



Adelaide's Lament: Exploring Our Inability to Make Reliable Sense of Our Situation

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Abstract

In Guys and Dolls, Adelaide laments that “the medicine never gets anywhere near where the trouble is.” As a musical number the song is fun. As an insight that too often applies to situations in which we are deeply enmeshed, it is no fun at all. Systemic mistakes tend, at the least, to be embarrassing, painful and expensive. They can be fatal. In the context of an extended conversation on saving the future, a truly interesting question is this, “Might the dominant geo-political understandings of our present situation and the future prospects for humankind be fatally wrong-headed?” Put bluntly, “Are our dominant perceptions, plans and actions to save the future, well-intended, but (inadvertently) ill-directed?” If there is any reasonable chance that the answer to these questions is “yes,” then the content and root assumptions that dominate present geo-political sense-making, planning and action need to be identified, explored and critiqued. A brief version of this task will be attempted. First, we will consider our geo-political situation and future as these are now predominantly seen by those who walk the pathways of power. Second, the limitations of this imagination of our present and future will be identified and critiqued. Third, some of the practical implications of the limitations of the dominant ways of making sense of our prospects will be explored. Fourth, conclusions will be drawn regarding the full range of possible geo-political futures that we may well face. It will be argued, contrary to well-entrenched understandings, that it is not the case that while we face a host of what we see to be Grand Challenges, as we work them through, our modern/Industrial world will be increasingly successful, global and sustainable. Rather; it will be suggested that as a form of civilization we in the modern/Industrial world are in a way more trouble than we now know. As we dig beneath the surface, we will confront the realization that, in principle, human societies and cultures are unsustainable to the extent that they are, or come to be, exemplars of a modern/Industrial form of civilization. We will end with the thought that this realization may well, but need not, be tragic; that the possibility is real that we are in a cosmic romantic comedy; and that we have not yet grasped our situation deeply enough to embody this hope wisely and compassionately. To learn to do so, of course, would mean that a plurality of those in power must come to accept a fundamentally new view of our deep work in the 21st Century – the new work of becoming the first form of civilization in history, consciously, to alter its character and trajectory through history. If these conclusions are at all sound, is hope warranted?

* This article is based on the author's presentation at the Conference on “Saving the Future” organized by The Institute on Religion in an Age of Science held from July 28 to August 4, 2012.

1. Introduction

On my office door there hangs a cartoon from *The New Yorker*. A man is walking past a storefront with a sign in the window advertising the services found within. The sign reads, "Things put in perspective while you wait." This sign captures my sense of my assignment from the universe – for good and ill I am a big picture, context-sensitive, strategically-minded mental map-maker. Therefore, I responded with delight when the organizers of the conference invited me to think about this question: "What may happen politically and economically (and why) in the West and in the Non-West as a result of all the threats, real and imaginary, and what can be done to prevent any disastrous consequence?"

"Our perspectives are not fixed and forever. We can and do change our perspectives. When we do, our past, present and future change."

As suggested by the cartoon on my door, what I have to offer to you are my own reflections and perspectives. They are hard-won and I am doing my best to stake my life on them. But they are nonetheless, just my perspectives. In terms the great American pioneer of serious futures thinking, Willis Harman, used, "There is no requirement that you agree with me. You can get off this bus at any stop along the way." I would add that you may also invite the driver to take a new route.

The good news is that our perspectives are not fixed and forever. We can and do change our perspectives. When we do, our past, present and future change, at least within limits. If this were not the case, none of us would be here. The bad news is caught in the title I have given this talk – Adelaide's Lament. I have always heard the key line of this song as expressing a potential for critical systems error. "The medicine never gets anywhere near where the trouble is." Vivian Blaine, who played the role of Adelaide on Broadway and then in the movie understood this all too well. She always sang the song with an undertone of desperation.

Adelaide understood that when our perspectives are systematically wrongheaded, it is almost certain that our actions, even if thoughtfully well-intended, will be ill-directed. Therefore, it behooves us to become ever more deeply and systematically reflexive. Lest this sound easy, I would remind you that to date no culture even aspires to become a culture of routine reflexivity. As of 2012, we in the West can't even seem to manage more than sporadic moments of being routinely critical, at least in our public affairs.

In light of these things, I invite you to engage with your most critical, generous and reflexively aware selves. John Gardiner, Lyndon Johnson's Secretary of Education, observed that he had enough persons in his life who were *unloving critics*, even enough who were *uncritical lovers*; that what he hungered for were more *loving critics*. So it is with me, and I assume those of us reading this paper.

