

HUMANITY'S EVOLUTIONARY FUTURE

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers an evolutionary perspective on the past thousand years of human development and the prospects for the next thousand years. An integrated overview of the global challenges facing humanity today, as indicated by major environmental and social trends, is presented. Recommendations are made as to universal societal values and principles which will likely lead to long-term survival for humankind in the new Millennium. The central premise is that “what we think”; based upon our societal worldview, value systems and beliefs, provides the foundation for “why we act” and informs as to what basic assumptions and goals we hold. Thus, changes in thinking, based upon new insights and knowledge, will most directly and effectively lead to the necessary widespread changes in individual and societal behavior required to ensure a positive future for humankind.

FOREWORD

As we approach the new Millennium, humanity is facing both enormous challenges and tremendous opportunities. The challenges are extraordinary as our civilization and our continuing survival as a species are in jeopardy. The opportunities are also extraordinary as they are being driven by unprecedented revolutions in scientific knowledge, new technologies, global communications and human understanding.

The current threats to our survival are real. Some are natural and ever-present such as that of a comet impact or other cosmic disaster. Most of the threats facing us today, however, are both man-made and new. This long list includes: major wars, weapons of mass destruction (both nuclear and biological), eco-system collapse, resource depletion, modern pandemics, toxic pollution of air, water and land, and reduced fertility rates.

The opportunities before us are just as real. They are based on new knowledge and innovations developed through the creative efforts of millions of people all around the world. The promise of the 21st century includes increased human understanding and revolutionary new tools such as new energy sources, robotics, supercomputers, global communications, space exploration, biotechnology, micromachines, artificial intelligence and others yet to be discovered.

It is apparent that humanity is truly at a crossroads. Will we be overwhelmed by the challenges confronting us or will we overcome them and enter a new era of human potential and accomplishment?

Progressive environmental degradation and excessive levels of resource exploitation go hand in hand with mounting unemployment, rising criminality, economic and social polarization, and ethnic strife. For our societies to develop, and for their members to survive, a crucial choice must now be made - a choice that will decide whether we head for further evolution or final extinction.¹

The crisis confronting us arises out of collective actions and behaviors which are founded upon an older view of reality and the world. The opportunities before us result substantially from fresh insights about the natural world, its systems and processes.

“What we think” significantly determines “how we act.” Accordingly, changing our current thinking is the key to changing our actions. And, changing our actions is the key to changing our future.

“THOUGHT PRECEDES ACTION”

Thought precedes action. This simple statement is both a major premise of this paper and also the greatest hope for humanity’s future. Our unique ability to think ahead and ponder a course of action is what distinguishes us most from the rest of the natural world. All other species are driven solely by basic instincts and needs. They can not pause to reflect and choose. We alone can.

The abilities to reflect, think ahead and choose actions in advance are the culmination of the evolutionary advantages humanity has developed over its 2.5 million year history. They arise out of two advanced human qualities: language and self-reflective consciousness.

If our species hadn’t developed language we would not have been able to develop the ability to think. When thinking we essentially talk to ourselves. Language is thus a fundamental requirement. Without it, we would only be able to think in images and symbols. Accordingly, our advanced abilities to reason and plan ahead could never have arisen.

The utilization of foresight enables us to imagine the future; to consider a preferable situation, scenario or circumstance. Once such images are created we can turn them into goals and attempt to achieve them.

The goal we desire or preferable future scenario we imagine is undoubtedly a reflection of our values and beliefs as well as our worldview. These subjective and changing perceptions form the framework for “what we think”. Personal values and beliefs are mostly influenced by family and community views while our broader worldview is formed collectively by the society-at-large.

The vast majority of the citizens of the industrialized world ascribe to the “western worldview”. What are its fundamental assumptions about human nature and the human condition and how did it come about?

THE WESTERN WORLDVIEW

The “western worldview” is not stated definitively in any book nor is it taught as such in any school. It is, however, a fundamental philosophy and belief system that underlies all western culture. Our current worldview is composed of the basic assumptions we collectively hold about the nature of man, man’s relationship with the natural world and the nature of society.

