

Prognosis

Like Scrooge in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, we are being visited by ghosts of the past, the present, and the future. They are showing us the consequences of our self-inflicted pestilence and giving us a chance to bring that pestilence to an end.

In my own country of origin, the United States, the government that was supposed to represent my interests has, in the past five years alone, thrown hundreds of billions of dollars in public funds into spreading the pestilence: devastating other countries, destroying hundreds of thousands of lives, and escalating the violence and hatred in the global community. And that government, my government, has given every indication that it intends to direct similar threats against other governments in the years ahead. Far from being immune to this plague, the Obama administration is helping to spread it in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the past and in the present, my government has threatened and continues to threaten the global community of which I am a part. And it is an ongoing threat to the future, constantly undermining the chances of human survival and conditions essential to optimal human health.

Militant nationalism leads swiftly to the arrogance of power and glorifies our ignorance and incompetence. It has been said that much of our culture — the myth of the hero, the addiction to acquiring material possessions, the violent contests for power — can be explained by our efforts to deny our mortality. Being surrounded by possessions gives us a false sense of security, and dominating others deludes us into a sense of immortality. One consequence of this choice is that in denying our mortality, we are losing our humanity.

In everyday conversations with many people in the United States, or in listening to people talking in restaurants or on television or in the streets, I often find a surreal lack of awareness of what has happened and what is happening. A waitress tells me about “sleepers” who are waiting for orders from Osama Bin Laden to rise up and attack “us” in the United States. A taxi driver tells me that “we” can’t let governments like Iraq’s get away with stuff, and the rest of the world has to help “us” stop “them.”

The waitress and the taxi driver are capable of greater sanity than their words convey. As I listened to them, I heard other evidence that affirmed their humanity, even as they expressed their paranoid and violent ideas.

In our culture, such ideas are not only okay, they are cultivated. Professionals with whom I converse often express slightly more sophisticated versions of the same kind of thinking. Sleeper cells, the latest version of Hitler, and other rehashed ways of frightening the public and seducing them into support for state violence — all this is, in significant part, the work of an endless parade of intellectuals. And these intellectuals, who serve the military-industrial-ideological-political complex, appear to be utterly ignorant of the pathogenesis of the plague they help to spread.

Militant nationalism is the major ideological disease-promoting factor in the warfare system. Warfare is a cancer, but also a communicable disease. Propaganda for war and mass violence can be communicated through radio broadcasts, as in Rwanda in 1994,

or through news magazines, scholarly publications, and television broadcasts, as in our own culture today.

To counteract the disease effectively, we must find the cultural, economic, and political means for therapy and prevention. This search will have to be innovative, evidence-based, and constantly renewed. To wait until the threshold of the next outbreak of war is to guarantee failure. Though the two world wars are behind us, the warfare system is very much alive among us:

[T]he plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good ... it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests ... it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and ... perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city. (Camus 1947, 308)

Militant nationalism is diminishing the chances of human survival, undermining the conditions of human security, squandering public resources, and extinguishing possibilities for growth of the human spirit worldwide. In my own country and in many other parts of the world, this plague is ravaging individual lives, families, and local communities.

The warfare system is a plague and a cancer that depends on militant nationalism to sustain it and spread it.

What is the prognosis?

By 2050 the economic and military ascendancy of China may have become obvious to every well-educated person. Assuming that the global community continues down the road toward Option B, China will probably not only develop the means to shoot down satellites (as it has already done and demonstrated) and the ability to deliver nuclear weapons where and when it chooses, but may also with a coalition that it organizes gain increasing control of the world's dwindling oil reserves.

Will this affect the lives of your children?

Assuming the continued rise of China and Option B for the global community, it is easy to conceive of scenarios for North Americans in 2050. With climate change, dwindling access to oil, and other emerging challenges, North Americans could face hard choices, including some that lead to increasing social polarization. Society could fragment as it goes into economic decline. North American society might look more and more like “weasels fighting in a hole,” to use the words of W.B. Yeats. To state the case rather gently: if social capital as well as economic wealth are in decline, life in North America three generations from now may no longer be the envy of the rest of the world.