2. The Now Dominant Understanding of our Geo-Political Situation and Future

I shall explore our geopolitical future in these steps. First, definitions. I was, after all, trained in philosophy. I will say a little about 'geopolitical' and, because it is so central to my

thinking, somewhat more about the phrase ‘modern/Industrial form of civilization’. Second, I will set out my understanding of the core defining content of our modern/Industrial form of civilization. Third, I will sketch what appears to me to be the geopolitical understandings that now dominate modern/Industrial societies. The sketch will help us understand the routine ways that modern/Industrial opinion leaders typically see, anticipate, prepare for and seek to respond to the perceived geopolitical future. Fourth, I shall reflect on and critique the dominant modern/Industrial geopolitical views of our world and future. Finally, I shall conclude with this thought: *In 2012, our deepest challenge as a modern/Industrial form of civilization is not merely the inadequacy of our dominant geopolitical views, but our inability to seriously consider the notion that our form of civilization has no future, no matter how we rejig our geopolitical ideas and ideals. In short, without knowing it we may exemplify the curse identified in Adelaide’s Lament – on our present path our medicine will not get anywhere near where the trouble is, at least not soon enough to make the kind of differences we now require.*

I will end with this question: Is, then, hope warranted?

3. Definitions

I use the term ‘geopolitical’ to indicate and include *the major factors that determine a country’s capacity to assure its future by securing its own territory and identity, and projecting its power and influence beyond its own borders.* My sense of the factors involved is broader than the original denotation of a country’s geographical factors and governance structures. My definition is in keeping with the expansion of the term that occurred in the late 20th Century. Now effective power has come to be seen as a function not only of one’s geography and governance, but also of one’s economy, technology, ideology and demographic profile.

In my view, we cannot stop here. Additional factors must now be included. For example, I include such physical considerations as resource scarcity, climate disruption and ocean acidification. I also add the adequacy of a society’s mythic imagination, its capacity to live in an evolving sense of identity, its capacity for routine reflexive consciousness, and its capacity to act as a conscious co-creator of the future – one that reflects and reinforces its deepest desires.

I have come to distinguish between a *culture* and its current *form of civilization*. For me, this distinction is critical. By ‘*culture*’ I mean not arts and culture, but the totality of a people’s ways of seeing, thinking and being. However, for me, it is not sufficient to use the category of *culture* to capture the deepest and most profound transformations that are afoot within and among us today. Much as cultural differences are not to be overlooked or taken lightly, they do not capture the deepest dynamics of what is going on among humans in the 21st Century. To get at these deeper dynamics and changes I use the phrase ‘*form of civilization.*’

By ‘form of civilization’ I point to the deep and largely unconscious patterns and boundaries of the imagination, thought and practice that characterize a culture that is an exemplar of a particular form of civilization. This implies that *at any given time in human history, if we are to make reliable sense of what has gone on, is going on and may well go on, we must understand both the unique character of every culture and the wider, deeper and longer frame of reference each culture exemplifies, namely, its form of civilization.* I note that a form of civilization is not bound by geography, but by time. This usage implies that it is a mistake to

define civilizational differences as a function of geographic differences. Today's differences between East and West are real, but they hang on a time shift, not simply different locations on the planet.

I readily acknowledge that mine is a stipulated definition of 'civilization.' It differs from the vast array of senses commonly given to this term. Since there is today no coherent and common sense of what is meant by 'civilization' – rather its usage is a dog's breakfast – I feel free to stipulate how I shall use the term. I follow this path, of course, because, at least to my mind, my usage allows me to make more sense of the past, present and future than any other usage.

It also allows me to acknowledge that every form of civilization is a cosmic bet that its grip on reality – what it takes to be real, knowable, known, true, good and beautiful – is reliable enough that the lives of its descendants will be secure if they continue to honour and live by the ways they have inherited. Since we know that human perceptions drive much of human history and that we are often wrong and wrong-headed in what we take as known, it follows that we had best learn to check the adequacy of the form of civilization we are exemplifying, intending, planning for and cosmically counting on.

By distinguishing between a culture and its form of civilization at any given time, we can identify cultural changes that occur within its current civilizational frame of reference and distinguish them from those that indicate that a culture is growing out of its inherited civilizational frame and possibly into another. This distinction is vital because these two types of cultural change have very different dynamics and very different risks for truly tragic outcomes if mishandled. I am suggesting that we must not focus only on the evolution of different cultures as if this is the most important game in town. Such a focus systematically misses a good deal of the length, breadth, depth and drama of the challenges and opportunities we face in the 21st Century. To ignore the larger game of civilizational transformation is to ignore the key changes and dynamics on which our future hangs.

Two examples may help.

