



## Is the World Floundering or Has She a Vision?

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### Abstract

*To all appearances the world seems to be floundering without leadership, direction or even a clear formulation of goals and processes. Yet, paradoxically, amidst the apparent chaos and confusion, evolutionary patterns of advance somehow seem to emerge, universal values become ever more prevalent and powerful as deep drivers and determinates, a more than conventional wisdom seems to guide situations where conventional wisdom is stymied or blinded by dogma and superstition, and susceptible ignorant masses sooner or later choose a course that leads to the future rather than back to the past. This progressive movement is far from steady and often interspersed with retrograde steps and descends into utter folly and vicious violence, but all the same a direction seems to emerge that defies the expectations of scientific projections and doomsday prophets. Despite our adoration of rationality, irrationality prevails even in the halls of knowledge. Bursts of extraordinary creativity follow episodes of suicidal stupidity. Humanity's predilection to self-destruction exists side by side with a serendipitous capacity for creativity and coming to our senses just in the nick of time to avert calamity. Pessimists decry the negative tendency. Optimists affirm the positive. None seem able to discern the pattern or process by which challenges become opportunities and imminent disaster is transmuted into progress. A key to deciphering this enigma lies in the invisible, yet to be realized potentials of the individual and society. This clumsy, costly, painful process is the mark of a still largely unconscious species struggling to discover its raison d'être and the secret of conscious evolution. Utopian ideals discredited by a world disillusioned by false promises exhibit a remarkable regenerative power to advance toward unseen goals. An unrealized vision founded on universal values guides us toward an inevitable destiny we have yet to conceive. Those seed values represent the quintessence of wisdom for humanity's survival, development and future evolution.*

Though the two World Wars are long over and the Cold War is also a thing of the past, humanity is still troubled by the fact that nuclear weapons remain with us. *Nor is there any semblance of realistic thinking about global warming or the economic crisis.* In the Fall of 1989, Soviet President Gorbachev and German Chancellor Kohl speculated that it might be decades before German reunification could be achieved. Just two days later, the Berlin Wall fell and their perception of reality was radically altered. Might our view of future possibilities be similarly obscured?

Such instances are not rare in history. In January 1947, wise men in Indian politics wondered whether India would ever become free. In March Lord Mountbatten arrived with

a mandate to transfer power within fifteen months' time. On June 3<sup>rd</sup> he accelerated the timetable to August 15, 1947, nearly a year earlier than first envisioned.

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What do such incidents tell us? They indicate that the world is secretly alive with a mission and determined course of action, which neither the actors nor the beneficiaries seem to be aware of. Such incidents have taken place in different parts of the world. England became alive with a sense of mission in May 1940 when German war planes raided the British skies. Hitler expected to win the decisive Battle of Britain within a few months. Instead, it was Germany that had to retreat ignominiously. America had a similar experience when FDR assumed power in 1933 in the middle of the Great Depression era. Within a few weeks he ended the US banking crisis, which had led to the failure of more than 6000 banks in the previous three years.

Humanity does possess a vision and responds with gratitude to its realization. We see a leader carefully preparing a speech. Half way through he is inspired to set aside the prepared text and speak extemporaneously, setting out a decisive new vision and new course of action. When hundreds of thousands of veterans assembled from all over Europe to defeat the French revolutionary army, Nature placed the genius of a Napoleon on the other side and radically altered the outcome. Establishing democracy against the entrenched powers of monarchy and feudalism in Europe required the strength of a dictator. So too, crisis is often a necessary condition for rapid social progress. The impending danger of famine in India was averted by the timely awakening of the Indian farmer, who turned a potential disaster into an evolutionary opportunity for growth, making the famine-prone country self-sufficient in food production within five years.

The world's computer experts anticipated a potentially catastrophic Y2K problem at the turn of the new millennium. But the event passed away without a single significant incident. Global awareness and determined preparedness changed the course. Since the last century or more, mankind has been troubled by the specter of rising population. Two hundred years ago, Malthus predicted widespread famine in Europe as population growth outstripped food production, yet global population has grown seven-fold since then and the expected calamity has been averted. This led to the birth of the science of demography, which functions by projections and forecasts. Recently, however, it has been recognized that apart from its negative aspects, population has beneficial aspects also. A new vision is emerging that views expanding population as an asset rather than as a liability. What was once perceived as a burdensome problem is now coming to be perceived as a strength. What appeared to us as dangers and inescapable disasters acquire new color as opportunities and potentials when we

become more conscious. Space and Time that appeared to be absolutes are now viewed as relative from the perspective of Relativity Theory.

