

Modern Times and the Contemporary Transformation

Trends and Developments in the Twentieth Century

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way . . .”

Charles Dickens

“May you live in interesting times.”

Confucius

In this third chapter, I begin by describing the major events and trends as well as some of the central issues and problems that have emerged in the twentieth century. I highlight visions of the future and the impact, for better or worse, such visions have had on recent human history. Second, I examine the popular idea that we are in the midst of a significant contemporary world transformation in which humanity as a whole is moving from one way of life into a vastly different way of life. These two main sections of the chapter are connected, for the events and trends of the last century produced the conditions of our present world and set the stage for the contemporary transformation. Through looking at the immediate past, we gain an understanding and developmental perspective on the present and some sense of the direction in which we are heading in the future.

The twentieth century is often seen as the most eventful and unsettling era in human history.¹ The changes that have occurred, great and small, could be seen as a progressive continuation of developments of the previous centuries.² Alternately, the last century could be seen as a prelude or transition to something fundamentally different in human life in the centuries that lie ahead.³ The answer is probably a combination of the two – of continuation and transformation. What was the twentieth century like? Where do we find ourselves upon entering the new Millennium?

In the West, the twentieth century began with a spirit of optimism and a general conviction in the promise of secular progress. The continuing growth of science, technology, and industry and an ever expanding economy stimulated innovation and invention in many spheres of human life. As an expression of humanity’s intelligence, energy, and self-confidence, and based on new developments in architecture and engineering, skyscrapers in cities like New

York and Chicago rose progressively higher in the early decades of the century, symbolizing humanity's high aspirations. Beginning with the telephone and automobile which emerged at the end of the previous century, the new century saw the creation of city-wide electrical lighting, the airplane, the movie, the phonograph player, plastics, and the assembly line, the last invention promising to bring the bounties of the modern world to the common person. Science and technology were fulfilling the promise of the Enlightenment and transforming the world.

Yet the very inventiveness and creativity of the early twentieth century produced a variety of disconcerting discoveries, new ideas, and innovations that would challenge the simple vision of progressive cumulative growth and progress. The development of relativity theory and quantum physics undercut the presumed certainty of Newtonian physics. Early twentieth-century art and music, through the great works of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Picasso, Kandinsky, and others, transcended, if not contradicted, traditional aesthetic principles and standards of beauty. Contrary to the Enlightenment belief that reason could and should direct human destiny, at the beginning of the century Freud proposed that instinct and desire ruled the human soul and reason was, at best, a servant to the primitive unconscious. And finally, the philosophy of relativism, challenging the absolutism and sense of supremacy of Western civilization, became increasingly popular in anthropology, history, and cultural studies. As Watson titles the beginning of his intellectual history of the twentieth century, it was a time of "disturbing the peace."⁴

Moving into the next few decades, events and new ideas of the period 1915 through 1945 clearly disrupted and undermined the early optimism of the century. World War I, fought with the new creations of technology, was the most destructive and geographically expansive war ever fought. Clearly, humanity had realized great technological progress, but the new machines and technological systems were not used to improve the human condition, but rather to inflict death and destruction upon fellow humans. In the aftermath of World War I, belief in the inevitability of progress through reason, science, and technology declined. How could the enlightened and presumably superior European mind commit such atrocities of violence and destruction, unless there was something wrong or missing within the modernist image? Or perhaps Freud and other similar thinkers were right – reason and high ethical values did not rule the human soul – primordial instincts and passions controlled the psyche.

Coincident with the end of the war, Oswald Spengler published his famous prophetic book, *The Decline of the West*. Numerous other writers within the humanities, philosophy, and literature also found fault with modern Western society. Many believed, contrary to the image of progress, that humankind was degenerating. Popular critical works appeared which argued that liberal society, industrial capitalism, and bourgeois individualism were destroying a sense of shared culture and producing a world of alienation and excessive subjectivity. The materialist world of acquiring more and more possessions, of increasing consumption and production, was destroying the culture of knowledge. T. S. Eliot saw a spiritual and sexual sterility in the modern world and Kafka wrote of a

world where the individual had lost control over his or her life. Once again, as in the nineteenth century with the critiques of romanticism, debate and conflict arose over the supremacy of reason.⁵ As the sciences continued to progress and one intellectual stream of philosophy, Logical Positivism, argued for the central importance of reason and evidence, anti-rationalist movements also arose, such as the existential philosophy of Heidegger and surrealist art, the latter delving into the visionary symbolism of the unconscious.⁶

One of the strongest and most visible reactions against Western capitalism was the emergence of Communism and socialism in Russia. Inspired by the writings of Karl Marx⁷ and fashioned into a twentieth-century social and intellectual movement through the leadership and ideas of Lenin and Trotsky, the Communist socialist state promised an end to social class and inequality – it provided a new and compelling vision of the future. Individualist capitalism, as well as the tyranny of royalty, was to be replaced by a centralized government and economy which would bring order, human equality, and a common purpose to human society. Yet as the decades of the 1920s and 1930s unfolded, what emerged in Russia was a new dictatorship and repressive authoritarian regime that, beginning in a violent revolution, continued its excessive carnage in subsequent decades as millions of people were imprisoned, tortured, and murdered in the name of the state. Communist Russia was one clear expression of the nineteenth-century idea that violence was justified in the name of the “the good of the people” – in this case, in the name the Communist state.

In fact, one could argue that both World War I and the Communist Revolution were instigated by elevated visions of the future that were used to justify war and violence. Throughout history, humans have frequently engaged in war and military conquest in the name of national and cultural ideals regarding the future.⁸ In World War I, the German belief in cultural supremacy and their aspiration to become the dominant power in Europe were critical instigating causes behind the outbreak of war.⁹ The Communist Revolution was propelled by Marx’s vision of a better world and his support of social revolution as a necessary step to realize his vision.

The next dark chapter of the early twentieth century was the Great Depression. Beginning with the stock market crash of 1929, the Great Depression of the 1930s saw unemployment rates rise dramatically in the United States and Europe and thousands of banks fail worldwide. Inspired by the predictions of Marx, many writers saw post World War I inflation, increasing unemployment, and the economic depression of the 1930s as an indication that individualistic capitalism was failing. As Watson comments, the 1930s was “a grey menacing time.” The Depression did not really ease up till the outbreak of World War II.¹⁰

World War I and the subsequent economic depression not only undermined faith in progress, they also contributed to a loss of faith in God. Hence, as Nietzsche had argued in the previous century, the central belief and value systems of the West, the religious and the scientific-secular, were both seen as unconvincing and in a state of decline. Not everyone experienced this generalized loss of faith, however, and the increasing spread of modernism,

capitalism, science, and individualism in the early decades of the twentieth century also instigated a counter-reaction back to traditionalism and religious fundamentalism. While many were losing faith in everything, others were trying to find it again in the religious certainties of the past.¹¹ This fundamentalist counter-reaction to the flux and chaos of modernism would intensify in the decades ahead.

In the aftermath of World War I, an international effort was made to establish the beginnings of a world government with the Peace Treaty of Versailles. This new world organization was named the League of Nations. As writers such as H.G. Wells had argued, the ongoing violent conflicts among nations would be our undoing, and a world government needed to be created that would ensure peace and provide an international forum for nations to resolve their differences without having to go to war. With advances in transportation (intercontinental air flights), communication (radio), trade, and travel, humanity was increasingly becoming a global community, and the professed separatism and individual sovereignty of peoples and nations of the past was less and less a realistic vision of human life. A global vision of the future was needed – one founded on peace and cooperation rather than war and conquest. Though the League of Nations failed, the movement toward global governance and cooperation has continued to the present day, motivated by the dream of world peace and reinforced by the continued growth of global interdependency and a global culture.

Not everyone was satisfied with the Treaty of Versailles and the formation of the League of Nations. In particular, Germany, with its sense of cultural and racial supremacy, found its post World War I situation humiliating. In the midst of this national disgrace, and coupled with an economic depression following the war, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party rose to power, promising the German people a renewed sense of national pride. Finding inspiration in his particular self-serving interpretation of human history and Germanic philosophy, and feeding on the discontent of the German people, Hitler instigated one of the most heinous and destructive series of events in the twentieth century. Hitler's futurist image of a "thousand year *Reich*" for the German nation catapulted humanity into World War II.

Hitler believed in the "great man theory of history" – that unique individuals possessing great vision and power have directed the course of human affairs throughout history. He saw individual leadership as a decisive factor in determining the future. Further, he thought that the father of all things was war and struggle (harkening back to Heraclitus and Hegel), and that Nietzsche's concept of the "superman" captured in many ways the new image he hoped to create for the German people and for German identity. He rejected the "trader" image of modern humanity, which he associated with Jewish people, the British, and the Americans, instead identifying with the "heroic" image of ancient myth. Further, he rejected both the hedonistic individualism of the modern West and the collective universalism of Communism, instead believing in the ethnic superiority and purity of the Arian race. It was the destiny of the German people to rule those inferior to them. He saw modern humanity as degenerative and

regressive and he opposed traditional religion with its superstitions and emphasis on compassion and equality, replacing it with a new “religion of blood.”¹²

Hitler and the German Nazi party were not the only ones who believed in a philosophy of supremacy and world domination. In alliance with both Mussolini and his Fascist government in Italy and the Japanese, who aspired, also with a sense of cultural and ethnic superiority, to rule Asia and the Pacific, Hitler and his Axis partners began a war of conquest in the late 1930s that spread across Europe, North Africa, the Pacific, and Eastern Asia. Again, I should point out that it was visions of the future, coupled with a highly aggressive philosophy for realizing these visions, that instigated great war and violence.