First, consider this statement made in a powerful Keynote address in 2009 in Essen, Germany, by my friend and colleague Thomas Homer-Dixon, "*I have come to realize that the solutions to our climate-change crisis will ultimately reside at the level of culture.*" Most who hear this statement will hear it as Homer-Dixon intended it – as a call to include in our attention not merely the technology of climate change but also the much wider and more powerful level of the shape and evolution of the whole culture. While I wholly agree with this call and his use of 'culture', I would add to his statement, "*and the form of civilization it manifests.*" In my view, the changes he is pointing to and calling for not only entail a transformation of our *culture*, but an evolution of a *new form of civilization*. It may be that our future hangs on understanding and operationalizing this difference. If it does, the distinction matters. Put bluntly, in my view we must sustain success not only as a culture, but as a truly sustainable form of civilization.

Or take Canada. I assume we would all agree that we need to understand what is unique about Canadians, eh? But we must also understand that the only overwhelming ambition Europeans and now others have ever had in Canada has been to create a modern/Industrial

form of civilization. In contrast, those we invaded, whether they were Mohawks, Innu or Cree, while different in their particular cultures, all exemplified a Small Group Nomadic form of civilization. No one in the Canadian drama understood that they themselves were an exemplar of a form of civilization, much less what their own form actually was. All were equally ignorant of the normal dynamics of clashes that have occurred and still occur among cultures that exemplify different forms of civilization. The thorough balls up that has marked European/Aboriginal encounters is not the least bit surprising.

In my *forms of civilization* perspective, these foul-ups are utterly reasonable outcomes, as is our present inability to make deep, reliable and common sense of today's cultural/civilizational mashups. To this day, no shared story of history – no shared strategic narrative – makes sense to all the actors in the human drama. All act as if their inherited story is golden and forever. In such a situation, tragedy is the likely outcome. If you see echoes of this kind of confusion in our invasions of Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq you may be beginning to get my drift.

As I consider our history as a species, I find it useful to distinguish five forms of civilization. I will list them in the order in which they emerged. Only the first four are now exemplified in actual human cultures and societies. First, Small-group Nomadic forms. I note that this was the only form for 95% of our life as a species. Then Settled Regional forms of civilization emerged. Then Settled Empires. Finally, over the last 1000 years, the modern/Industrial form has been developed. In these terms, this conference can be seen as a dialogue dedicated to ensuring that our time does not see the premature end of the human story. We live in the hope that if we play our cards well, the future may yet see the emergence of a truly post-Industrial or trans-modern form of civilization. These latter names, of course, are only primary lace-holders until we figure out the nature of the beating heart of the next form of civilization, should we live long enough to come to embody it with any degree of consistency.

This understanding implies that any given *form of civilization* is not static and forever. If the conditions are right, a new form of civilization can emerge from an existing form. If this were not so, there would be only one form of civilization. For good and ill, this is obviously not the case. Consider for example, that the *French*, among many other Europeans, have lived in the first four forms of civilization, although, of course, they did not know themselves as French 20,000 years ago. This evolution suggests that we may well find traces of prior civilizational forms in any culture that is no longer Small group Nomadic. I note that the Hebrew/Christian tradition also runs through these four forms – from “*A wandering Aramean was my father...*” to “*We shall have a King like the others,*” through the Roman Catholic church of Settled Empire and on through the Reformation to modern/Industrial mainline Protestant churches. Americans and Canadians, on the other hand, save for our aboriginals, have lived our whole lives within the modern/Industrial form of civilization. Does this account, in part, for our frequent misreading of and impatience with those who knew earlier forms?

In any case, it is clear to me that the diversity we celebrate is diversity within the modern/Industrial frame. Those who would challenge this frame are not tolerated. In this perspective, what we call “development” can be seen as an attempt to move a given culture from its inherited form of civilization into the modern/Industrial form. That this fact is not understood, and even often denied, is a major source of confusion both for folks in developing countries and those of us in modern/Industrial societies.

I would argue that this perspective can re-frame our well-intended but almost wholly misbegotten ways of creating public policy about human security, social welfare, innovation, multiculturalism, Islam, globalisation, the clash of civilizations, development and East/West differences. One policy implication is clear – we should stop promising persons in any existing culture, including our own, that they have the right to maintain their present form of civilization forever. Whatever our intentions, this is a promise we simply *cannot* keep. Given the actual dynamics of this planet and human life, no way of life is non-negotiable and forever.

4. The Emergence of Modern/Industrial Cultures and Societies

My second task is to sketch my understanding of the core character of our modern/Industrial form of civilization. Having an adequate grasp of who we are and why is a necessary but not sufficient condition for saving the future. I note that relatively little is actually written about the quintessential characteristics of the modern/Industrial form of civilization. If McLuhan was right that fish don't know they live in water, then this condition is to be expected. It is also to be expected because, as we will see, ignoring the root character of whole systems is typical of modern/Industrial societies.

