education and the mobilization and training of professionally qualified teachers. On the other hand, two specific developments of the past century have contributed to and supported the cause of universal education (see *Sustainable Education: Imperatives for a Viable Future*): firstly, the succession of development plans for the advancement of educational need and financed by international bodies and government agencies, including the World Bank, major foundations and several branches of the United Nations system; secondly, the information technology explosion, which has extended the benefits of the accumulated learning of the human race potentially (though not yet actually) readily available to all its members. With all these new means and willpower at hand, it is vital that educational curricula and contents include those basic attitudes and skills that are needed in the paradigm of a united humanity. Therefore, the concept of world citizenship needs to be incorporated into the core of our educational systems.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

**Partow Izadi** is a futurist and educationalist working as a senior researcher and teacher at the University of Lapland (Rovaniemi, Finland) situated on the Arctic Circle. His early interest and involvement in futures studies and global education have marked his career since 1984. He has worked in various future-oriented research and development projects sponsored by the Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education in Finland as well as international organizations such as the OECD. His main concern has been the problematique and implementation of global education and universal values within a systems theoretic philosophy. One of the practical methods of implementation he has been experimenting during these projects has been the action research approach as a method of social and organizational reform. In

recent years his focus has been on studying the effect of current educational paradigms on the future paradigm of society. Active cross-scientific and intercultural networking is an essential element and daily aspect of his work. Partow Izadi is a member of the World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF) and has worked to promote futures studies in Finland for instance during his work on the Executive Board of the Finland Futures Academy. One of his foci is developing a Master Degree Programme in the area of Global Education, with the aim of training experts in proactive education reform towards sustainable and inclusive globalization. His lifelong membership in the organized work of the worldwide Bahá'í community has played a vital role in shaping the abilities that are relevant in a futurist's work. This experience has been especially valuable for identifying and applying the ethical, socio-cultural and organizational principles that are relevant while working in an increasingly diversified and pluralistic social environment. A distinctive principle in this experience has been the attitude of being mindful of the prosperity of humankind as a whole while working with the concerns of a particular group or dealing with the requirements of a specific situation.

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