World War II was the bloodiest, most costly, geographically pervasive, and destructive war ever fought by humankind, even surpassing the carnage of World War I. Waged with the most technologically sophisticated weapons ever used, culminating with the atomic bomb, and fueled by the human failings of arrogance and pride, World War II was the great watershed point of the mid-twentieth century. Not only did tens of millions of soldiers die in battle, but at least as many civilians were killed, often by their own governments, with the infamous extermination of millions of Jews in Germany and other Nazi ruled countries being the most well known example of man’s injustice to man during this great human disaster.

The eventual defeat of the Axis powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan, though at one level a great victory of human rights and democracy over violent tyranny and injustice, left a dark shadow on humanity that still haunts us today. The creation and subsequent mass production of atomic weapons left post World War II humanity in the ominous situation of having the capacity for total self-destruction and annihilation. We had walked up to the edge of the death of our species – a situation of our own doing – and there was no question that another global conflict, if waged with atomic weapons, would be the final bloody act in the history of human civilization. This cataclysmic image of the future was terrifying and had a great impact on subsequent world events.

Yet not everything during the period encompassing the two World Wars was doom and gloom. In great part due to the pressures of competition among antagonistic nations during the wars, science and technology continued to advance and even accelerate. Radar, submarines, jet airplanes, rocketry, and modern atomic physics were some of the noteworthy scientific and technological developments over this thirty year period. More within the domain of pure science, modern genetics and evolutionary theory emerged, combining the insights of Darwin with Mendel’s work on genetic transmission.

Technology impacted the public and cultural world as well. “Talkies” (movies with sound) exploded on the scene in the 1920s and became immensely popular during the 1930s and 1940s. The American movie industry, centered in Hollywood, created one of the most significant cultural developments of the century, eventually sweeping across the entire globe. Movies became a primary source of public entertainment and “movie stars” were born, becoming cultural icons that millions upon millions of people idolized, if not worshipped. Because movies could be shown wherever there were movie theatres and were watched

by so many people, the stars of Hollywood became highly visible figures in human society. Due to their heroic, larger than life presence on the screen, they increasingly became among the most admired people in modern culture. Additionally, movies became a great form of escapism from the darkness of the Great Depression and World War II.

Within the arts, the Art Nouveau and Art Deco movements brought innovative style and graceful beauty to painting, decorative art, the crafts, sculpture, and architecture. The modernist trends in painting and music, begun early in the century, continued to blossom and flourish. Chagall, Mondrian, and Dali, among others, would continue the challenge to classical artistic traditions begun early in the century. The great musical composers of the twentieth century Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff produced many of their best pieces during this time. Also breaking free of the constraints and norms of the past, in the realm of popular music, jazz and swing and the “Big Band” era provided new rhythms and exciting emotional tempos that freed the human spirit. Jazz and contemporary classical music would be integrated in the creative compositions of George Gershwin.

Supported by continuing advances in media, communications, technology, transportation, and mass production, and fueled by artistic and entrepreneurial creativity and initiative, in the first half of the twentieth century popular culture emerged as a highly influential social force and an ever growing part of the economy in many modern countries. The growth of the entertainment industry was a central force in this modern development, but so was the mass media which broadcasted and advertised the innumerable new products, ideas, icons, symbols, and possibilities of the emerging pop culture. Pop culture challenged the elitism of classical culture – it was for the masses – and not everyone was happy with this new development in modern human society. Hitler had waged a cultural war of purification against this “putrefaction” within human life and Communist Russia also saw Westernized pop culture as a form of degeneracy and conducted its own inquisition against it. Even in the West, various writers saw popular culture as shallow, fickle, hedonistic, low-brow, and threatening to the high ideals of human civilization. In spite of such criticisms and counter-reactions, the growth of the entertainment industry and popular culture, and the mass production and purchasing of all manner of new toys, gadgets, and cheap, commercial goods would further accelerate in the second half of the twentieth century.

Following World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the two super-powers of the world, and although they had fought a common enemy in Nazi Germany, these two super-powers professed and practiced very different political and economic philosophies, namely democratic and individualistic capitalism versus a one-party, centrally controlled, collective Communist economy. Fueled by mutual distrust, post World War II – the “Cold War” - was a time of espionage and counter-espionage, competing cultural propaganda, and global paranoia, anxiety, and tension over a potential atomic war and perceived social and geographical threats. Two seemingly incompatible visions of the future competed for world dominance.

If World War I and the Great Depression had significantly damaged our belief in progress, World War II and the development of atomic weapons of mass destruction further undercut the optimism of the Enlightenment. With increasing tension between the United States and the Soviet Union and their thousands of nuclear missiles pointed at each other, perhaps, as many believed, hope for the future of humanity was naïve and unrealistic.

After the war, existentialism, inspired by the writings of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger, emerged as an influential philosophy in France and other countries in the West. According to existentialists such as Jean Paul Sartre, humans are “condemned to be free” and can not find authentic meaning and purpose in any philosophical or religious ideology. Each human must create his or her own identity and values – without any abstract or absolutist foundation – and face a future that is uncertain and without any overall teleological purpose. There is no inevitable law of progress or universal spiritual destiny for humanity. As Nietzsche proclaimed, “God is dead” – in fact, all gods are dead. Sartre was particularly disdainful of a world overtaken with materialism, industrialism, standardization, and the growing Americanization of the culture. He hated the bourgeois and wished to free humankind of the tyranny of reason. For Sartre, it was the authentic self that should be pursued, liberated from the shackles of modernity and all types of false authority and security. This philosophy of authenticity and freedom would have a significant impact over the next few decades in the West.¹³ The future was an individual and free act of creation.

Although critiques of Western culture and its capitalist and consumerist economy would continue, if not intensify, after World War II, the 1950s and 1960s was a time of rebuilding, increasing affluence, new discoveries and inventions in science and technology, and modernization spreading across the world. Capitalism and consumerism grew. After the war, Germany and Japan were rebuilt and the Japanese, in particular, embraced modernism and the technological and capitalist vision of the future. In the United States, the new pop culture and affluent lifestyle spread through the middle class. TV’s, Walt Disney, suburbia, rock ‘n’ roll, supermarkets, shopping malls, and the building of a network of interstate highways all contributed to a renewed sense of optimism, adventure, and well being. As a consequence of efforts in World War II, when the first computers were created, continuing research and development into computer technology made steady advances in miniaturization and processing speed, laying the seeds for the information revolution in later decades. Even the Cold War with its tensions contributed to the upswing, for by the late 1950s, the United States and Russia found themselves in the “Space Race” as rockets, satellites, and eventually humans traveled upward into the heavens.

As Watson states, all efforts in social engineering in the twentieth century turned out to be great disasters. Although many nineteenth-century thinkers, such as Comte, Marx, and Saint-Simon, believed that science and the philosophy of secular progress could be applied to human society and its redesign¹⁴, the authoritarian and totalitarian system of Nazi Germany had not only failed, but had caused great human misery and produced unbelievable human atrocities. After the war, as the Cold War intensified, there was the growing realization that the

Communist system in the Soviet Union, under the ruthless and paranoid leadership of Stalin, was implicated in as much human torture, murder, and social repression of its citizens as the Nazis had been in Germany. In 1948, George Orwell published his fearful and scathing critique of totalitarian social control, *1984*. Social philosophers, such as Mannheim, von Hayek, and Popper, attacked the idea that there could be a science of human history and that its principles could be applied to the organization and direction of human society. Rejecting collectivist efforts, such as Stalinism in the Soviet Union, these writers argued for the need for spontaneous social order, flexibility, and liberty in the future evolution of human society. This philosophy resonated with the popular belief that World War II had been a victory of democracy over tyranny, as well as with the growing sense of individual freedom in the modernized West after the war. Indeed the 1950s and 1960s saw the philosophy of individual freedom and liberty become increasingly more powerful in many aspects of life in Western countries.¹⁵

As one significant example of this trend, the middle decades of the century witnessed the rise of feminism and the triumph of the sexual revolution. Through the feminist writings of Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, the social and scientific research of Kinsey and Masters and Johnson, and the creation of the Pill, women were inspired to break free of the social and sexual constraints imposed upon them within traditional male-dominated Western society. Women had been a significant part of the workforce during World War II, but after the war, most returned to lives as mothers and stay-at-home wives. This stereotypical role was increasingly challenged in the 1960s as more women began to pursue professional careers and goals, increasingly sought higher education, and challenged the oppressive social norm of the submissive and subservient female. As “sexual consciousness” rose and came out from behind the psychological and social suppression of earlier times, both women and men openly broke free of the cultural ideal of life-long, religiously sanctioned monogamy, and engaged in pre-marital sex, frequently with different partners; divorce rates also began to climb. As Kinsey discovered, there was actually more sexual freedom going on in the 1940s and 1950s than the general public realized, but with his publications, as well as many other noteworthy books in the next two decades, sexual freedom was more openly discussed and culturally reinforced and sanctioned.¹⁶ The sexual revolution was an attack on tradition and a search for something new in the future regarding gender roles and human relationships.