In essence, our worldview is based upon a collective perception of the way that nature and the world actually work and our desire to emulate these principles in human affairs. This perception, however, is limited by the level of our knowledge and understanding at the time that the particular worldview was developed.

The present worldview developed over thousands of years, likely beginning at the dawn of civilization in Sumer about 6,500 years ago. It was heavily influenced by early Judeo-Christian belief and reached its pinnacle with classical scientific and economic thought in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. My understanding of the key tenets of the “western worldview” is as follows:

Man’s nature is essentially Evil.

Man was forever cast out of the Garden of Eden for his sin (evil). This “original sin”, the sin of acquiring independent knowledge and disobeying the father, renders divine retribution on imperfect human beings. The punishment is for eternity. There is no redemption possible as Man can never return to paradise.

Man was given dominion over Nature.

It is man’s divine right to rule, dominate and control nature, the Earth and all lesser creatures. This includes the domination of male over female. God created women second after man and from man.

Man is motivated by self-interest and society is primarily a clash of individual interests.

Both the world and human society are in a state of constant competition between individuals for limited food supplies, shelter, mates, etc. The strongest survive to compete another day. The weak die out.

Man and the Earth are at the center of the Universe as the pinnacle of God’s creation.

Man and the Earth are at the center of creation. There is a fixed and immutable divine order and it is strictly hierarchical. Man is next to God and nearly divine, i.e., “the divine right of kings to rule.”

The Earth is a limitless frontier with endless space and resources for expansion. There will always be more land, water, and natural resources over the next horizon. The Earth’s bounty is endless and can never be depleted. This, then, is my interpretation of our current “story”. It is a story born of limited experience, limited knowledge and a very incomplete understanding of the natural world. It is a story that our culture has told itself

for thousands of years as the absolute truth. It has been believed without question and strictly enforced by society's institutions.

Accordingly, all of our present social systems, institutions and organizations have developed out of this fundamental belief and value system.

The fact that our current story is substantially incorrect and incomplete has just begun to dawn on many people. This realization is due to the greatly increased knowledge and understanding that humanity has collectively accumulated over the past few decades.

It is estimated that human knowledge is now doubling every ten years.² Over the past decade more scientific knowledge has been created than in all human history.³ This "knowledge explosion" has occurred just in time. The "western worldview" has risen to dominate the planet and has led to great prosperity for much of humanity over the past century. It has also led directly to the major dilemma confronting us today.

THE WORLD TODAY

In the 1998 edition of the Worldwatch Institute's *State of the World* report, Lester Brown summarizes; "As the economy grows, pressures on the Earth's natural systems and resources intensify. From 1950 to 1997, the use of lumber tripled, that of paper increased sixfold, the fish catch increased nearly fivefold, grain consumption nearly tripled, fossil fuel burning nearly quadrupled, and air and water pollutants multiplied severalfold. The unfortunate reality is that the economy continues to expand, but the ecosystem on which it depends does not, creating an increasingly stressed relationship."⁴

In addition to these dramatic global trends, since 1900 the human population has increased sixfold from 1 billion to nearly 6 billion today. This exponential population growth, together with the western consumer lifestyle spurred by industrial development in the 20th century, are the primary factors behind the current levels of resource consumption.

Global trends in population and consumption continue to accelerate at unprecedented rates. In *Vital Signs 1997*, another publication of the Worldwatch Institute, Lester Brown further enunciates the current dilemma; "The global economy is expanding at a robust rate. But the ecosystem on which it depends is not expanding at all. The evidence for this is painfully clear: the demand for seafood is exceeding the sustainable yield of fisheries; the grazing needs of the world's herds of cattle and flocks of sheep and goats are outpacing the sustainable yield of grasslands; forests are shrinking before the growth in the demand for firewood and lumber; aquifers are being depleted as the demand for water exceeds the recharge rate. And since much of this economic expansion is based on fossil fuels, carbon emissions into the atmosphere are outstripping the Earth's carbon-fixing capacity, leading to the build-up in greenhouse gases, rising temperatures, and growing climate instability."⁵

If the wealth of the Earth is our capital, then we are using up our capital at a truly alarming rate. The economy is expanding while the Earth's eco-systems are shrinking.