The radical changes that have occurred during the post-war years defy imagination. Cyberspace has united the world as never before. After centuries of incessant rivalry and military confrontation, Europe is striving to forge a model for the peaceful union of states similar to that of the USA. Communism has abandoned the illusion of a centralized economy and shifted to free enterprise. Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence that appeared utopian at the time, served as the inspiration for the American Civil Rights Movement and the abolition of apartheid in South Africa. Women have acquired an awareness of their civil and political liberties and are no longer awed by the bondage of marriage. Communists long protested that property is a form of theft which should be abolished. Now a number of billionaires around the world are disenchanted with the unbridled accumulation of property for their children and are actively giving it away for the benefit of humanity. Such incidents are a sharp reminder that the world is not a blindly blundering entity. It is moved by a vision and that movement has a direction.

Man gives little thought to the creative capacities of his own mind. The World Academy's past President Harlan Cleveland reminded us about the subtle creative powers of the mind with respect to ideas. **He made a notable observation that the mind possesses infinite creative power that does not get diminished no matter how much knowledge it gives away.** This illustrates the principle formulated in the *Upanishads* about the powers of Infinity, "Complete minus complete is complete."

So too, society is a marvel with infinite capacity for accomplishment, but we rarely stop to reflect on its remarkable powers. *Language is an ingenious social invention that is not generally appreciated.* Philologists have spent their whole lives trying to understand the nuances of language. The Danish philologist Otto Jespersen excelled even Dr. Samuel Johnson in his study of the English language. Language scholars have stopped short of examining the mystic origins of language. To comprehend society we must try to understand the essence of all social powers and processes.

We can acquire mastery only over things we are conscious of. As long as we do not understand the fundamental principles on which a phenomenon is based, we are powerless to control and harness it. Money is an important instance. It stands as the symbolic power of productive human relationships as expressed in trade. Adam Smith closely examined the principle of division of labor and brought out marvelously its great powers. He also caught a glimpse of the power of money, but refused to delve deeply into the subject and analyze it from first principles. It is time that economists examined the very origins and first principles of Money. There was a time when priests were alarmed by the invention of the telescope and microscope, which they mistook to be instruments of the devil. Today many are alarmed by the adverse effects of the way money behaves. *Money, not knowledge, is the reigning power in the world.* Apart from its symbolic nature, it is also a very creative power.

Over countless millennia, humanity's close observation of physical Nature revealed the secrets of crop production. Agriculture developed when human beings discovered the pro-

found fertility of the soil. *What we call fertility is only another version of creativity.* We can call it the creativity of the soil. It marked a fundamental step in the process of civilization. A greater landmark was humanity's discovery of the creative powers of trade. Trade creates the symbolic power of money, which is the foundation for trust in commercial human relations. In medieval England, the goldsmiths became society's bankers. They discovered the unusual capacity of banks to create money out of financial transactions between people. Physical labor done on farms and in factories produces products and generates money out of those products. Hard-working men were aghast at the sight of bankers sitting at their desks and generating money on the spot. The very notion made them feel cheated. Failing to comprehend the remarkable power of money to multiply, American President Andrew Jackson felt some kind of fraud was being perpetrated and warned the public not to believe in paper notes. Most of the outside world sympathized with him. He had the same mentality as those who disapproved of the telescope, microscope and the theories of Copernicus. There is no historical record of similar opposition to language or to printing, though it would be understandable had there been one.

The world has a vision, but this does not negate the fact that humanity has floundered all through history. We have survived and moved on in spite of our floundering. Unfortunately, it is aggravated by a perceptible tendency to organize misguided wandering into willful insistence on self-destruction. President Jackson's economic 'vision' is only one instance of a recurring trend. Awarding two Nobel Prizes for the development of computerized trading algorithms used in destabilizing financial speculation is another. As Time marched on, Jackson's vision was simply brushed aside and the importance given to money kept on increasing to the point that it has come to possess its creator. As in the case of technology and nuclear weapons, humanity is dominated by its creation.