Just as significant, during the 1950s and 1960s the Civil Rights movement became increasingly visible and influential, altering the social fabric and values of human society. Over the preceding two centuries, a frequent criticism of modern Western democracies had been that only a minority of the citizens of “democratic” countries really enjoyed the full benefits and opportunities of true freedom – there still existed in modern democracies a social stratification of power and wealth. Women, for example, couldn’t vote in the United States until the twentieth century, and “Blacks” or African Americans were commonly treated by White European Americans as racially inferior and not deserving of the same

respect and privileges as everyone else. The Civil Rights movement, led by Black Americans such as Martin Luther King, and increasingly involving other ethnic groups who had been ostracized in American culture, demanded equal treatment and equal opportunities. The Civil Rights movement, which would eventually spread through other countries in the world, was an attack on stereotypes, especially negative ones. It professed a philosophy of individualism, where each person should be judged on character and not the color of his or her skin or ethnicity. In modernized countries, the philosophy of liberty and equality, in many respects, was intensifying and spreading throughout all spheres of human life.¹⁷ A new positive dream of the future that was more egalitarian and inclusive was emerging.

Also beginning in the post World War II era and continuing in the decades thereafter, the global phenomenon of decolonization spread across the world. In the Age of Exploration Europe had conquered and settled many large areas throughout the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australia. Even up to the beginning of the twentieth century, this process of “colonization” had continued, with Great Britain, in an effort to find new economic markets, unsettling the Chinese Empire. As a consequence of this last significant expansionist effort, the great leading world economy of China fell apart. But the growing political wave of liberty and self-determination began to turn things around after World War II. India won its independence from Great Britain and steadily, in subsequent decades, colonies in Africa and Asia broke free of their European masters. Many nations and people around the world, no longer under the control and influence of Europe, could begin to create and implement their unique visions of the future. Coupled with decolonization, more and more countries throughout the world attempted to establish democratic governments, though not always very successfully. Still, the general political trend toward democracy and liberty has continued up to the present. As Francis Fukuyama has proclaimed, the modern political era can be summarized as the “Triumph of Democracy.”¹⁸

In spite of such global movements toward democracy, liberty, and equality, the world struggle between capitalist democracies and Communist collectivist nations continued throughout most of the second half of the twentieth century; the political philosophies of collective totalitarianism and individualist democracy fought for control over the future of the world. From the 1950s to the 1980s the Soviet Union continued to aspire toward expanding its global leadership, in fierce competition with the United States and other Western democratic countries. Equally disturbing, Mao Zedong and his Communist party won control over mainland China in 1949 and created a new totalitarian government in the most populous country in the world. In the years ahead, the influence of Communist China would spread throughout Eastern Asia, and various other countries, such as North Korea and Vietnam adopted Communist governments as well. Wars were fought, again notably in Korea and Vietnam, between Communist and Western democratic forces over political and economic control of these lands. Ongoing internal conflict, in the name of Communist collectivist ideals, also occurred within Asian Communist countries, notably in the great Cultural Revolution in China, where presumed dissident voices against

Maoist philosophy were “silenced” in vast numbers. Though worldwide there was a growing call for freedom and fair and humane treatment of all people, within Communist countries such as Russia, China, Cambodia, and Vietnam, tens of millions of citizens were killed by their authoritarian governments in the name of totalitarian ideals. In fact, such oppressive and violent actions by governments against their own people, if we also include Nazi Germany in the count, caused more deaths than combat fatalities in all the wars fought in the twentieth century.¹⁹

While the political and humanistic philosophy of freedom and equality made advances across different spheres of human life and across different parts of the globe, and while this philosophy and way of life wrestled with the “Communist Block” for control of the world, from within the confines of democratic and capitalist nations, critiques and counter-movements to the very system itself emerged and grew in power and influence. Life in the United States was not all it was cracked up to be. Notable writers such as David Riesman, in his book *The Lonely Crowd*, proposed that Americans, in spite of their professed individuality, were becoming increasingly other-directed (rather than inner-directed), and desperately in need of love and personal relationships. In a similar vein, the philosopher Hannah Arendt saw increasingly isolation and loneliness in an emerging mass society, which she feared was a step back toward totalitarianism. The psychoanalyst and social philosopher Erich Fromm, in his book *The Sane Society*, saw man in the modern capitalist world becoming a commodity – an identity to be sold – and expressing his Marxist philosophy, Fromm described modern work as dehumanizing, boring, and meaningless and leading to alienation. W. H. Whyte, in his very influential work *Organization Man*, argued that individuality was not on the rise but rather declining in middle class corporate America. We were becoming more conformist in our behavior, ruled by the dictates and expectations of modern society and business. The growth of homogenized and repetitious suburbia was one clear expression of this trend toward conformity. In *The Affluent Society*, John Galbraith expressed his concerns over the growth of a mass society, the advertising industry, and an excessive focus on the production and consumption of goods. Finally, Vance Packard, in his best selling series of books beginning with *The Hidden Persuaders*, argued that American consumers were being turned into “mindless zombies” who were being manipulated by the psychological techniques of the advertising industry.²⁰

Such critiques of America and the modern capitalist and consumer society helped to lay the seeds of a cultural revolution that would blossom in the United States and spread into many other countries around the world in the 1960s and 1970s. The “Beat Culture” and the subsequent “Hippie Culture” presented an alternative philosophy of life and vision of the future that pulled together and expressed various existing trends and dissatisfactions within the modern world. It was a philosophy and lifestyle of extreme liberty and freedom – freedom of women, freedom of Blacks, and freedom to use illegal mind altering drugs and engage in premarital sex and “free love.” The “beatniks” and “hippies” tossed off their middle class clothing in favor of jeans, flower shirts, and brightly colored

beaded jewelry. Males let their hair grow long. Both young men and women strongly objected to the values of the “military-industrial complex,” denouncing the materialism of the affluent West and condemning the incessant wars being fought by their countries around the world. The Peace movement, in fact, grew out of their efforts. The Environmental and Ecology movements were also strengthened through the hippie philosophy of “back to nature.” Popular music, building upon the freedom of expression and boisterous quality of Rock ‘n’ Roll, became the soul of this new culture and popular singers such as Jimi Hendrix, the Beatles, Janis Joplin, and many others, became the central cultural icons of the movement. The music and lifestyle called for a breaking down of individual inhibitions and social taboos. In many ways the “Beat Culture” and “Hippie Culture” involved a re-assertion and further evolution of the philosophy of individualism (ironically a Western creation), with its emphasis on freedom and non-conformity, and was supported by the new popular psychologies of self-actualization, as espoused in the writings of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Instead of focusing on outer reality, there was an increased emphasis on inner reality, on spirituality, and the development of human potential. The cry and proclamation was to “Make love, not war!” This new counter-culture, as part of its rejection of modern Western society, also embraced many Eastern ideas, as well as the philosophies of indigenous peoples, such as the American Indians, and in opposition to the extreme rationalism of the West, turned to mysticism and a more emotional-romantic way of life. Personal expression and personal connection became more important than rationality, technology, and material gain.²¹

While the counter-culture of the beatniks and hippies was spreading across the United States and the West, a new intellectual and academic movement gained strength in Europe and eventually the United States that also contributed to the attack on the ideals of the modern West. Taking their inspiration from Nietzsche, Marx, and even Freud, the philosophers of Postmodernism and Deconstructionism achieved an increasingly powerful voice in the West in the 1970s and 1980s. Where the Enlightenment tradition had emphasized reason, science, and the ideal of secular progress, Postmodern thinkers, such as Foucault, Marcuse, and Derrida, argued that there was no objective and progressive direction to history, that all intellectual systems of thought were in actuality ideological systems for achieving and maintaining power, and that truth and value were historically and culturally relative. Neither science nor Western values had a privileged epistemological or ethical status. Philosophical relativism, in fact, has a long history going back at least as far as the ancient Greeks, but this new wave would have a strong impact on popular culture and thinking and clearly connected and was reinforced by many other resonant trends going on in the West.²²

As expressed through the Beat culture, there was a growing distrust of tradition and authority, and a growing dissatisfaction with the creations of modern science and technology. Alienation, war, the destruction of the environment, consumerism, and poverty were all blamed on the modern Western system. The reasons given for justifying the status quo – big business, big government, and

the smoothly running machine of modern life – appeared to be veiled attempts to maintain political and economic power. Twentieth-century anthropology seemed to reveal that non-Western cultures and people were not necessarily more primitive, but rather just different, and that the Western sense of superiority was egocentric and prejudicial. Respect for different points of view, lifestyles, and values, a consequence of individualist philosophy, seemed to imply that there was no superior way of either knowing or living. The Civil Rights and feminist movements and the process of decolonization all reinforced the value of pluralism and the ongoing critique of male-centered Euro-American dominance and superiority. According to philosophers of science, such as Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend, even the presumed objective and superior quality of scientific knowledge – basically a creation of the Western male - was also a chimera.²³

Postmodern writers clearly agreed with those critics of American society and Western capitalism who had argued that the citizens of modern Western countries were not as free as they believed they were. The French writer Guy DeBord saw the modern world as a “society of spectacle” where the world had become a commodity and even consumption itself had become part of the show. Big business and advertising had deluded modern humans into thinking they were free, but in actuality humankind was enslaved. On a related front, the psychiatrist Ronald Laing accused modern psychiatry and psychotherapy, presumed avenues toward individual freedom and self-expression, as actually reinforcing the norms of the mass society and conformity.²⁴

Philosophical relativism, as espoused in the writings of Postmodern thinkers, was especially critical of the idea of secular progress. If the beliefs and practices of different cultures and different times can not be comparatively evaluated relative to some absolute or objective standard, how can we say that there has been progress across time? Postmodernism reinforced the already growing loss of faith in the ideal of secular progress due to the two World Wars and the Great Depression. The Beat Generation also could not accept the standard view of progress, since it seemed that it was the very creations of advancing science, technology, and capitalism that were responsible for the most serious failings of the modern world.