These threatening global trends will likely continue to accelerate significantly into the foreseeable future. In addition to the recent exponential growth in consumption and population, massive numbers of people in developing countries such as China and India are today experiencing a "quantum leap" in industrialized economic growth. China, containing over one-sixth of humanity, has been the world's fastest growing economy in the 1990's. Since 1980, it's economy has doubled in size every eight years.⁶ India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the nations of Southeast Asia are not far behind. And, approximately 80 million people are expected to be added to the total human population each year. The World Health Organization's 1998 report on health projects a global population of 8 billion in the year 2025.

The message to humanity is undeniable: economic growth and the Earth's eco-systems and resources are in a direct inverse relationship. Increased economic growth, in our current model, depletes natural wealth. Human well-being is presently at the immediate expense of the Earth. It is clearly a non-sustainable situation that eventually must end - one way or the other. If the world economy as it now structured continues to expand, it will eventually destroy its natural support systems, decline and collapse.

In addition to the precarious state of the Earth's eco-systems and resources, we must also seriously address the further threats to humanity posed by; major conflicts between nations and peoples, nuclear and biological warfare, pandemics, economic upheaval, and the unpredictable effects of global warming, ozone depletion, diminishing biodiversity, fresh water shortages, extensive rainforest depletion, and others. The future could also well see the rise of violent conflicts between nations over diminishing natural resources.

As I write this, India and Pakistan have entered into a new nuclear arms race, once again raising the specter of global holocaust. Great fires, caused by increased human activity, are burning millions of hectares of tropical rainforest in Mexico and Guatemala following earlier devastation in Indonesia and Brazil. And, upheaval in the economies of a number of Asian nations is darkening the interdependent global financial picture.

There can be little doubt that we are on the verge of a major catastrophe, or series of catastrophes, which has the potential to end our civilization and even our species over the next generation - our children's generation. Few of society's leaders in government, business, religion, education and media, however, have recognized this reality and taken any serious steps to avert disaster. Instead, the traditional view of economic growth remains the "mantra" and it is now being exported to the entire globe.

Fortunately, though, there are also numerous global trends appearing which may lead us away from the edge on to a sustainable path in time: population growth is slowing, information and communications are becoming global, renewable energy use is increasing, recycling and reuse is expanding, new environmentally sustainable technologies are being created and, despite the minimal attention paid by the mass media

to these most pressing challenges, millions of people worldwide have awoken to our predicament and are leading the campaign for major change.

To a great extent, it is our “thinking”, our current worldview and its’ related belief and value system, that has led us to the present dilemma. Accordingly, a dramatic shift in our thinking is the one factor that can ultimately lead to a positive future for humanity as we approach our evolutionary crossroads.

HUMANITY AT THE CROSSROADS

Humankind has arrived at its defining moment. It is a time of decision and the decision can not be postponed for very much longer. We have evolved as a species to the point where we must now consciously chose the course of our future evolution.

There are now two clear paths before us: the sustainable one, which will likely lead to unprecedented prosperity for humankind in the new Millennium, and the unsustainable one we are currently on which may lead to extinction.

History contains countless examples of civilizations who have destroyed themselves through unsustainable resource use, violent conflict or disease. However, all previous civilizations were local or regional and not capable of large-scale global destruction. That, of course, is not the case for our civilization.

To avoid this fate we must write a new chapter in human history and evolution, one that transcends the past and shapes a preferable future for all.