Although man continues to flounder, the world in general possesses sufficient vision to eventually set on the right course. In spirituality, a decisive visionary moment is known as the Hour of God. We may go one step further and call it *the Hour*. It may even be observed that humanity's insistent floundering over an extended period subconsciously shapes the social vision that proves infallible. This has been occurring in all areas of life and the floundering and vision oppose one another very much as a play of light and darkness.

Humanity fought the First World War as the "war to end all wars". In fact, it became a huge cataclysm that brought the world to the brink of disaster. Yet, it led to the birth of the League of Nations and was accompanied by a rise in world public opinion against warfare. Meanwhile, Hitler prepared Germany for unprecedented aggression, and Britain blindly ignored the threat until war once again broke out. Churchill's attempts to raise an alarm in the British Parliament evoked derisive laughter in the government. Prime Minister Chamberlain flew to Germany to make lasting peace with Hitler and announced to the world that it would be a durable peace. His cabinet endorsed his announcement with full approval. Chamberlain rejected proposals for strengthening the armed forces on the grounds that there was no money for such expenditure. He went a step further and said that his cabinet would sanction money only for programs promoting prosperity. *Hitler grossly betrayed the trust Chamberlain had reposed in him and launched a blatant war of aggression.* The resulting

aggression by the Axis Powers was so powerful that most Englishmen believed surrender was the only option. The world appeared to flounder in the face of this aggression. But the strength of English resistance was grossly underestimated by Hitler, who expected the Battle of Britain to end in a German victory within a few months. He failed to understand how deeply England cherished its liberty and was determined to preserve it. Having lived for nearly a millennium under foreign rulers, Britain valued freedom too much to relinquish it. In spite of the vast superiority of German airpower, it was Germany that had to retreat within a few months, not the British.

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The world values Freedom. Humanity’s march toward freedom may be slow and circuitous, but it is inexorable. Over many centuries, the world has been organizing itself in greater freedom. Freedom is supported by Life. The energy and power generated by freedom enabled the descendants of the American settlers to establish hegemony over the world in a few centuries, surpassing the power acquired by European civilization over a millennium. The French Revolution awoke dazzling hopes of a better future that united broad sections of the population with revolutionary idealism, mythical in character, generating new ideas, energy and initiative. The world has a vision of its own. It does not honor those who blindly grope. In WWII, people who valued freedom were stirred to act, new leadership sprang up, the notion of surrender was abandoned, England responded, the world was saved from military tyranny, democracy came into its own and began to spread. Forty-six democracies were born at the end of the war. Freedom was later extended to over a hundred nations. The Second World War was followed by the founding of the UN and then the EU. War eventually became unthinkable among European nations that had been engaged in incessant warfare for many centuries. *The world’s vision is founded on universal values that often appear as unrealizable, utopian ideals, but their power to move events is real and their progressive realization is inevitable.*

*Humanity is conservative by nature and loves to repeat what it has learnt, whether it be right or wrong.* Man founds a new religion and works hard to spread it all over the world. But his innate conservatism asserts itself and he starts governing the organization in a way that negates the very ideals of the religion itself. Such atavism is characteristic of the way humanity relates to religion, politics and economics. This is an example of floundering which destroys the very institutions created to serve a higher purpose.

The world’s vision expresses itself through such things as the emergence of the Hippy movement, calls for social equality, glasnost and perestroika, etc. Whatever may have been the result of these movements, one solid achievement has been the spread of freedom. The Berlin Wall did fall, liberating East Germans from authoritarian rule and paving the way for the spread of democracy in Eastern Europe. Rosa Parks, the African American woman from

Montgomery, Alabama, who asserted her right to social equality, did live to see the African American community acquire a greater measure of civil rights.

Humanity is creative. It has created more than one civilization. When threatened with extinction by an exploding population, society does rise to the occasion and act, as India ushered in the Green Revolution to avert famine in the 1960s and as the superpowers finally stepped back from the brink of catastrophe to end the Cold War. Greece destroyed itself, but was replaced by Rome. The Roman Empire declined but eventually gave rise to the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, and the rise of democratic values. The remarkable invention of agriculture, which formed the basis for the growth of sedentary civilization, was followed eventually by the wonders of industrialization and a twelve-fold rise in real living standards during the past two centuries. Whatever its pitfalls and dangers, industry now rules the world. The modern money-based economy is its direct offshoot. If material comforts were alone an index of civilization, then we would have to say that humanity today is far more civilized than ever before.