The historian Robert Nisbet has chronicled the rise and fall of the idea of progress across the centuries and identifies a whole set of factors that has contributed to the loss of faith in progress in the twentieth century. For one thing, Westerners began to feel increasing guilt over their own affluence and success, becoming more and more aware that their material progress depended upon the enslavement and cultural destruction of non-Western people around the world (the results of colonialism). Nisbet also notes a steady loss of faith in the value of central institutions and the in the values such institutions presumably embody. As expressed through both the Beat culture and Postmodernism, there has been an ongoing revolt over the last half century against authority and traditional institutions such as government, business, religion, and the military. Enlightenment philosophers had made a strong connection between economic and social progress, yet in the second half of the twentieth century there has been a growing hostility toward the ultimate value of economic growth. Economic

growth, based on a capitalist system, had generated increasing disparity between the rich and the poor, undermined the traditional values of family, community, friendship, tradition, and religion, and produced a society of materialist consumers. Presumably, moral constraints and principles had deteriorated in the West, in the name of self-interest and the pursuit of financial success.

Also, according to Nisbet, in the twentieth century there has been a loss of respect for knowledge, science, and scholarship. The question has been repeatedly asked: Has the growth of science and knowledge really benefited humanity? Throughout the century, there has been a draw back to nature, to simplicity, to some idealized, more humane and authentic reality of the past. Nisbet also sees the loss of faith in objectivity and reason, as a consequence of Postmodernism and other philosophical and cultural developments, as leading to increasing self-centeredness, subjectivity, and occult practices. Whereas the Enlightenment engendered hope that the principles of science could be applied to humanity and society, in the twentieth century, people lost faith in the social sciences, and arguing in a similar vein to Watson, Nisbet points out that many people have come to believe that the social sciences and social engineering in the last century have done much more harm than good.

Also, part of the problem, contends Nisbet, is due to the very success of modernization, for we have created a world of security, abundance, and leisure with no perceived need for pushing ahead. As Watson states, we are doing “too well to do good.” Further, in the West, we have become complacent, if not bored with life. There are no visionary prophets of hope – no “Faustian” individuals expressing a “will to power.” According to Nisbet, modern humans have escaped into hedonistic materialism, fanatical spirituality, and the violence and sensationalism of the mass media. We have lost our sense of true culture, of cultural heroes (these having been replaced by sports figures and media stars), of the sacred, and of something “beyond.” In a sense, the future has died in a sea of momentary pleasures and complacency.

In the final analysis, in agreement with a similar view expressed by the historian of futurist thinking Fred Polak, Nisbet contends that a society, such as our modern world, that does not have a positive and progressive vision of the future will flounder and fail. Nisbet hopes for a renewal in the belief in progress.²⁵

Every critique has its counter-critique; every movement has its counter-movement. After the anti-establishment movements of the 1960s and 1970s, a variety of counter-attacks and opposing movements have emerged. As one example, the Beat generation, in the eyes of many critics, was in actuality an extreme expression of self-indulgence, unbridled hedonism, and self-centeredness. There was nothing constructive about it. It was a “culture of narcissism,” as the psychoanalyst Christopher Lasch argued. The free love (translated as non-committal sex), drugs, rock ‘n’ roll, and dropping out of society were simply a variety of pleasure seeking activities with no accompanying sense of responsibility, ethical constraints, or concern for others. “Doing your own thing” carried with it no sense of social sensitivity or responsibility. In the 1970s, the expression the “Me generation” became a commonly used negative label applied

to the young adults of the era. The popular self-awareness sessions and encounter groups of the hippie period were seen by writers such as Lasch and the journalist Thomas Wolfe as simply opportunities for people to talk about their favorite subject – themselves. Although the expression “consciousness raising” was frequently used to describe one of the central goals of the Beat counter-culture, members of the movement were actually engaged in various forms of self-indulgence. Further, the whole movement had a strong regressive quality to it. It romanticized the past and rejected a great many of the achievements of the last few centuries. Moreover, if everyone was off “doing her or his own thing” and focusing on his or her own inner consciousness, who was minding the store, and where was the sense of a social vision and purpose for the future of humanity as a whole? The movement was excessively romantic and Dionysian, focusing on feeling, emotion, and personal reverie, and had lost touch with all the important values connected with the rational and Apollonian side of humanity. According to Lasch, the movement had failed to produce any real expansion in consciousness or real psychological growth.²⁶

Yet the self-centeredness and hedonism of the 1960s and 1970s continued into later decades. One notable failing of the movement, as Daniel Quinn points out, was that it did not seriously consider how one goes about making a living. Underneath the veneer of freedom, members of the Beat and Hippie cultures were living off of the wealth and support of their parents; eventually the hippies had to “grow up” and find a way to support themselves. Interestingly, what happened was that many of the “hippies” turned into “yuppies,” finding jobs in the corporate world (their professed enemy a decade earlier), and continuing their lives in middle-class affluence in the suburbs. But frequently they seemed to carry with them the self-centered narcissism of their youth, only now they had found a way to satisfy this psychological disposition through the making of money and the purchasing of goods, services, and high-tech toys. A frequent criticism of contemporary modern culture is that it is excessively sensationalistic, self-centered, and hedonistic, all qualities of the hippie culture as well.²⁷

Another counter-attack of the 1980s and 1990s was directed against the relativism and liberalism of Postmodern philosophy and it came from a variety of fronts. Many philosophers and scientists disputed the subjectivist conclusions of Kuhn and Feyerabend, arguing instead that there was measurable objective growth in the sciences and that there were cross-cultural standards for evaluating knowledge claims. The educator Allan Bloom, in his highly controversial book *The Closing of the American Mind*, argued that the shallowness and extreme liberalism of pop culture was destroying educational standards and that we were witnessing an intellectual deterioration not only of the academic curriculum but of modern civilization as well. According to Bloom, universities were giving into public opinion and the philosophy of political correctness and losing sight of the great repository of knowledge of the past. Again, the new freedom, as Lasch had argued, was superficial and without merit. In a sympathetic and supportive vein, Harold Bloom, an esteemed professor of literature, also challenged the relativism of contemporary culture and education

and outlined a Western canon of great works of literature as foundational for higher education. The historian Gertrude Himmelfarb pushed the critique of Postmodernism even further. Not only was education being compromised and diluted, but our culture and our moral values were being threatened by Postmodernism. The liberalism of Postmodernism had become so extreme that it undermined “our duty to truth” and was actually subverting our liberty and freedom. Evil and human atrocity had become relative, and hence the actions of individuals like Hitler, which at one time were clearly seen as morally heinous and a global threat to the dignity and liberty of humankind everywhere, were now, through the eyes of Postmodernism, open to diverse and relativist interpretations.²⁸

In response to the writings of Allan and Harold Bloom, there was a counter-defense. The two Blooms were accused of being stuck in the past and of being Euro-centric. According to the counter critics, Western academic education should acknowledge and include in its canon the ideas and writings of non-Western countries. One of the fundamental points of Postmodern philosophy has been that the Enlightenment embodies an extreme Western bias, elevating its culture, its values, and its body of knowledge to a position of absolute validity and superiority over all other cultures and belief systems. Therefore, in the name of fair-mindedness, contemporary education and cultural awareness need to go beyond the prejudices and biases of the West and acknowledge and appreciate the varied points of view and values of cultures from elsewhere around the world. Both our human heritage and our future should be conceived in pluralistic, rather than Euro-centric terms.

Yet, another development, strongly connected with recent research and thinking in the sciences, brought into question the factual validity of philosophical relativism. Early anthropological research in the twentieth century seemed to demonstrate great variability in cultures around the world and this presumed general finding seemed to support the idea that humans were very malleable and basically products of the particular culture and historical period in which they lived. Yet, more recent research done in the last few decades has not only uncovered serious methodological flaws and personal biases connected with the earlier studies, but has also revealed that there, in fact, are numerous universal features to human thinking, values, and practices all around the world. Cultural relativism, at least to a great degree, appears to be a factually invalid scientific theory. Underneath our apparent differences there is a great deal of commonality within the family of humankind. Further, with continued developments in the biological sciences over the last few decades, it appears that biology and genetics significantly constrain individual and cultural variation. As the contemporary biologist E. O. Wilson came to argue, biology and culture are not entirely separate, and biology – a biology all humans share as members of the same species - to a great degree determines culture.²⁹

As Watson notes, many of the Postmodern and Deconstructionist writers remained relatively oblivious to the ongoing advances in science occurring in the second half of the twentieth century. While hippies were into doing their own thing and Postmodernists were proclaiming the relativity of all knowledge and

values and critiquing the concept of progress, science steadily advanced in its understanding of the world and its technological creations continued to further transform the world. The growth of science and the increasing infusion of technology into human life have been two of the most powerful and influential trends of the twentieth century. According to Watson, one of the most significant developments of twentieth-century science has been the progressive synthesis of a comprehensive description of the evolution of nature and humankind. Derived from research across numerous disciplines from history, archeology, paleontology, and geology to physics, biology, anthropology, and ecology, a grand narrative of life, the universe, and humanity has emerged. While Postmodernists have attacked the idea of grand narratives, science has been producing one. While the Postmodernists talked about diverse points of view, science, involving the contribution of numerous disciplines and investigators from many cultures, found agreement and convergence from all these points of view on a general story and pattern of change. There are innumerable controversies and areas of mystery still within science, but a general picture of nature has emerged and this general picture has steadily grown in detail and comprehensiveness over the last century. This comprehensive view of nature is evolution.³⁰ Hence, while Postmodernists continue to dispute the concept of progress, and contemporary creationists and fundamentalists vehemently argue against the validity of the theory of evolution, and while modern popular culture wallows in a loss of faith in the idea of progress, science has been steadily uncovering across the whole panorama of natural and human history a fundamental and pervasive progressive process toward increasing complexity, organization, and intelligence.³¹

Watson identifies the three major intellectual forces of the twentieth century as science, free market economics, and the mass media. As we have seen there have been critics of modern capitalist and consumer culture throughout the twentieth century, and the attacks, in fact, go back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Yet a pervasive trend throughout the last century has been the growth and spread across the globe of modern capitalism and consumerist culture. Toward the end of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union and its communist government collapsed and though the process of transformation has been far from successful, the various countries of the former Soviet Union have moved toward the adoption of capitalist free-market economies. Though China still maintains a communist system of government, it has supported the development of a capitalist economy. While various countries and ethnic groups continue to oppose Western consumerist culture, people around the world increasingly embrace and participate in this way of life. In fact, perhaps the main force behind the ongoing globalization of the world is the progressive networking together of capitalist economies and consumerist cultures. For better or worse, production and consumption continue to rise around the world. Since the end of World War II, with its up's and down's along the way, there has been a great economic boom as production of goods has grown over six fold worldwide.