THE EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE

To truly appreciate the awesome gifts we have received and the tremendous responsibilities we must assume, it is essential to understand our place in the Universe and in cosmic evolution. History did not begin the day we were born. We must know where we have come from and what we are made of. We must know of the forces that have driven the evolution of life for 15 billion years. And, we must know of the many miracles that have enabled a barren rock in a minor galaxy to burst forth with all the diversity of life we see on this Earth, which is our home. Only then will we be prepared for the great task that lies ahead.

To summarize this narrative - Life’s Story - is not an easy thing to do. It requires compressing 15 billion years of evolution into a short few paragraphs and hoping that the scale and grandeur of it all will not be completely lost. The following synopsis attempts to do so. It is based on today’s generally accepted scientific view.⁸

Approximately 15 billion years ago, at 10^{-43} seconds, a microscopic particle of infinite intensity and density exploded, expelling energy and light outward in an ever expanding flow, creating time and space as it expanded. This event, dubbed the Big Bang, was the beginning of our Universe. The cosmic energy cooled for billions of years until matter, in

the form of massive clouds of gas, emerged. These gas clouds formed the first proto-galaxies and stars. The first stars exploded as supernovae releasing the heavy elements from which our sun, our solar system, our planet and ourselves are all composed of.

The sun and planets, including the Earth, formed out of a cloud of interstellar dust about 4.6 billion years ago. Earth, as an inner planet of the solar system, is a terrestrial or rocky body. This enabled the Earth to acquire oceans, continents and an atmosphere after 500 million years of cosmic bombardment. Life first emerged about 4 billion years ago with the first single-celled micro-organism. The first multicellular organism appeared about 700 million years ago. The first plants arrived around 430 million years ago with land-based animals following some 30 million years later. Dinosaurs roamed the Earth between 200 and 65 million years ago. Some 50 million years ago, mammals first emerged.

The earliest ancestors of man, apes living in east Africa, came into being about 25 million years ago. The first humans, Homo Habilis appeared using stone tools about 2.5 million years ago. Archaic Homo Sapiens emerged 200,000 years ago. Modern man appeared about 40,000 years ago as a "hunter-gatherer." There was little change in human evolution for about 30,000 years until 10,000 years ago with the first Neolithic village and the beginning of the Agricultural Age. The rate of change began to accelerate dramatically with the emergence of the first civilization in Sumeria about 6,500 years ago. This revolutionary event rapidly led to the development of art, writing, mathematics, architecture, religion, city-states and nation-states.

This Millennium, particularly the last 500 years, has witnessed an unparalleled expansion in human knowledge and tools. Classical scientific and economic thought, together with revolutionary technologies such as the printing press, sparked the Renaissance and the Enlightenment that solidified the modern "western worldview" during the 15th to 18th centuries. The 19th century brought the theory of evolution, powerful new technologies and the Industrial Revolution. The 20th century has seen incredible advances in energy use, electronics, communications, transportation, and mass production. There have also been major new scientific discoveries in quantum physics, cosmology, ecology, molecular biology, chaos and complexity theory that have fundamentally altered our perception of nature and reality. We have entered the Information Age and are on the verge of the "Global Age" as we approach the tremendous challenges and opportunities of the 21st century and the new Millennium.

Viewed from this perspective, we appear to have crossed an evolutionary threshold in the middle of this century, entering a period of greatly accelerated socio-cultural evolution. After the end of the Second World War, the complexity and power of human knowledge and tools began to increase exponentially. Almost every aspect of human life has been thoroughly changed over this period. In 1945 there were no televisions, personal computers, satellites, fax machines, cellular phones, email addresses, Internet sites, etc. Man had not walked on the moon and we had not yet viewed the magnificent image of our own "blue planet" as seen from space.

The rapid societal changes we have experienced in the last half of the 20th century appear all the more remarkable when viewed against this perspective of historical time. The transformation of our civilization over these few short years has been all encompassing and there is no end in sight. Evolutionary change has now become revolutionary change and the pace continues to quicken.