We know that the world a century from now will be very different from the world of today. We can no more predict the details of that world than a stock market analyst can tell you what will be on television ten years from now. Nonetheless, trends are often discernible, and predictable consequences often follow from recognizable conditions. The provident person does not wait until the house burns down to carry out maintenance and repairs, or to purchase household insurance. Our ability to influence the future remains significantly greater than our ability to predict what that future will be. Learn or perish. We must learn to live together as human beings. That remains an option.

A patient with an immune deficiency is likely to succumb to an infectious disease that a healthy individual can easily survive. Climate change and other challenges are likely to be manageable if we meet them as a healthy, cooperative global community. A global community ravaged by militant nationalism and warfare is more likely to succumb. There is no point in wasting time with pessimistic and vapid predictions about the dangers ahead; it is essential to be aware of the challenges and prepare ourselves as a global community to meet them.

We are stuck in an old and dangerously maladaptive paradigm. The danger that the warfare system may lead to extinction of the

human species has been a matter of public awareness at least since the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Despite this mass of evidence, nuclear weapons states have repudiated their responsibility under international law to relinquish their nuclear weapons. The military superpower among them has assumed a belligerent posture toward other governments, which is guaranteed to elicit defensive responses from the governments that feel threatened. Violence and threats beget violence and counter-threats.

That pattern of behavior is a threat to the global community, meaning *us*. It is an inevitable consequence of militant nationalism and the warfare system. At this point in history, it requires profound ignorance or willful blindness not to understand this.

The warfare system is a plague and a cancer; militant nationalism is its ideological pathogen. Pervasive in our culture is implicit and explicit propaganda for war; an unremitting, and usually subtle, incitement to violence and to accepting the inevitability of violence.

We are imposing this pathology on ourselves; therefore, it is in our power to stop it. We are after all human beings and not plague bacilli or cancer cells. Human beings are supposed to be smarter than plague bacilli and cancer cells.

Some generation of mankind was eventually bound to face the task of abolishing war, because civilization was bound to endow us sooner or later with the power to destroy ourselves. We happen to be that generation, though we did not ask for the honor and do not feel ready for it. There is nobody wiser who will take the responsibility and solve this problem for us. We have to do it ourselves. (Dyer 1985, 265)

Pessimism about the worst of the possibilities is a waste of time. The human spirit is resilient, and we will endure what we must, as Carthage once endured Rome's conquest, as the Romans endured

their demise in the fifth century C.E., and as Iraqis have endured the plague of militant nationalism over the past quarter century.

Whatever befalls, the essential dynamic will involve not so much a clash of civilizations as a clash of convictions about the value of human life and the conditions that sustain it. That is a conflict that works itself out within each of us as individuals, as well as in communities worldwide.

Within each person — within *you* — there are values and mental pathways that provide information about the chances of human survival. Gratitude and reverence for life tends toward one set of futures; ingratitude and violence against life leads toward another. If life is not worth living, if we place little value on our own potential and even less on the lives of other human beings, then it follows that the human species is not worth saving. And almost all of the things we care about, which assume that the human spirit and human creativity have value, would then, by definition, be of little long-term interest.

Far more interesting to me is another possibility: that if we can significantly change our patterns of thinking and behavior toward healthier alternatives, we may discover a vastly expanded realm of human possibilities. This awakening may also involve a painful awareness of what we have destroyed and lost in the past, and of our own responsibility for that failure. However painful it may be, if it comes, it can enable a far, far better use of the opportunities that remain.

As a global community we are in the process of growing up. In *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community* (2006), David C. Korten outlines five stages in the developmental pathway from the least mature to the most mature orders of human consciousness. Korten bases his map on the work of various psychologists who have studied human social and psychological maturation from infancy to adulthood. This sequence begins with Magical Consciousness, the consciousness of a young child two to six years of age. In this first order of consciousness, the child's behavior is impulsive and driven

by emotions. The child looks to others to make things magically right, and is unable to take responsibility or even recognize the effects of his or her own actions.