The media and science have also been prime targets of social criticism throughout the last century, yet again, there is no question but that the power of both these forces in modern life has grown immensely.³² Watson, in fact, argues that the most significant trend across the twentieth century is the coming to terms with the advancements of science. Modern science has changed everything, including the way we think.

For Watson, the great global challenge facing humanity at the turn of the century is the non-West coming to terms with the West. The tension and conflict between the modernized West and Islam is particularly noticeable and pronounced, but Watson argues that Islam is still stuck in the past – in a philosophy of life that depends on ancient religion and faith. Writers such as Samuel Huntington see the cultural conflict between Islam and the West continuing, if not intensifying, in the decades ahead. Huntington also predicts escalating tension and conflict between the West and China, but other writers such as Thomas Friedman are more hopeful, believing that a compromise and balance can be struck between local cultures and the capitalist world economy sweeping across the world.³³

David Christian, in his “big history” of the world, *Maps of Time*, provides an overview of the major trends of the twentieth century. According to Christian, it has only been in the twentieth century that the full significance and impact of modernism have become apparent. Along a variety of measures, in spite of all the “sound and fury,” the twentieth century has shown phenomenal growth and change. World population has exploded from 1.6 billion at the beginning of the century to over 6 billion by 2000; of course, this may or may not be a good thing. Agricultural productivity has tripled in the same period of time. Energy usage per capita has almost quadrupled, as has the average global income. Perhaps, most astoundingly, the global economic output increased from 2 trillion dollars in 1900 to 5 trillion in 1950 and 39 trillion in 2000.

Other main trends in the twentieth century, according to Christian, are growing mass literacy, increasing longevity, the spread of democracy, widespread decolonization, an unprecedented economic boom since 1950, the death of peasantry and traditional tributary empires (such as those in China), the emergence of powerful transnational corporations, accelerated innovation, the breaking down of gender roles, and vast increases in wealth, productivity, and pollution. But, according to Christian, perhaps the most significant phenomenon of the last century has been the global transformation of the environment as industry, technology, government, and human society, in general, have altered, manipulated, and affected our planet in numerous ways. There have been great ecological changes in the last 50 years especially. According to many critics, humanity is quickly exhausting the resources of the earth and irretrievably polluting the environment. The question of where this ecological trend is heading has been the source of increasing controversy and debate over the last few decades.

Christian states that the continued growth of capitalism and the free market has been another major trend of the twentieth century. Eleven of the top thirty economic entities in the world are now business corporations, rather than

nations. Capitalism has produced great wealth and abundance and the collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union was primarily due to the fact that it could not generate the productivity or innovation of capitalist economies. Yet, capitalism has not equitably spread its benefits to all people. The unequal distribution of wealth in the world continues to intensify. The gap between the rich and the poor over the last few decades has widened at an accelerated rate. According to Christian, the overall global effect of modernism and all its economic and industrial developments on those people and cultures in third world countries has been decidedly negative, producing more harm than good. Further, the continuing growth of capitalism and economic productivity has necessitated the reciprocal growth of a consumerist society. As critics of this system have repeatedly argued, economics in the modern world seems to direct life, rather than the other way around. We live in order to buy, rather than buy in order to live.

On a positive note though, Christian states that in the last century there has been a great increase in collective learning. Advances in communication, the spread of higher education, the growth of science, increasing travel, and most notably in the last couple of decades, the rise of information technologies have all contributed to increased knowledge sharing and consequently the creation of more new ideas and innovation. Referencing the contemporary social theorist, Manuel Castells, the flow and exchange of information around the world has now become the most significant sector of the capitalist economy. Supported by a high-tech global infrastructure and the spread of computers into business and the home, a new “information economy” has emerged that, according to Castells, is qualitatively different than the previous industrial economy. In this process, the power and significance of nations and national boundaries have significantly decreased and the wealth and power of multinational corporations has increased.

Christian argues that the acceleration of the pace and scale of change is both the most striking and equally most frightening feature of the twentieth century. By many indicators, more change has occurred in the last century than in all the rest of human history. As he notes, some fear that we are watching a “traffic accident in slow motion,” as our industry and consumption continue to grow, unchecked by effective counter-measures to protect our environment and bring greater overall equality to all the people of the world.³⁴

In summary and conclusion, the last hundred years has been a time of amazing and often unsettling changes. The physical and biological sciences have been revolutionized through relativity theory, quantum physics, big bang cosmology, contemporary evolutionary theory and research, astronomy and space exploration, incredible advances in archaeology and paleontology, and the discovery of DNA and genetic transmission. Our understanding of the laws of nature, life, the universe, and the vast extent and intricate detail of space and time has been totally revolutionized.³⁵ Technology has transformed our lives with the invention, mass production, and distribution of the automobile, airplane, telephone and cell phone, radio, phonograph/CD/DVD players, light bulb, laser, television, microwave, fax and copy machines, and computer. A hundred years ago there were no movies, movie stars, or home video machines. Basically, a

hundred years ago we were still earthbound without satellites, rocket ships, and orbiting telescopes. In the twentieth century we landed on the moon, sent probes into the atmosphere of Jupiter, and mapped a billion galaxies in the heavens above. On a more down-to-earth level, in modernized countries, our kitchens, bathrooms, backyards, entertainment and living rooms, and homes, in general, have been transformed with a thousand different gadgets and modern conveniences, and our city streets, shopping areas, and business offices have become infused, illuminated, wired, animated, and automated with technology.³⁶ And finally, we have seen the beginnings of technology moving into our bodies, with artificial tissue and limbs, hearts, and other internal organs.³⁷ *Time* magazine identifies the advance of science and technology as the most significant defining trend of the twentieth century, nominating the preeminent scientist of the century - Albert Einstein - as the "Person of the Century."³⁸ The twentieth century has blown us away with its science and technology.

Yet in the last hundred years, we have been through two World Wars, a Global Cold War, and innumerable reshufflings of national boundaries and alliances involving hundreds if not thousands of local wars and skirmishes. In spite of (or maybe because of) our great nineteenth century dreams of human progress,³⁹ in this century we have fought, killed, tortured, and imprisoned our fellow humans over race, culture, religion, and politics in record numbers; the number of war deaths in the twentieth century quintupled over the number in the nineteenth century. We saw the rise and fall of Soviet Communism and the German Nazi state and suffered the historically unprecedented human atrocities created in their wake. *Time* magazine identifies the other two most important themes of the twentieth century as the struggle of democracy against totalitarianism and the struggle for human rights – two global battles that we are still fighting.⁴⁰

Even the growth of science and technology in the last century seems to have been a mixed blessing. Through the rapid advances in our technology and science, we have threatened our own survival as a species. We created atomic weapons and the United States came very close to initiating an atomic war with the Soviet Union, and, though the Cold War has subsided, we have amassed an arsenal of nuclear bombs that easily could wipe out all humanity.⁴¹ The production of weapons of mass destruction, including atomic, chemical, and biological weapons and all the techno-refinements associated with such weaponry, vastly exceeds our previous military capacities of a hundred years ago.⁴² Our factories, transportation systems, escalating consumption of resources, and the offshoots of our techno-civilization – the increasing production of waste and garbage - have all significantly unsettled and polluted our earthly ecosystem.⁴³ And the cutting edge wave of new technologies, including robotics, genetic engineering, and nanotechnology, presents new global threats of an even more potentially devastating nature.⁴⁴

There have been other important changes and developments in the last century – also often having both negative and positive features. As noted, the world population has skyrocketed and mega-cities of towering skyscrapers, incredible wealth, and overpowering slums have emerged across the globe.⁴⁵

Psychologically and socially, we have been transformed by pop culture, pop psychology, modern art and literature, rock music, and the rise of the feminist and Human Rights movements. But all these forms and self-expressions of freedom and the breaking of traditional constraints have instigated or created new conflicts, dangers, and uncertainties – for example, the loss of faith in progress and the rise of Postmodern relativism and unbridled self-indulgent hedonism. We discovered Freud and the dark secrets of the unconscious, Walt Disney, Mickey Mouse, and Jurassic Park, cyberspace and inner space, free love, mass divorce, credit cards, credit card debt, birth control pills, artificial sweeteners, and AIDS. As pop culture has circled the globe and communication and trade have increasingly networked humanity together, the local customs and cultures, which once provided simple and singular answers to the issues of life, have been replaced by a plethora, hodgepodge, and smorgasbord of choices, freedoms, ambiguities, and multiple visions of life.⁴⁶ Modern life has become filled with time saving conveniences yet is increasingly fast-paced and stressful.⁴⁷ We are more educated and psychologically self-aware, yet drug addiction and psychological disorders have reached epidemic proportions in modernized countries. And as we enter the new century, the Internet - the biggest machine and system for social, business, and recreational use ever constructed - seems to continue to grow with a will of its own, further networking the entire world together and further accelerating every dimension of human life. Yet as the computer and the Internet have come on the scene promising enhanced learning and interconnectedness, many people feel increasingly isolated and inadequate - stuck with the feeling that they are perpetually falling behind in what needs to be known.⁴⁸ The world today is in many ways a maze of contradictions.