THE EMERGING WORLDVIEW

The current “western worldview” is in the midst of a major transition. A new worldview is emerging which draws upon a much more complete picture of nature and reality. It is being defined by the fresh insights into ourselves and nature that we have collectively acquired in the 20th century. My perception of this emerging worldview is as follows:

Man’s nature is both Good and Evil.

Man has the innate capacity for both good and evil. Man’s nature mirrors the nature of the Universe. The Universe has two fundamental tendencies; self-organization (order) and entropy (chaos). The parallel in the human realm is good and evil. Good can be defined as actions that enhance life while evil as actions that diminish life.

Man is the steward and guardian of Nature.

It is Man’s responsibility to preserve and protect nature and life on Earth and to manage the Earth’s resources wisely. The domination and control by Man over nature and other forms of life will eventually result in catastrophe.

Man is motivated by both self-interest and altruism. Society is a balance of these motivations.

Man is both genetically programmed for self-perpetuation and is a “social animal”. Concern for the well-being of family, community and others is also innate to human nature. Competition among individuals is balanced by cooperation within communities.

Man is an integral part of the “web of life”

Man is not separate from or above nature but an integral part of nature and dependant upon nature for survival. Nature exhibits both hierarchical (a baboon troop) and “flat” structure (an eco-system). All life is interconnected and interdependent in the “web of life.”

The Earth’s natural resources and space for expansion are limited and finite.

The Earth has renewable, non-renewable and limited resources. Non-renewable and limited resources such as fossil fuels, fresh water, trees, agricultural land, etc. are in a finite supply. The faster we utilize these resources the quicker they become depleted. The space for human expansion on our planet is now severely limited.

This emerging worldview is, to a great extent, the opposite of the current worldview. As the new worldview gains broad societal acceptance, “what we think” at the fundamental level will change. Thus, our individual and organizational actions and societal institutions will be transformed as well in accordance with the changing view of reality.

Flowing out of the new worldview are a number of values which embody its belief system. Early adaptation to the emerging worldview and these key values will increase the prospects for the future success of humankind in the coming Millennium.

KEY VALUES FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

For the first time in human history a global consensus on universal societal values may be capable of being formed. This is due to the new understandings and our abilities to communicate globally. We would in essence be agreeing upon the collective wisdom of humankind at this point in our evolution.

The ten values and principles set out below are an attempt to define such broad societal precepts and are by no means intended to be comprehensive. They represent my views based upon extensive readings, study and reflection over a number of years.

The first four are values that arise from fundamental aspects of the natural world. The last six are presented as “principles for the future.”

1. Balance

There are always two or more interests represented in every relationship. These interests must be balanced. Balance in nature refers to balancing the activities of the diverse organisms and species in an eco-system so that all survive and thrive. Balance is also a dynamic concept. Constant adjustments and readjustments occur to maintain an overall equilibrium. Thus, balance leads to stability and longevity.

In future, our focus should be on balancing just about everything in society; the interests of humankind and the Earth, self-interest and community interest, competition and cooperation, the public interest and private interests, the short-term and the long-term.

2. Harmony

Harmony is the diverse parts of a whole system acting together as one in an enhanced manner. The key aspects of harmony are synergy, the whole being greater than the sum of its parts, and accord. In nature, harmony is found in an eco-system where every individual organism and species plays a crucial role in the greater whole. The waste product of one species provides the nourishment for another in an on-going life cycle. In the human realm, it is in our communities and societies where the principles of harmony should prevail. Each member of society is a unique individual contributing his or her distinctive skills and abilities to the greater whole. Every organization can emulate the workings of harmony in nature. Ecological harmony is innate to natural systems. Human beings, however, must consciously choose to act in harmony and to create the social structures necessary to sustain it.

3. Partnership

Partnership is the equitable sharing of both the benefits and risks of a collective endeavor. It is also the mutual acceptance of specific obligations and responsibilities to each other.

It is based on mutual respect for the rights and interests of all the partners. In nature, partnership is inherent to the balance and harmony of a collective endeavor such as an eco-system. There are, of course, numerous examples of partnership in human society. Many are economic such as business partnerships and corporations, and more recently; joint ventures, alliances, consortiums, networks, etc.