The second order of human consciousness, according to Korten's map, is Imperial Consciousness, which normally occurs at about six or seven years of age. One of the discoveries the child makes in this stage of development is that actions have consequences and that pleasing authority figures is often rewarded. There is at this stage no internalized code of ethical behavior, of course. And bad behavior is rationalized with the claim of good intentions, or the dodge that "Everyone else is doing it." It is not difficult to recognize in this pre-adolescent order of consciousness some of the ideational and behavioral hallmarks of our own "adult" political culture. We can also recognize similarities to the ideational framework for quite a few contemporary intellectuals. Yet it is Korten's third order of consciousness, the Socialized Consciousness, that best fits with our dominant political culture today.

The transition from Imperial Consciousness to Socialized Consciousness normally takes place about the age of eleven or twelve years. In the individual, it corresponds to a time in which the norms of a large reference group become internalized. Advances in emotional intelligence and social skills help the individual gain security within a group. The individual learns to do what is necessary to gain acceptance by the group and to support the group against other, competing groups. This stage is associated with acceptance of rules and laws and legitimate authority, and with a morality that endorses such a framework. The individual also finds identity through primary reference groups as defined by "gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, class, political party, occupation, employer and perhaps a favored sports team."

It is the consciousness of the Good Citizens, who have a "Small World" view of reality defined by their immediate reference group, play by the existing rules, and expect a

decent life in return for themselves, their families, and their communities....

Highly adaptive to the dominant cultural and institutional context, the Socialized Consciousness is the foundation of conventional good citizenship. On the downside, it is also susceptible to manipulation by advertisers, propagandists, and political demagogues, and it is prone to demand rights for the members of its own identity group that it is willing to deny others. (Korten 2006, 45–46)

The Socialized Consciousness can be recognized as the level of maturation our political culture has achieved, that of an adolescent. The individual or the culture that has attained Socialized Consciousness may be capable of further growth, or not. Our culture has been stuck in this stage of maturation for a long time. The Socialized Consciousness is at the core of old-paradigm thinking and guarantees the Option B choice that we are making as a global community.

Encounters with people from other cultures, from identity groups outside one's own, can lead individuals to transcend their Socialized Consciousness to what Korten calls Cultural Consciousness, the fourth order of maturation of human consciousness. This step involves a recognition that cultural diversity, like biodiversity, is a natural and healthy phenomenon. Cultural consciousness is a "profound step in the development of a true moral consciousness based on examined moral principles."

A Cultural Consciousness is rarely achieved before age thirty, and the majority of those who live in modern imperial societies never achieve it, partly because most corporations, political parties, churches, labor unions, and even educational institutions actively discourage it. Each of these institutions has its defining belief system

to which it demands loyalty.... But because those who achieve a Cultural Consciousness have the capacity to question the dysfunctional cultural premises of Empire, they are the essential engines of the cultural renewal and maturation.... Persons who have achieved a Cultural Consciousness have an “Inclusive World” view that sees the possibility of creating inclusive, life-affirming societies that work for all. (Ibid., 46–47)

Korten’s fifth order of consciousness, Spiritual Consciousness, is one in which creativity in service to others becomes a source of self-actualization and joy. Korten describes Spiritual Consciousness as “the highest expression of what it means to be human” (Ibid., 47). This is a level of awareness in which conflict and paradox become new opportunities for growth, and what seemed to be constraints become the means of self-transcendence. He sees this deepening awareness of life’s possibilities as an integral part of the process in which the individual relates to diverse people and situations.

The Spiritual Consciousness joins the Cultural Consciousness in seeking to change unjust laws. It recognizes, however, that at times it must engage in acts of principled nonviolent civil disobedience both to avoid being complicit in the injustice and to call the injustice to public attention. It undertakes such acts with awareness of the potential legal consequences. (Ibid., 48)

It is in self-actualization at the spiritual level of maturation that the necessary connection between personal well-being and the health of the global community becomes obvious. It is also at this level that the diametric differences between Option A Christians and Option B Christians can no longer be obscured. It is Option A Christians, Muslims, and Jews who can achieve Spiritual Consciousness. This concept is entirely in accord with the concepts

presented by Korten. Option B Christians, Muslims, and Jews are stuck at an earlier stage of maturation, however famous they may be as religious figures. This is why the designation “Christian” or “Muslim” or “Jew” is so meaningless in spiritual terms.