The Contemporary Transformation

“Everywhere we look there is a tension between the past and the future, between a pessimism we cannot shake and an optimism we cannot believe in.”

John Noble Wilford

“Living in the borderlands between the modern and the postmodern means negotiating constant conflicts between the old and the new and confronting perplexing and often disturbing change. Condemned to a seemingly unending state of transition, permanent tension and strife appears to be a defining modality of the between. Moreover, the discourses that strive to describe this condition are also in conflict and at odds with each other, condemning us to unending theory and culture wars with no truce in sight.”

Steven Best and Douglas Kellner

*“Somethin's happening here,
What it is ain't exactly clear....”*

Buffalo Springfield

Watson states that we are in a “cross-over” or transition culture. We are moving from one way of thinking and living into a new way, yet there are many competing voices regarding the nature of the contemporary transformation, where it is heading, or where it should be heading. Watson identifies contemporary science, art, and business as three alternative ways of seeing the world, which are in competition with each other in our present times. But there are other levels and types of competition as well. Different cultures and people are at odds with one another across the globe, often engaging in violent conflict as a way to determine their destiny and future. Ideologies, social movements, and theories compete, as do corporations and businesses over who will dominate different areas of the economic market. All in all, according to Watson, we have entered the twenty-first century without a unifying grand narrative or common story of where we are and where we are heading. We have moved into a “Post – Postmodern” period.⁴⁹

Although, according to Ed Cornish there seems to be a general consensus, as one defining feature of the contemporary transformation, that we are in a period of accelerative change, different groups of individuals interpret and react to this general trend in different ways.⁵⁰ Futurists such as Hazel Henderson, Robert Theobald, and Alvin Toffler point out that there are many who wish to deny, minimize, or openly resist the revolutionary nature of our times.⁵¹ Instead of advocating for fundamental change in policies and philosophy, such conservative forces are attempting to continue along traditional paths, or even retreat to the past.⁵² Yet we should keep in mind, as Mary Clark observes, that in the past, societies usually learned new ways of thinking only when they were pushed into it.⁵³ Rarely does a society initiate mental change - a society, in fact, will resist changing its worldview. Resistance to change is a basic human motive, due to the need for mental stability, security, and the need for a sense of identity.⁵⁴ And further, as Henderson notes, those individuals and organizations in power will especially resist change because they are benefiting the most from the status quo. Change is risky, costly, and time consuming. Yet as advocates for change argue, it may be more costly in the long run to deny and resist the transformational forces and trends around us.

The issue of stability versus change is one of the main theoretical and ideological conflicts of our times.⁵⁵ This conflict comes out in theories and paradigms of the future. Continuing the historical dichotomy between those views that saw time as cyclical or unchanging and those views that saw time as linear and progressive, one basic dividing line and argument among theories of the future is whether the future is going to be (or should be) significantly different or basically just more of the same.⁵⁶

One good example of how change and the nature of the contemporary transformation can be interpreted differently derives from the sociological studies of Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson.⁵⁷ In a survey of American belief systems and values, Ray and Anderson identified three relatively distinct social-cultural

groups: Those who emphasize a return to a simpler, less technological past (the “Heartlanders”); those who continue to embrace a modern secular and technological progress (the “Modernists”); and those who advocate a jump forward to a new way of thinking beyond either traditionalism or modernism (the “Cultural Creatives”). In a sense, all three groups might see themselves as advocates of change – it simply depends on where you are standing. Heartlanders (which would include traditionalists and religious fundamentalists) often see contemporary times as simply a continuation of secular and ungodly trends that go back centuries, if not thousands of years into the past. From their perspective, within the modern world there is really “nothing new under the sun.” Yet, from outside this group, the Heartlanders are often viewed as attempting to retreat into an idealized past that, in fact, never really existed. Modernists, on the other hand, see the contemporary world as undergoing great change and progress and they see themselves as embracing this progressive movement forward. Yet, for the Cultural Creatives, the contemporary world is simply a continued expression of the eighteenth-century philosophy of material and secular progress – there is nothing qualitatively new, only much more of the same thing. The Cultural Creatives really want a change – not back to the idealized vision of the Heartlanders, but toward something really different. Many Cultural Creatives argue against the continued emphasis on unconstrained growth, calling for a “change” in direction and values toward a more sustainable society.⁵⁸ They want to move beyond the headlong rush and lack of foresight associated with modernism.

Keeping in mind these ambiguities and disagreements, it does seem, at least based upon a variety of indicators, that accelerative change is a defining feature of our era. To recall, as Christian documents, world population, industrial and agricultural productivity, wealth, innovation, the growth of knowledge, and ecological deterioration all show positively accelerated rates of growth over the last century. Other writers would add that humanity on a global scale is networking and connecting together at an accelerative rate as mass communication and the Internet are wiring us together into one “global brain.”⁵⁹ And Ray Kurzweil and Hans Moravec, among others, would further add that the information processing and storage capacities of our computer technologies are also growing at an exponential rate, setting the stage for even greater changes in the coming decades.⁶⁰

Accelerative change is intimately connected with increasing speed in innumerable aspects of human life. James Gleick, in his book *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything*, chronicles in unsettling and often comical detail the growing frenzy of modern life.⁶¹ For Gleick, increasing connectivity generates increasing speed in our lives. Within the business world, there is an increasing emphasis on efficiency and the modern worker feels busier than ever. There is a growing sense of information and choice overload and a never ending list of projects and tasks to complete. Information becomes obsolete more quickly and new products and developments have increasingly shorter life spans. There is a general expectation to be quicker and think faster. As Gleick puts it, we live in a state of “rat-race equilibrium” and are forced into multi-tasking as a way to

get everything done. Yet, because new technologies, which supposedly were developed as ways to save time, actually create more to do, we never do catch up and feel guilty and uncomfortable doing nothing – we can not relax. We are a time conscious society, where time is money, and in fact, more valuable than money. Overall, the fast pace of our lives is changing us psychologically, such that old TV shows and movies seem too slow to keep our attention for very long. We live in an “unbearable state of distraction” and perhaps suffer from a collective case of attention deficit disorder.

Because many of the big changes of the last century, which include accelerative change and increasing speed, seem more negative than positive, it is not altogether obvious to many people whether the contemporary transformation is progressive or degenerative.⁶² As Hazel Henderson has argued, in times of great upheaval, events will seem ambivalent.⁶³ We may be witnessing a collapse into a new age of darkness, or a rise to a higher plane of existence. Vaclav Havel states that we are presently in a transitional period where something is on the way out and something new is being painfully born.⁶⁴ During such times all existent value systems crumble and we enter into a time of confusion and uncertainty. As Zohar and Marshall put it, “Something new is in the air.”⁶⁵ And as Buffalo Springfield would add, “What it is ain’t exactly clear.” Of special importance, we are experiencing the birth of a new millennium. This passage from the old millennium into the new is associated with the archetypal theme of death and rebirth.⁶⁶ It is seen as a turning point in the history of humanity - as a time for both hope and fear.⁶⁷ Barbara Marx Hubbard sees our contemporary world in a time of great crisis, but connects this threatening state with the opportunity for a new birth – the negative and the positive possibilities are inextricably linked together.⁶⁸

From the perspective of open systems theory, the ambiguity of contemporary times is quite understandable. In open systems theory new order arises out of chaotic fluctuation. There are many who think that the world is going downhill because of all the apparent problems publicized in the news, as well as all of the local problems being experienced firsthand, e.g., stress, speed, terrorism, crime, inflation, pollution, traffic congestion, drug abuse, and divorce. David Pearce Snyder, a well-known futurist, acknowledges that in many ways things are indeed getting worse.⁶⁹ But as he notes, we shouldn’t extrapolate, as many are doing, into the future from the immediate present. This is linear thinking. Snyder believes that we are in revolutionary times and that it will take two generations - 50 to 70 years - to assimilate the productive potential of the new technologies, ideas, and practices. During the first half of a revolutionary change, things will get worse. According to Snyder, the real benefits of a dramatic social change don’t come until two-thirds of the way through the revolution. On a related note, Henderson states that status quo and conservative thinkers are trying to make sense out of the present transformation using industrial, Newtonian concepts and that this approach will not work.⁷⁰ For Henderson, the transition should be understood in terms of open systems and nonlinear, interactive, and creative concepts. From this more modern

perspective, the problems and ambiguities of the present are seen as necessary events in a progressive and evolutionary jump forward.

Perhaps the optimists are right and the contemporary transformation is moving in a positive direction, but even many of them would agree that there is clearly a dimension of uncertainty associated with our present situation. As noted earlier, there are different interpretations of the nature and direction of events and trends in our modern world – often clearly at odds with each other. This multiplicity of points of view in fact contributes to the overall uncertainty of things.