“Ignoring the root character of whole systems is typical of modern/Industrial societies.”

It is useful to remember that the modern/Industrial form of civilization grew out of pre-Industrial forms of settled civilization, namely Regional Empires and Regional Settlements. Assuming that the modern/Industrial form did not break in every respect with what went before, it is useful to ask, *“Which defining characteristics of the earlier forms of civilization were inherited by the modern/Industrial form and which were developed as truly novel?”*

My response is that one of the two deepest defining characteristics of modern/Industrial civilization is a continuation from the past. I refer to the deeply held sense that ultimate reality is timeless and changeless; that truth, if reliably known, is the same for all persons in all places at all times; that the logic of contradiction and contrariety both hold; and that certainty is a mark of true knowledge. It follows that in a classic modern/Industrial culture life will be organized, both inside and out, hierarchically. The practical reason is that for large scale purposes someone must be in charge. The ultimate reason, of course, is that in order to get organized at all as humans we must assure ourselves that we have reliable access to eternal truth, even if only through a great chain of being, with a god-king as the key link between heaven and earth.

This hierarchical sense can be seen in Ken Boulding's doggerel, *“In every organization from root to crown, ideas flow up and vetoes flow down.”* Command and control are of the essence. It follows that the whole point of human life is to learn to live on earth in the ways that best reflect and reinforce our knowledge of the unchanging eternal. *As above, so below.* Obedience to the eternal is also built in. As Pope Paul IV, the first Pope to visit the USA, reminded Americans as he flew out of Detroit, even if one disagrees with him, to be Roman Catholic is to understand the requirement that to be faithful to Christ is to obey him as Pope. Given the presupposition of static reality and timeless truth, this claim is reasonable and to be expected. Finally, I note that a sense of hierarchy is not Western or Eastern. It shows up in

every culture that exemplifies the Regional Empire, Regional Settled or modern/ Industrial forms of civilization.

“Once on the path of fragmentation, we soon learned to think of physics without philosophy or even the history of physics, fact without value, the secular apart from the sacred, commerce without ethics, nations as sovereign entities, and solipsistic individuals as sufficiently primordial to require a social contract in order to have obligations to each other and a common sense of societal authority.”

But to the present Pope’s consternation, the West did not remain wholly faithful to the Regional Empire form of civilization into which the church was born. We developed a new insight that came to deeply define the modern/Industrial West. While we kept the sense of static reality and the hierarchy that goes with it, over the last 1,000 years the West cut a new swath in history. We in the modern West moved slowly and incoherently from our pre-modern/Industrial default sensibility of a deep holistic grasp on reality to the sense we now still largely take for granted, at least for most public and private purposes: whole systems and entities are made of pieces, that are themselves made of pieces and that the pieces are ultimately more real than the wholes they together constitute. In short, the holistic grasp on reality that marks all forms of civilization prior to the modern/Industrial was fragmented by the modern/Industrial into stand-alone pieces. The roots of this journey run very deep. In the Thirteenth Century time was fragmented by mechanical clocks and by Aquinas who authorized us to think about the earth apart from God. I know that Aquinas is not normally taught as a father of our modern/Industrial world, but he is. Once on the path of fragmentation, we soon learned to think of physics without philosophy or even the history of physics, fact without value, the secular apart from the sacred, commerce without ethics, nations as sovereign entities, and solipsistic individuals as sufficiently primordial to require a social contract in order to have obligations to each other and a common sense of societal authority. I note in passing that all of these developments, at best, are puzzling, if not offensive, to those with a pre-modern/Industrial sensibility. Most would pay it no heed if we did not have more money and better weapons.

This evolution can also be seen in Western art and architecture. As Northrop Frye observed, *“In what our culture produces, whether it is art, philosophy, military strategy or political and economic development, there are no accidents; everything a culture produces is equally a symbol of that culture.”* Again, I would add, *“and its form of civilization.”*

I invite you to answer this question: *“What are the major features of a society that assumes and exemplifies a sensibility that is the product of the tension between these two deeply defining assumptions about reality: One, that reality is static, not dynamic. Two, that reality is made up of and can be known as separate pieces – pieces which then can be added together to result in wholeness?”* Sadly, or happily, we do not have the time. Therefore, I will simply assert that it is my experience that a variety of possible cultures, all of which embody and reinforce the modern/Industrial form of civilization, can be inferred from the tension and

interaction between these two fundamental ontological and epistemological assumptions. I note that no well-trained Jesuit would be surprised or bothered by this assertion. I note further, that the resulting form of civilization is isomorphic with our modern/Industrial form of civilization.