Among the contemporary writers and visionaries who have understood this is Eknath Easwaran. His many excellent contributions include a three-volume work, *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living* (1975–84). It is profoundly important that India’s ancient scripture, on which Eknath Easwaran’s book is based, uses the metaphor of a battle for the challenge facing each of us in life. The adversary, however, is not someone or something “out there,” but the Ego within each of us, which separates us from what we could become. To overcome that adversary requires tremendous discipline and dedication to the service of others. It is exactly this that we admire in the good soldier. It is not the discipline and the dedication to serving others that is the fatal flaw in the military or the soldier. It is that they have chosen service to something that is self-destructive, militant nationalism, which is to the nation and to the global community what the Ego is to the individual. Until this recognition dawns in our consciousness, we will continue down the road to Option B.

The purpose of this book is not to prompt a debate but to clarify a choice. It is not for me to make that choice for you, but I must state the choice as clearly as I can. The consciousness that dominates current history must be transcended if there is to be any hope of moving toward brighter human options. If we want Option A, then we will have to bring governments into compliance with law. Human well-being, not state power, must become the priority. The new paradigm is the *sine qua non* for progress toward Option A.

Your choice

The personal is historic. There is an undiscovered country within you. Through the exploration and development of that country, you can bring to the world something no other can achieve. Each generation leaves a legacy for the next: a set of problems and a set of opportunities. Your life and work will contribute in some way to the legacy your generation leaves for those who follow.

The generation that abolished slavery, the generation that established the vote for women, and the generation that established a five-day work week each created opportunities for us. Those generations swept aside all the false arguments for why it could not be done. Our generation will decide whether to establish a rule of international law as the framework for human security and human survival.

Political leaders are forced to make their decisions from a menu of viable options. It is no longer a viable political option in North America to sell human beings as slaves, to exclude women from public life, or to impose a seven-day work week on any of us.

Today it remains a viable option for our governments to massively escalate international violence, threatening the global community of which we and the generations that follow us are a part. International law is designed to remove that option. In the culture of militant nationalism, there will always be intellectuals who insist on maintaining it. They dismiss international law as unrealistic. They are the false prophets of our time.

What about tomorrow? For each of us, it is an option to support international law. *Awareness* of the requirements of international law, and of some of the major derelictions from those requirements by home and allied governments, is within easy reach of most adults. *Support* for organizations and for individuals who insist on government compliance with international law is also within easy reach. *Active engagement* in responsible, informed citizenship, in initiatives that promote your government's compliance with law

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and respect for health of the global community and human life, is also well within the reach of many.

To act on that opportunity is the essence of real democracy. Real democracy requires active, informed, responsible citizenship, using the prescriptions and honoring the requirements of law. Genuine democracy subordinates state power to a profound respect for human life. And it recognizes that the framework of international law is necessary for making that value system stick. Richard Falk, Albert G. Milbank Professor of International Law and Practice, Princeton, goes a step further:

I believe that as an American citizen I would be better served by a government that accepted the constraints of law as surely in international affairs as in domestic. Indeed, I would even contend that the next leap forward in legitimate governance will be giving citizens an enforceable, constitutional right to a “lawful foreign policy.” (1999)

Will we be able to establish a rule of law and thereby advance the chances of our survival? That is an empirical question. It can only be answered by sustained and visionary efforts to achieve the goal: by relentless pragmatic realism.

Whatever else happens, if you play an active and constructive part in the effort, it will be *your* gift to the future of human survival. Nothing can ever erase what you have contributed. And if your generation is able to establish a rule of law for the global community, it might just be the most important gift any generation has ever given to the world.

The prognosis is yours to decide.