There are various writers who do attempt to bring some order and coherence to the nature of the contemporary transformation. For example, Ed Cornish lists six fundamental “super-trends” in an attempt to capture the main features of what is happening around us.⁷¹ These six super-trends are:

- Technological Progress
- Economic Growth
- Improving Health
- Increasing Mobility
- Environmental Decline
- Increasing Deculturation

Cornish sees these six super-trends as interconnected. Technological progress, as both a trend and a force, stimulates economic growth and economic growth not only feeds back on technological growth, but also contributes to improving health, increasing mobility, and on the negative side, environmental deterioration. Further, Cornish sees technological and cultural change as interconnected, so not only has technological change accelerated, but cultural change has accelerated as well. In the last century, both technology and human values changed drastically and continue to do so. Cornish notes that increasing mobility, due to increasing wealth and improved transportation, has been the primary cause of globalization and as globalization spreads, local cultures and ways of life are being homogenized into a world culture. Increasing deculturation involves the loss of traditions and values, which are replaced by one emerging international culture. As modernization spreads, many people are experiencing “culture shock.”

In general, Cornish views our present period as revolutionary, involving a fundamental transformation in all spheres of human life. In a model similar to the one proposed by Alvin Toffler, Cornish argues that there have been three global revolutions in human society throughout history: The Agricultural, Industrial, and Cybernetic. (Toffler referred to the third revolution as the Information Revolution.)⁷² We are still in the midst of the Cybernetic Revolution, which has involved the introduction of the computer and computerization into almost all aspects of our personal and professional lives. Cornish foresees a possible fourth revolution coming in the near future – the Biotechnological Revolution – which in its early stages right now promises the potential capacity to redesign life and in particular human nature. I would only add to this list a progenitive revolution – the Great Awakening of 40,000 years ago that saw the birth and

flowering of a multitude of cultural and technological developments – perhaps the birth of language, abstract thought, and culture itself.⁷³

If we place these four global revolutions on a time line, the most noticeable fact is that the rate of revolutionary change is accelerating. Each new revolution comes much faster/more quickly than the last. We have not even adapted to the present Cybernetic/Information Revolution and a new one, the Biotechnological, may already be emerging. Following the logic of Kurzweil, Moravec, and the science fiction writer Vernor Vinge, who first coined the expression, we seem to be accelerating toward a “technological singularity” where the pace of change and the exponential growth of computer intelligence will reach a level that will surpass human understanding and adaptability.⁷⁴ Hence, not only is the rate of change in our times accelerating, the rate of new waves of revolutionary change is accelerating as well.

One could argue that each new wave of revolutionary change brings with it a new set of technologies and social systems for organizing and disseminating information that, in fact, facilitates the speeding up of the rate of change. Computers, the Internet, improved transportation and communication, and an expanding global economy allow for increased collective learning and innovation, making our present social system much more powerful at producing change within the world. Further, each new wave also seems to reduce the time needed to move to the next wave of revolutionary change. If we follow the punctuated equilibria model of evolution proposed by Gould and Eldredge, the jumps in evolutionary development in human society come more and more quickly. Writers such as Kurzweil and the physicist Murray Gell-Mann, among others, see human cultural development as the latest and most powerful expression of the overall evolutionary process in nature; the evolutionary process itself evolves through increasingly more advanced stages that facilitate higher rates of progression and change. From this perspective, the accelerative rate of change in contemporary times is simply an expression of the mechanism of evolution evolving increasingly more powerful ways of generating evolution and change.⁷⁵

The Postmodern interpretation of the contemporary transformation, as described in the writings of Stephen Best and Douglas Kellner, highlights some other significant features of the nature of change in our times.⁷⁶ As Best and Kellner argue, the Postmodern era is a decisive shift away from the previous period along many different dimensions of human life, including politics, philosophy, culture, and the arts. A critical feature of this transformation is the abandonment of a single unifying vision or narrative for humankind. Whereas people in the past generally adopted and lived by a single belief system and set of values, mass communication and globalization, among other factors, has exposed people around the world to multiple systems of thinking and philosophies of life. The Postmodern world is a reality of many points of view – it is a pluralistic rather than monistic culture. Of course, in the past, there were different cultures and sub-cultures across the globe, but these different cultures tended to be much more insulated, and usually each culture tended to see its beliefs and values as the best and truest. In today’s Postmodern world, unless one defensively closes off the surrounding world, one lives in a reality of many

different perspectives and lifestyles. It could be argued that such a pluralistic system of ideas and values, both socially and psychologically, opens the human mind to increasing flexibility, freedom, and creativity, but it also produces more uncertainty, ambiguity, and conflict in life. Thus the Postmodern era may be speeding up change, but also it is intensifying uncertainty as to where it all is heading.

There are numerous other efforts to describe the overall nature and significance of the contemporary transformation, and of course, this is a manifestation of Postmodern pluralism. I will describe many of these alternative viewpoints in the next chapter on theories and paradigms of the future, but I should mention now a few other comprehensive interpretations to provide a more complete picture of the main features of the contemporary transformation.

Ed Cornish does not identify globalization as a distinctive “super-trend” within the contemporary transformation, yet numerous other writers would include this trend as one of the most significant directions of change in our present world. Walter Truett Anderson, for example, in his book *All Connected Now*, focuses on globalization and highlights some of its most important features. In the last century, the number of international corporations has significantly increased and the financial and political power of these corporations has grown and spread across the globe, producing an ever expanding global economy. Global governance has also significantly grown, in part instigated by the need to monitor and regulate the expanding global economy. Hence, the growing global economy, global governance, and political system are tied together. There has also been a globalization of human rights and the development of principles of “World Law,” as people around the world have come together to articulate a general set of moral and legal expectations regarding the treatment of fellow humans and basic living conditions and opportunities for everyone. According to Anderson, the emerging global society is a new kind of human society. It is responsible, to a great degree, for the increasing multiculturalism manifested in people’s lives, for we are all being more exposed to different cultures and belief systems. (Hence, Anderson explains the pluralism of the Postmodern era as an effect of globalization.) Further, there is an increasing number of individuals who see themselves as cosmopolitan or international citizens, rather than identifying with a particular nation. Technology is also a significant factor in globalization. Our computer and communication technologies have become global systems facilitating the exchange of money, products, and information and allowing for the monitoring and control of numerous ecological conditions across the globe. The earth and humanity along with it is being “wired” together – technology is global and globalizing. Overall, Anderson sees the emerging global society as a more hopeful society than those of the past, a more “open society” with greater awareness of change and the future.⁷⁷

Because of this general and pervasive trend toward globalization, a fundamental conflict has arisen in our times, and this conflict defines one of the key features of the contemporary transformation. The world has become divided between those who support globalization and those who do not and wish to preserve their local cultures and ways of life. Those who support globalization

tend to advocate for a mixing of cultures and are pro-change. Those against globalization are against the mixing of cultures and tend to oppose change. Anderson describes this conflict as between “globalism” and “tribalism” while Thomas Friedman metaphorically describes it as “the Lexus versus the Olive Tree.” Some writers, such as Samuel Huntington, see globalization as primarily a Western creation and foresee continued conflict between this Western vision of world unity and other cultures, such as Islam, which do not want to be enveloped in this spreading economic-cultural system. Finally, Benjamin Barber describes the conflict as “Jihad versus McWorld,” where international corporations (“McWorld”) in their attempt to create global economic markets are instigating frequent violent counter-reactions from local cultures (“Jihad”) against global big business.⁷⁸ As Anderson states, globalization is becoming “the issue” of the global society.

Connected with the conflict over globalization is the ongoing disagreement between optimists and pessimists regarding the overall direction of change in contemporary times. This disagreement often takes the form of a dispute over whether the modern, technologically driven, expansionary capitalist-consumerist society is making the world a better place in which to live, or making things worse. Dinesh D’Souza describes the conflict as between the parties of “Yeh” and “Nah.” As D’Souza states, the party of “Yeh” believes that material and moral progress come together and we should embrace the capitalist and free market way of life (This was the view of the Enlightenment as well.) The party of “Yeh” embraces technological advance and lives for the future, since, according to them, the past wasn’t really that good and things are indeed getting better. The “Yeh” party believes in the promise of secular progress. (Basically they are Ray and Anderson’s modernists.) The party of “Nah,” in contrast, thinks that humanity’s Golden Age was in the past and that the present embodies a deterioration of human society. For the party of “Nah,” science, industry, and capitalism have produced a loss of community, a moral decline, and an end to the belief in a higher transcendent order (God).⁷⁹ Thus, in D’Souza’s analysis, the pessimists have a regressive or backward looking perspective (“the good old days” syndrome), believing that the contemporary transformation is heading toward disaster; on the other hand, the optimists are forward looking and hopeful regarding where all the contemporary changes are leading. This debate, though, over the questionable effects of modernization goes back at least two hundred years to Romantic and earlier traditionalist critiques.