Now and then the world generates a great burst of expansive, creative energy of one type or another and makes a striking advance. Great ideals lie at the root of each such forward movement and are the source of its impetus. At the same time we find a recurrent tendency for retrogression, an incessant urge to go backwards and undo the gains of progress, such as the recent return of power politics and Cold War rhetoric in international relations. The misuse of the power of money is playing that role today. Climate change presents imminent danger. The danger from nuclear weapons, for long thought remote, reemerges as a real and present danger.

We must strive to precisely discern the nature of our problems in order to overcome them. The Great Depression presented a new type of economic problem. The problem was no longer a scarcity of supply. An abundance of productive capacity met with a paucity of demand because of concentration of wealth and limited distribution of purchasing power. Confronting a problem for the first time requires original thinking. FDR solved it by going back to the first principles of productive prosperity. Since then the world has experienced unprecedented prosperity combining convenience and comfort.

When Nehru became India's first Prime Minister after Independence, he wanted to quickly achieve the levels of prosperity prevalent in the West, but there was no past precedent from which he could borrow for a planned initiative to develop a democratic nation so rapidly. The spectacular but partial progress of USSR through dictatorship was not suitable for Indian democracy. The problem Nehru faced required an original approach. He sought quick results without the necessary knowledge. His efforts reflected a deeper truth. That truth is that man accomplishes first and learns only later to understand the process. Such learning comes from intuition or insight, not reason. C. Subramaniam, India's Minister of Food and Agriculture then, was a farmer endowed with that knowledge. He applied it to launch India's Green Revolution. His accomplishment was more a result of intuition than rational understanding.

Another method for accomplishment is to do the right thing, as Churchill did in 1940. It saved England and Europe for democracy, while depriving Britain of her wrongfully held

overseas possessions. Gorbachev achieved a similar result. The Indian leadership might have obtained equally dramatic results had they exhibited the right conviction. The right conviction for India was the complete readiness to rise up in arms to secure independence based on self-respect and the legitimacy of self-defense against a dominant aggressor. Had her faith been in the force she naturally possessed, she could have avoided the country being partitioned and the half century of regional conflict that followed it. Rather than taking a doctrinaire position, she would have also been prepared to recognize the threat posed by China's growing military strength, which so shocked her when it attacked in 1962. *The Non-Aligned Movement that elevated Nehru to global prominence could have raised both Nehru and India to the highest stature in international affairs.* In spite of this, a permanent seat in the UN Security Council was given to India, but offered by Nehru to China with his characteristic magnanimity. It turned out to be a very serious mistake that did not serve the purpose. China later turned into a hostile aggressor, compelling India to abandon its non-aligned policy.

The end of the Cold War opened up two new possibilities: the abolition of nuclear weapons and making the UN a truly democratic institution by abolishing the veto power of the five permanent members of the Security Council. Both these possibilities were missed in 1991, either due to lack of alertness or lack of proper equipment. The US was the UN's most dominant influence during this period. She achieved that eminence by vigorously championing the end of colonialism and imperialism, which the UK and other colonial powers long resisted. She was also rich and strong. Leadership requires strength, but that *strength needs to be combined with some type of idealism.* The UK and USSR failed to qualify for leadership on that ground, while the U.S. rose to the top. Even her qualification was limited by continued denial of full civil liberties to African Americans. Her financial assistance to European nations through the Marshall Plan was not entirely altruistic. It was conditional on their political support, which fostered dependence and subservience. The USSR attained superpower status in spite of authoritarian rule, mainly because she rejected aid in favor of self-reliance. The US was not intrinsically qualified to champion the abolition of nuclear weapons, because many of its leaders believe in the value of these weapons. Moreover, her campaigning for abolition of nuclear weapons was vitiated by refusal to abolish the right to carry hand guns domestically. America could not resist the urge to drop nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nor to lay waste Vietnam by devastating conventional arms. One cannot lead a cause based on diametrically opposing attitudes. The abolition of nuclear weapons is a vast universal ideal signifying humanity's shift to the mental plane from the physical plane that believes in violence.