What is needed now are greatly expanded societal partnerships that go well beyond traditional applications. Partnerships between men and women, between cultures, sectors and interests in society, between nations, between present and future generations. This would lead to a "win-win" societal model being implemented over the "win-lose" model we currently follow. A culture of partnership is vastly preferable to a culture of conflict.

4. Sustainability

Sustainability is a very recent concept in our thinking that is becoming more important to humanity's future each passing day. Sustainability, however, has been a fundamental principle of success in nature since the beginning. Sustainability in the human societal context has been defined as: "A society that satisfies its needs without diminishing the prospects of future generations." Thus sustainability includes wise resource use and management, conservation and longevity. Eco-systems must be sustainable to survive. This means that each individual and species in the system interacts harmoniously and symbiotically both for its own benefit and for the benefit of the community. This approach greatly enhances the long-term prospects of the individual members, their particular species and the eco-system itself. Lasting sustainability flows naturally from balance, harmony and partnership.

5. Being Open to the Future

Today, our world is being reshaped at an ever-increasing pace. We must continually adapt to the changing realities by being open to the future. New realities demand new thinking and new approaches. To "live in the past" or desire a return to the past is to respond to former realities. The past limits and restricts as it can only be what is known to date. The future, however, presents new possibilities which can not be definitely known in the present. The future is the world of unlimited possibilities.

6. Cooperation Over Confrontation

The accelerating information and communications revolution is driving our current societal evolution toward the potential attainment of true global community. This revolution is leading to a shift from the national perspective to a global one. The ever-increasing worldwide exchange of information and communication has the beneficial effect of increasing understanding among individuals and groups which, in turn, can lead to choosing cooperation over confrontation. We now know that nature utilizes both competition and cooperation as evolutionary tools. A key to our success, then, is to balance the elements of competition and cooperation, as is the case in nature.

7. Responsibility For The Future

Securing a positive future for all is based upon individual acceptance of responsibility for the future. Humanity today has the ability to solve all of our problems. This will become

a reality when a new understanding of our true potential and our relationship to the Earth has replaced the current worldview. To a greater or lesser extent, we all share responsibility for the current state of the world. We also all share responsibility for the shape of the future.

8. Unity In Diversity

The interrelationship and interdependence of all life on Earth can not be denied. Nor can we deny the interdependence of the human race and our political, economic and social institutions. The globalization of culture, technology and economics is proceeding at an extremely rapid rate. National borders, like many of the past walls between us, are being transcended. The major challenges we now face are global in nature and, thus, so must the solutions be. The world of the future can be a world of shared vision, values and goals while embracing cultural diversity.

9. One World - One Future

As we share a common future, the concept of the common good must now transcend existing cultural, religious and economic differences. The narrower interests of each group, culture and nation must become secondary to the interests of all humanity and to that of the Earth upon which all life depends. Ultimately, we will all succeed or we will all fail.

10. Shaping Our Destiny

We can collectively make the choices and take the actions which will lead to the creation of a peaceful and sustainable global community in the new Millennium. For this to occur all of us must now become leaders. Everyone can get involved in the campaign for a positive future. It will require true commitment, sacrifice and action. Each of us can do something meaningful to make a difference - whether large or small, and in thousands of different ways. For the sake of our children and future descendants we must successfully address the challenges before us and ensure humanity's destiny.

OUR EVOLUTIONARY FUTURE

Humankind has made incredible progress over its long evolutionary journey. We have survived for millions of years to reach this special moment in time. We are at the threshold of a new Millennium and on the verge of determining our future evolution for the first time in history.

In the 21st century we will shape our biological evolution through bioengineering and our socio-cultural evolution through our collective choices and actions. We now have the knowledge, tools and abilities to shape a noble destiny for humankind. We must be certain to use our abilities wisely on behalf of all past and future life on Earth.