Let me offer you, then, my understanding of some of the core elements of the mythology that has come to dominate and shape the modern/Industrial form of civilization, and therefore, modern/Industrial cultures. For me this is not a random list. Rather the following features are entailed in the interaction of the two deep assumptions that underlie our way of being in the world. Given variations in time, geography or among cultures these features will not all show up to the same degree or in the same ways. But they are present as defining features of all cultures that can be characterized as developed modern/Industrial cultures.

- A modern/Industrial society will have a reductionist/materialist bias – physical realities will be seen as not merely more obvious, but as more real than subtle realities that touch us gently. In the Rock, Paper, Scissors game of such societies, numbers always trump metaphors and anecdotes. On this point, every Chamber of Commerce agrees with Karl Marx.
- In human terms, individual persons are seen as the primary units of reality and each individual is complete in him or herself.
- Nation-states are spaces where persons who are culturally similar live together. Each nation-state is a sovereign unit unto itself and must not be intruded on by those external to it, not even by the UN's recently declared "responsibility to protect.."
- Within the society, life is divided into public and private realms – matters that are shared and common to all (the public realm) are divided from those that are unique to each individual (the private realm). In the public realm, the same rules must apply to all without discrimination. The price that must be paid for each of us to legitimately have an idiosyncratic private life is that our subjectivity cannot be taken into public space as if it belongs there. Don't bring it to the office. For example, in Ontario, you cannot know anything about my private persona for public purposes. If you want to hire me it is illegal to ask me what schools I attended. The reason is that I may have gone to St. Michael's and then you might think I am Roman Catholic – a private matter that by law you may not know for public purposes. Public space, common to us all, is itself divided into self-contained sectors in some way or other. One type of division now common is the Triple Bottom Line with its economic, environmental and social sub-sectors.
- Institutions in every public sector are organized hierarchically.
- Economic matters trump all others. Their primary function is to increase material wealth.
- They do this primarily by increasing the scope and efficiency of material throughput. Within economics, money dominates all other economic considerations.
- Human life is seen as a production/consumption function. The good life is defined and measured by one's "command over goods and services." A well-functioning economy is a consumer-based economy. Social policy is primarily about how much access to goods and services the poor and those with special needs should have.

- The bias to reductionism results in a bias to reify human affairs into separate and self-contained realms, e.g. politics, commerce, science, religion, art. NOMA is an expected perspective.
- The bias to experience and treat reality in pieces is legitimized by a host of boundaries. One outcome is that all matters beyond the boundaries of our present concerns and purposes are defined as ‘externalities’ that we can safely afford to ignore.
- Critical-mindedness is required in public life. Deep reflexivity is restricted to private life. Even there it is optional.

I must pause for a moment and deal with a matter that is surely arising in some of you. I have said that we need to learn to see, explore, think through, understand and factor into our commitments and decisions the fact that in 2012 there are now four main forms of civilization exemplified on the planet -- Small-group Nomadic forms, Settled Regional forms, Settled Empire forms, modern/Industrial forms. I have also said that we in the modern West exemplify the modern/Industrial form. And I have defined the modern/Industrial form on the basis of two deep ontological/epistemological assumptions – static and piecemeal reality. Yet, I can hear you saying that today’s world is also marked by dynamic systems and complexity, not static pieces. In what sense, Ruben, are we in the West still truly modern/Industrial?

This is a good and important question. My reading of the data suggests the following sketch of a response. First, I wholly agree that in 2012 there are many emerging features of our lives and societies, including the category of emergence, that are incompatible with our still being seen as a pure form of a modern/Industrial culture and form of civilization. Apparently, we may already be growing into something that is not just a new culture, but a new form of civilization. This, of course, is one of the possibilities to which I want to point.

Second, there is evidence that a culture does not shift from one form of civilization suddenly and completely, but slowly, unconsciously and incoherently. This implies that at any given time in history we have to ask of any given culture, “*To what extent is it deeply coherent?*” By ‘coherent’ I mean that the cognitive content of the fundamental structures and patterns of its physical artifacts, thought patterns and imagination are essentially aligned and isomorphic; that they reflect and reinforce the same dominant mythic form of civilization. I raise the question of coherence because there are limits to how incoherent a culture can become and still be a well-functioning culture.