*The higher the ideal, the greater the impact of even smaller expressions of it.* Mahatma Gandhi's call for Indians to refuse to pay the salt tax shook the British Raj to its very roots. The simple refusal of Rosa Parks to move to the back of the bus was enough to engulf the US in civil rights protests. *If this principle were not true, a single person such as Churchill could not have saved the whole world and FDR's fireside chats with practically-minded Americans could not have persuaded them to redeposit their life-time savings into a failing banking system.* The victory of Napoleon's army against a much larger coalition of forces at Austerlitz is further evidence of this principle. A small significant event can have a hugely

disproportionate impact on the world, provided the initiator is totally sincere to the principle expressed. In Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*, a small but significant decision of Mr. Bennet and acceptance of what was obvious by the heroine Elizabeth proved powerful enough to change the course of the story and catapulted the family to heights of wealth and status they never envisioned.

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*The Communist Manifesto* was published in 1848 and *Das Capital* in 1862. It was widely believed that they would lead to a proletarian revolution in England or Germany, the two most industrialized nations. To everyone's surprise, it occurred in Russia instead, where the proletariat was miniscule in number. That became possible because the exploitation of the working class was most cruel there. By 1900 socialism had won universal admiration. Two Socialist Internationals had been conducted and European governments were unnerved by the threat of the socialist menace. Working conditions were improved to avoid revolution. Such positive efforts did moderate the demands of restive workers. America was a land of free enterprise. The younger generation was motivated by a spirit of entrepreneurship, and strongly opposed communist dictatorship. FDR felt that the Sears Catalog was a fitting reply to the Communist challenge. The salary of US auto workers far exceeded the salaries of laborers in Socialist Countries. Americans served the cause of Communism more effectively through their capitalist economy than did the socialist economy of USSR. The vision of humanity realizes itself in unexpected ways.

In the Indian epic *Ramayana*, the hero Rama confronted an adversary who had won a boon that gave him half the strength of any enemy who opposed him. The story depicts ancient knowledge that we energize the enemy by opposing him, as the USA and USSR energized each other to the ridiculous extent of producing 70,000 nuclear weapons through decades of mutually assured destruction. Martin Luther circumvented this principle by founding a whole new religion rather than trying to battle the irrational superstition of the Catholic Church head on.

One important aim of European science was to replace superstition with rationality and it made remarkable progress in doing so. The very word "scientific" has come to be regarded as synonymous with rationality and truth devoid of superstition. But superstition survives even the rise of modern science and returns in new disguise. It survives in the form of authority, tradition and seniority that resist rationality, independence, original thinking, even within institutions of science and academia. Over time science has ousted religion and replaced it on the throne of social status. The scientist has become the hero, the ideal. All thinking must now be 'scientific' – a most laudable aim. Unfortunately, in the process, science as a human undertaking has come to function on the basis of authority and self-interest, rather than on the basis of pure rationality. A former President of an academy of sciences appreciating the



views spoken by a much younger man, expressed the wish that these ideas be spoken by some famous scientist, for only then they would receive the attention they deserve. British biologist Rupert Sheldrake conducted innumerable experiments and submitted documentary evidence to support his theories. In response, an editor of *Nature* refused to even examine the evidence, because it challenged established theory in the field. As capitalism has adopted the methods of communism to combat its opponent, science has unwittingly succumbed to the very disease it chose to fight.

*The wider the perspective, the more rational.* Rejecting contrary views implies rejecting aspects of a greater truth. The current conflict between neoliberalism, Keynesianism and ecological economics tends to overlook the fact that all three represent valid aspects of a greater truth – freedom for individual initiative, regulation to promote equity and protection of the environment are not opposites. Rather, they are all essential aspects of a complete formula for sustainable development. Specialization of science has not only led to fragmentation of disciplines, but also to organization of non-facts into valid theories. Employment is part of economics and economics is part of society. If economics is studied as an integrated dimension of society, not in isolation as a collection of statistics, there will no longer be any unemployment. *Honor human beings in this century of the Individual, respect society for its greatness, guarantee people's fundamental rights, and economic crisis will disappear.* There is no virtue in being irrational or superstitious. Science has the value of being rational and true. The problems of the world are of self-inflicted blindness, like the six blind men who sought to describe the elephant in a bygone era.

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