The turn of a Millennium is a time for new beginnings. It is a time for the reconciliation of past conflicts and for new approaches. It also provides us with a unique opportunity to focus personal and societal change toward a positive future. The timing could not be better as our civilization and our species may not survive to the next Millennium or even to the next century if we continue on our present unsustainable path.

Humanity has made unprecedented gains over the past 50 years. However, these years have also brought about some of the greatest challenges we will ever have to face. This is the major paradox confronting us at the end of the 20th century. Our foremost period of progress has also led to our most serious period of crisis.

The reason for this dilemma is that the worldview that gave rise to our prosperity is incorrect in its major assumptions, values and beliefs. With our old worldview and our new technological prowess we have managed to extract and convert the Earth's natural wealth to human purposes at an ever-accelerating rate, mostly over the past few decades. The faster we do so the better it appears to us to be. As a result of this apparent prosperity many more people are born each new generation and everyone is living much longer. One day, and that day may be soon, the reckoning will come. Our "capital" will be all but gone and the inevitable decline and collapse will occur. Our progress is, accordingly, unsustainable and thus ultimately illusory.

Many people in western society and around the world are now aware of this situation. After all, the alarm bells have been ringing for over 30 years. Some spokespersons for various interest groups have responded to this awareness with undue optimism that a technological solution will save us. Others deny that we have any real problems perhaps because they share the current "aura of invincibility" permeating our civilization. For many the issues are too overwhelming and present an overload of information. Finally, to some our concerns appear manageable. This is probably because we typically only address our challenges one at a time - global warming today, ozone next month, overpopulation the following month, etc. The reality, of course, is that all the global problems are occurring simultaneously, continually interacting and often reinforcing each other.

Technology does present much promise and will undoubtedly play a crucial role in shaping a preferable future. Technology, alone, however will not suffice. The situation has gone much too far and time is now too short. The powerful global trends now in motion cannot be quickly reversed. Technology has also often proven to be a "mixed blessing" in the past, when not used wisely.

The societal institutions to whom we would expect to look for leadership have so far failed us on this the biggest of challenges. Our political leaders are too busy worrying about the next election to think about the future 10 or 20 years from now. Business leaders have invested heavily in the current worldview. Our religious leaders seem to be mainly focused on the issues of the first Millennium. Educational leaders appear confused about their role in preparing students for the future. And, the media are busy covering the important stories of the day such as the latest political gossip. In general, all are preoccupied with lesser or even trivial issues and are thus not seeing the "big picture."

Accordingly, it is the people of the world who are today addressing humanity's future with vision and action. It is they who are leading the campaign to build a new society in the next Millennium.

Millions of ordinary people worldwide have realized that we must adapt to changing realities and a changing environment by changing ourselves. They have understood that our current assumptions about nature and reality are erroneous - that the opposite of our older worldview appears to be true. They know that the decisions we make today will have a much larger impact on the future of humanity than those of any previous generation.

Humanity has reached an evolutionary crossroads. We have perhaps 25 years to shift our society from an unsustainable to a sustainable path. This is our one “window of opportunity”. Accomplishing this great task will be the most exceptional collective endeavor in human history. All the elements for success are now in place. We have new knowledge, new tools, new insights and new thinking. If we use them wisely we will succeed.

The current crisis facing humanity presents us with both enormous challenges and tremendous opportunities. In overcoming our challenges we will emerge with a new society. It will be global, diverse and sustainable. There will be a mega-shift in societal thinking from focusing on the past to shaping the future. From domination, control, confrontation and exploitation to nature’s way of partnership, balance, harmony and sustainability. All of society’s institutions, organizations, systems and structures will be transformed accordingly.

Therefore the key to our long-term success is where and how we will apply our collective energies, resources and abilities in the immediate future. Acting today for tomorrow, we can choose to apply them cooperatively and in partnership for the benefit of all humankind. We will then begin a remarkable new chapter in humanity’s evolutionary story - the coming of the Age of Wisdom!

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