Third, regarding any given society at any given time we need to learn to distinguish between two profoundly different types of diversity and incoherence. The first arises because a society encounters artifacts, thoughts and mythic structures that, while different from its own, are from cultures that also exemplify the same form of civilization. Up until roughly 10,000 years ago, this type of diversity was the only type experienced by our species. Today, I think of encounters between the Mohawk and the Cree, or the modern Greeks and Germans. The other case arises from encounters with cultures that exemplify a form of civilization different from one’s own. I note again that we now have four forms of civilization encountering one another. I think of encounters between Americans and Chinese or Canadians and Aborigines. By and large these types of encounter do not go well. In large part this is because, without a grasp of the differences in their forms of civilization, those engaged in the encounters are prone to systematically misconstrue the other and therefore the encounter with the other.

5. The Dominant Geopolitical Views of modern/Industrial Cultures and Societies

My third task is to sketch my understanding of the consensus geopolitical understandings and expectations that dominate modern/Industrial cultures and societies. My reading of the literature of official organizations suggests there is wide publicly-expressed agreement on the following features of the future as we move to mid-century.

- The most unsettling feature is that the future will not only be more turbulent, but more uncertain. To modern/Industrial persons and societies this is literally ungodly.
- Phenomenologically the world will be increasingly global. We will be more connected to each other and more mutually interdependent. In short, globalization as a phenomenon means we are stuck with each other; there is no place to hide. For an increasing number of purposes, global is the smallest scale at which we must now see and think things through as we act. It is dawning on us that Jesus' admonition to "*Pray for your enemies*" must now be heard as a counsel of prudence, not morality. There is less and less chance that an age-old human aspiration can continue to be fulfilled – our enemies can die while we and our loved ones will live in peace and prosperity. I note that this phenomenological sense of globalization is overshadowed by a second sense of this term.
- *Globalization* is also the name of the greatest missionary movement in history – the project driven by modern/Industrial societies to sweep all others into the modern/ Industrial form of civilization. This is the sense and use of 'globalization' that shows up most commonly in the media, in business and in government reports. 'Globalization', in this sense, entails extending modern/Industrial free market economies to the ends of the earth. Markets, of course, establish value by monetary price. Winners are selected on the basis of their ability to pay. The extension of modern/Industrial market economies is the West's new crusade. This time, those to be converted are mostly eager to believe because Globalization in this sense is a new Cargo Cult. We are opening 1,000 business schools a year, mostly in cultures not yet modern/Industrial. Virtually all are seen as a sign of progress.
- The economy is the hands-down winner of the prize for the most important societal sector. The economy must grow or die. Economic growth is both a Good Thing and a *sine qua non* of survival. The great hope lies in the rising middle class of emerging markets. We're good as long as we are producing enough consumers and they have enough cash to keep us all afloat. As HKSBS says in airports around the world, "*The world belongs to those who see possibilities.*" The unspoken implication is, "*we mean possibilities for economic growth, for profit, for money-making.*" The possibilities for disaster are not to be raised in polite modern/Industrial conversations.
- The economy is itself divided into sub-sectors. The most important, by far, is money. The unspoken drive of a modern/Industrial culture is to create a future that is safe for money. Schumpeter's *creative destruction* applies to all, save money. In this regard, money trumps all else. Its acquisition has become the main game. Money has taken

over the high altar in our temples. Without monetary motivation nothing serious is even considered, much less accomplished in the public realm.

- Given the above factors, life will be increasingly competitive for nations, firms, communities and individuals. Sustained success requires a more intense focus on economic growth. Consider Greece. This slogan is written in marble outside its Ministry of Economic Development, *“Building a competitive Greece.”* This is now the official impulse of virtually all countries and international government and business bodies.
- The two things for which one must compete most strenuously are first, international money for investment and second, executive talent. Competing for these requires the creation of *“favorable business conditions.”* Low taxes, little regulation, and growing rich/poor gaps. Quantification, planning, efficiency and productivity are the order of the day. Lesser matters pale into comparative insignificance. For example, science is important not in itself but as a source of technology, which is primarily of value if it can be commercialized. Commercialization is critical because it is the only sure way to turn knowledge into cash. *STI* is not only a widely understood and used set of initials – science, technology and innovation – but the sweet spot of the core strategy for future growth in virtually all modern/Industrial cultures and companies.
- Asia, especially China and, secondarily, India, will continue to rise in both power and influence. Asia, Europe and North America are the three big regions for the future. Latin America and Russia are secondary, Africa an afterthought, the Middle East a problem. The big overarching questions are, *“Will China risk war to ensure its access to resources and maintain its social cohesion on its march towards modernity, as did Japan at a similar stage of development three generations ago?”* The secondary question is, *“Will the USA gracefully accept and work with new partners as collaborators, not rivals?”*
- The whole world will be increasingly enabled by ITC platforms that are themselves increasingly interconnected and capable of replacing routine human actions. The web is no longer just for persons, but for things.
- There is a huge ambiguity about the nature and character of human beings in modern/Industrial cultures. On the one hand, the dignity of each private individual is held up as the highest value by which all else must be measured. But this is an official view of our subjective reality; a reality that has no serious status for public purposes. A person’s inner life has no place in public and no economic value. Rather, individuals are seen for public purposes as producers and consumers. In public, life is essentially seen as a production/consumption function that is itself measured by throughput. Accordingly, humans are just another form of capital; resources for the economy. It follows that education is a public good to ensure that we have the workforce to produce goods and services efficiently and that educated persons have access to the goods and services of the economy. Without a good education a person runs the risk of not being able to get into the economy either as a producer or consumer. In such cases, death is always an option.
- In sum, the character of a modern/Industrial culture is largely determined by the shape and success of its economy. The momentum of modern/Industrial cultures is *“on-*

ward", which is incidentally the official slogan of my city – Calgary. The demand of a modern/ Industrial culture is always for *more*.

- Finally, there is a deep consensus that TINA holds. TINA is Margaret Thatcher's famous phrase, "*There is no alternative.*" It expresses the sense that is widespread among those who own and govern us, that for good and ill we have created our modern/Industrial beds and now we must sleep in them. There is no way off this particular wheel. Globalization as a project is our only hope. This implies that future societal transformations must be evolutions within the modern/Industrial form of civilization, not transformations of it.

I note that virtually none of the literature that claims to be about a post-Industrial or knowledge-based future escapes the deepest imaginative ruts of the modern/Industrial world. Whether the talk is of a knowledge economy, a green economy or a biotech future, the conversation always is rooted in the acquisition of money as the key move in the game of life, both for persons and for whole societies. And, it must also be acknowledged that as of today no society aspires to plough a new civilizational furrow. None has even a vague notion about how it would go about consciously cooperating with its own evolution in order to develop into a culture that manifests a truly new form of civilization. The question of how we might hip-check a whole culture onto a new civilizational path is simply not asked.

"All challenges mask opportunities."

Given the above, it is not surprising that the official attitude to the major issues we face today and those we anticipate for tomorrow is that, "*Yes, we face some Grand Challenges. Climate change, productivity, governance structures and societal cohesion are just four of two dozen equally important issues. There are obstacles to be overcome. But, all challenges mask opportunities and, ultimately, all are amenable to the application of large amounts of cash, technology and human ingenuity. We face nothing so profoundly distressing that we have to change our essential character.*"

6. A Critique of the Dominant Geopolitics of the modern/Industrial Form of Civilization

I want to begin my critique of the dominant geopolitical views of modern/Industrial cultures in what may appear to be a strange manner. I want to acknowledge the many blessings of the modern/Industrial form of civilization. Nothing in what follows is to be taken as a lack of admiration and gratitude for what we have become.

At a trivial level, I happily recognize both that I would not be alive and we would not be here were it not for the development over the last 1000 years of our modern/Industrial ways of seeing, thinking and living. More important is the fact that even if it is the case, as it seems to me to be, that we must now consciously leave our modern/Industrial identity behind, we can only do so because our ancestors once grew into this identity, often at huge cost to themselves and those they loved. What is more, they taught us that integrity demands that we trust the universe enough to do our best to follow our data wherever it takes us, even if it is to and beyond the edges of our form of civilization. And, at our best, we are actually doing so. The unique possibility that is before us in the 21st Century – that we can consciously embrace our

role as co-creators of a new form of human civilization – is only possible because many before us committed to paths that came together as the modern/Industrial form of civilization and they did so with great commitment and integrity.

But, as some are now saying, it is time to grow up and move on as a form of civilization. I hope that by now you will have some inkling of the tone and nature of my critique of the dominant modern/Industrial geopolitical understanding of the present and its anticipations of the future. The core is this:

“Treating symptoms without getting at the underlying syndrome is ultimately a fool’s game.”

Officially, our modern/Industrial cultures are in a way more trouble than we know or are prepared for because we cannot make reliable enough sense of our world to save the future. And, we just cannot bring ourselves to believe that this is so because we have been so inordinately successful by every material measure. Virtually all of the evidence we can see points to this conclusion as rational. As is always the case with tragedy, the hero’s failure is rooted in that which he cannot see. So it is with us. As of 2012, the thought that we require a civilizational frame change has not yet occurred to us in any serious and public way. Nor has the thought that much that troubles us stems not from a clash of civilizations, at least not as this phrase is commonly used, but from a clash of forms of civilization.

- Consider that the Grandest of Grand Challenge – the need for and fact of civilizational frame change – is not on the list of Grand Challenges of any significant organization in the world. This work is simply neither seen nor assigned. Today’s deepest dream is a familiar one – let us keep the modern/Industrial game going. Even the thought that we face a challenge that is civilizational in scope is only now beginning to emerge, at least as this is measured by articles with this focus in peer reviewed journals.
- The thought that climate disruption may not only be a major challenge but also a symptom of a yet deeper malady is not on our minds, in our labs or on our agendas. In saying this, I fully realize that symptoms can kill you. They are not to be taken lightly. I also know that treating symptoms without getting at the underlying syndrome is ultimately a fool’s game.
- None of the topics raised on *understanding and dealing with systemic risk* is actually intended to see, explore, understand and respond to whole systems civilizational risk. As far as I can make out there is not one significant institution – by this I mean something larger than a Philosophy department – that is dedicated to identifying and exploring, let alone responding to civilizational risks in a truly whole systems manner. The world’s first research centre for whole systems civilizational risk is yet to be founded. There is an opportunity here for earning significant global influence for the persons who first grasp this challenge at a scale to get the job done.

A second line of thought is simply that we now know better than to continue to assume and live as if Newtonian mechanics reflects and reinforces the most accurate and fundamental statement we can make about of the nature of reality.

- If we in the modern/Industrial West were a company going public with its first IPO and we asked the broker what type of company is making the offer, the answer would be that we are a *pure technology play*. *STI is the sum and substance of our game*. Of course, this is to be expected of a modern/Industrial culture. The source of my sadness is that as with 9/11 the knowledge is already in our system to tell us that it is a grave mistake to follow our normal inherited biases; that we would be far better off to figure out why we are in trouble, than we will be if we just follow our inherited inclinations in dealing with the trouble we can easily see. The point I am making is that we suffer not from counter-intuitive reality, but from counter-reality intuitions fed by hubris. In public space this is a thought we cannot imagine and speak, much less ponder and flow with.

A third line of thought is that the price of hanging tough with the modern/Industrial form of civilization is simply too high for all that we hold dear.

- Allow me to return to the topic of development and globalization as an economic project. This movement is sweeping the world. We tell people in developing countries, now called “emerging markets”, not to worry. All that happens is for your own good and you can keep your own culture while you develop a modern economy. No one tells them that to succeed they have to change their form of civilization. The reason, I am suggesting, is that the missionaries themselves are not aware of this requirement. So we think not of the autonomous villages of India, one of Gandhi's three defining marks of Indic culture, and the human and public disruption that will be caused by the “modernization” of India's food system. The coming strife and turmoil will surprise us.. We will blame their poor administration, not the corruption of our imagination. To us, and we hope soon to India, modernization is by definition a Good Thing.

China and Singapore both claim to have finessed cultural change by being state-driven societies and economies. It seems to be working. No one talks of the fact that state-capitalism requires that the modern/Industrial genie is let out of the bottle just as much as does private capitalism. Neither we nor the Chinese consider that for the first time in 5,000 years China may not be able to conquer her conquerors by capturing them in her pre-existing culture. In my view, such ignorance is not only convenient, but deeply dangerous and cognitively reprehensible.

- One final example. Even after the global credit crisis, which by some estimates cost 20 trillion dollars world-wide, we cannot bring ourselves to see, seriously assess and respond to the risks to our future of the fact that through derivatives private firms can, in effect, create money. What is more, they have done so in the last three decades in volumes that simply dwarf the value of the so called “real economy.” If the CIA can be believed, the 2011 estimate of the total GDP of the world was 70 trillion in US dollars. The value of the derivatives market is estimated to be between 600 and 1200 trillion. Given that the derivatives market is unregulated, no one really knows. The implication is clear, serious money can now destroy any economy it sets its mind to. Iceland, Ireland, Greece, Spain and Italy may just be practice for the real thing – Europe and the USA.

By now you can see that I have come to the view that we are in much deeper trouble than we know and that, at least officially, this is unknown and almost unknowable. All of this has me wondering if it is possible that such a deep and now deadly grip on our imagination, and therefore our minds and lives, is what Paul meant by the phrase we translate as principalities and powers; that our bias to read these words literally as referring to Rome may be a modern/Industrial mistake?

It is time to keep the promise I made earlier – to offer this thought as a conclusion: *In 2012, our deepest challenge as a modern/Industrial form of civilization is not merely the inadequacy of our dominant geopolitical views, but our inability to seriously consider the notion that our form of civilization has no future no matter how we rejig our geopolitical ideas and ideals. In short, we may exemplify the curse identified in Adelaide's Lament – on our present path our medicine will not get anywhere near where the trouble is, at least not soon enough to make the kind of differences we now require.*

I also promised that I would end with this question: Is, then, hope warranted?

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