To add recent support to the arguments of the party of “Nah,” Gregg Easterbrook in his book, *The Paradox of Progress*, documents that although citizens of modernized countries have increasingly more material benefits and wealth, they do not necessarily feel any happier because of it. In fact, in the popular TV special, *Affluenza*, and accompanying book, a whole host of social, psychological, and moral problems are connected with the accelerative growth of production and consumption.⁸⁰

Both D’Souza and Ray and Anderson provide a similar historical analysis of the underlying events that have led to this present conflict within human society. According to all of them, prior to the rise of modernism in Europe, the

West was fundamentally a God-centered society. Values and purpose in life were defined by the Christian church. Revolutionaries of the modern era, though, perceived this Church-centered social order as exceedingly authoritarian and repressive. In the West, the rise of science, Enlightenment values such as reason, and democracy were various attempts to overturn the closed-minded and rigid social system of Medieval times. Yet what replaced the church and royalty was a market ideology and society of commerce. The West became a society that was money and time centered, held together by a shared selfishness, where greed was elevated to a moral virtue and imperative. This new modern society, though it created a whole set of benefits, produced increasing inequality, rootlessness, over-spending, alienation, and stress. The party of “Nah” could rightly ask, “Does this constitute progress?” Both tribal and fundamentalist critics of modernization frequently highlight the money-centered, un-godly way of life modernization has created.

There are other critical social and ideological movements that see a general trend toward decline, deterioration, and potential disaster in the present world. Postmodernists have critiqued the power hungry, supremacist behavior of the West, and environmentalists believe that in our rush toward technological advancement and economic growth, we are destroying our natural ecology beyond repair. All things considered, one defining feature of our contemporary world is a significant divide between those who see humanity heading in a positive direction and those who see us as spiraling downward. Many people, to recall the earlier discussion on the ambiguity of change in contemporary times, are mixed and uncertain in their assessment of where we are heading.

As Ed Cornish points out though, it is important to combat fatalism and nihilism about the future.⁸¹ Even if pessimism has its value in highlighting problems that need to be faced and addressed, it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.⁸² It is important to have positive and realistic images of the future. Our contemporary world is faced, therefore, with a challenge, a challenge that has been with us probably since the beginning of human civilization: How do we create motivating and convincing positive images for the future. Clearly, there is presently a great divide among humanity regarding whether the future is something to fear, or something that engenders hope and optimism.

Leonard Shlain provides a different historical explanation of contemporary times and arrives at an optimistic conclusion regarding the overall future direction of humanity. For Shlain, one of the central conflicts within human history has been the emphasis placed on right-brain visual thinking versus left-brain linguistic thinking. He connects the former mode of thought with feminine values and behavior and the latter mode with male values and behavior. He sees male left-brain thinking as responsible for a great deal of the violence and injustice throughout history, whereas image-based, more feminine thinking tends to support peace and justice. Shlain believes that with the rise of visual media in the modern world, we are witnessing an “Iconic Revolution” and a more balanced mode of understanding and approaching life.

Shlain’s analysis, in some ways, dovetails with the writings and ideas of the feminist philosopher Riane Eisler and the scientist Sally Goerner. Eisler sees

most of recent human history as controlled by male authorities who organized human society in terms of dominance hierarchies. This system brought with it social injustice, inequality, and much war and violence. She does believe, though, that human society, especially in the last hundred years, is moving toward a more gender-balanced system. In her mind, the feminine approach to social organization is the establishment of partnerships, rather than top-down rule. Goerner, looking at the development of science over the last few centuries, argues that in science we are moving away from hierarchical and top-down models of natural order to network and connectivity models. Goerner believes that this new way of thinking in science is spreading outward into many different spheres of human life and will transform human society.⁸³

Pulling together the ideas of Shlain, Eisler, and Goerner, there is perhaps a fundamental shift in human thinking, values, and modes of social organization occurring in the contemporary world. This general trend involves a set of interconnected themes: The rise of women, the increasing importance of visual imagery, and a shift from dominance hierarchies to partnership networks. This general trend promises to create a more peaceful, balanced, and just world in the future. Yet, as Eisler, for one, is quick to point out, this new, more feminine mindset is a threat to the status quo, which is primarily ruled by males who think in terms of dominance hierarchies. Hence, the rise of women in contemporary times (which many writers would include as a fundamental trend of the contemporary transformation) has generated still another basic conflict within our world, as many individual cultures, that tend to be dominated by strong male rule, fight back against the global movement toward the equal rights of women.

The *Millennium Project*, introduced in the previous chapter, takes a somewhat different approach to describing the main features of the contemporary world. Instead of identifying basic trends as the key elements in its description, to recall, the *Millennium Project* identifies key challenges. This analysis provides a more action-oriented and dialectical view of our times; for each global challenge that is identified (there are fifteen) there will be a description of a desirable goal and of forces that are working both toward its realization and against it. The *Millennium Project* also describes provisional courses of actions, resources, and activist groups connected with addressing each of these key challenges. Included in their list are such challenges as bringing sustainable development to all people across the world; bringing more ethical considerations into the workings of the world economy; reducing the growing gap between the rich and the poor; using technology and science to improve the conditions of human life; and replacing authoritarian governments with democratic governments. The *Millennium Project*, coordinated by Jerome Glenn and Theodore Gordon, involves the systematic polling and analysis of judgments of experts around the world on key challenges and issues. Thus its assessment of the “state of the future” reflects a more global, balanced, and collective view than the ideas of any one individual or particular culture or ideology.⁸⁴

The assessment of present times provided by the futurist Barbara Marx Hubbard also highlights the theme of challenges for the future. According to

Hubbard, we are at a crisis point in the evolution of humanity. She sees two basic trends at work in our time: One trend is in the direction of self-transcendence and the other trend is in the direction of catastrophe. In her mind, which trend will dominate in the final analysis will depend upon the choices humanity makes; for Hubbard, the future is uncertain and can go either way. Hubbard believes though, as do Glenn and Gordon of the *Millennium Project*, that humanity possesses the resources and intelligence to meet the challenges facing us and to create a positive future. The question is whether we will pull together as a species and global society and constructively solve our problems. This is uncertain.

Hubbard presents her analysis of the present and the possibilities of the future in the context of human and natural history. She takes a “big picture” of time. According to her, the most fundamental pattern of change in history is evolution. The emergence and growth of human civilization is part of this overall cosmic process. As do many other writers, Hubbard believes that the evolutionary process is speeding up (or accelerating), but she adds a dialectical dimension to this process, arguing that evolutionary growth has a spiral form, where the evolutionary process passes through stages involving a crisis point or challenge at each stage that must be overcome if the growth process is to continue. (A similar model of growth was created by the psychologist Erik Erikson in describing the stages of individual psychological growth where a crisis at each developmental stage needed to be resolved if the person was to move on to the next stage of life.) Hubbard thinks that we are now at a crisis point in our evolution, but this crisis is not necessarily something to be depressed or fearful over, since evolutionary crises are the necessary preludes to advancement and jumps in evolution. As she puts it, “Our crisis is a birth.” The nature of this fundamental crisis is best symbolized by the image of the mushroom cloud of an exploding atomic bomb, for this image represents humanity’s recently created technological ability to self-destruct. We have come to the edge of the cliff and we can either fall into the abyss or take off and fly.

Many historical trends and developments, both positive and negative, have contributed to our present condition and world situation. On the positive side, Hubbard sees the growth of science and technology, democracy and individualism, and the recent feminist, human rights, environmental, and peace movements as all providing resources and ideas for successfully meeting the present world crisis. But there have also been negative trends, such as environmental deterioration, increasing military development, and continued conflict and animosity among the different cultures of the world, that threaten our very survival. Some trends, such as the growth of technology and economic productivity, are double-edged swords, providing resources for successful continued evolution, yet also creating negative and potentially very destructive effects in our world.

In Hubbard’s mind, the key principle to our further development is “conscious evolution” where humanity purposefully guides its future evolution using the vast resources and knowledge base that we have created over the centuries. Further, she believes that it is critical that humanity comes together as

a whole in this endeavor. We must move toward a “total resonance of all individuals” in a “co-creative” endeavor if we are to successfully meet our contemporary challenges. Hubbard sees the growing “social potential movement” – an outgrowth of the “human potential movement” – as the beginnings of such a collective effort. Thus, Hubbard stands with many other social theorists and writers throughout history, such as H.G. Wells, in basically arguing that “united we stand, divided we fall.” In fact, Hubbard equates evil with separation and disconnectedness and good with creating an “Integral Culture.”⁸⁵ Again, as in Goerner, we see the importance of the idea of connectedness.

Not everyone agrees that the solution to our contemporary problems lies in a coming together of humanity into a united whole. In fact, to recall, one of the central conflicts and issues of our time concerns the desirability of continued globalization. For many people, especially, but not exclusively outside of modernized countries, the movement toward globalization embodies an economic and political effort on the part of the West to dominate and assimilate all other cultures across the world. Many nationalists and cultural pluralists argue for the preservation of non-Western philosophies and ways of life, against the perceived continued colonialism and spread of Western concepts of progress across the globe.⁸⁶ One could argue that one of the most fundamental issues of our time is in actuality a continuation of an age old conflict between the forces toward social unity on one hand and those toward individuality and diversity on the other.⁸⁷ Each side of this coin, from an historical point of view, has had both positive and negative effects on the growth of human society; hence, there is no simple answer to this issue. Because this conflict has been so fundamental to the entire history of humanity, it is doubtful whether it will be resolved one way or the other in the immediate future. We will continue to struggle over unity versus diversity.

In two of his books on contemporary culture, Anderson distills two somewhat different classification schemes of the main “world views” or “stories” competing for our attention and allegiance in interpreting the meaning and direction of our times.⁸⁸ These maps of the ideological terrain provide a good conceptual bridge, summarizing a variety of the above ideas and views, and providing a lead into the more detailed review of theories and paradigms of the future in the next chapter. They present a perspective on the complex nature of our times.

In the first book, *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be*⁸⁹, Anderson lists and discusses the following six contemporary worldviews:

- The Western Myth of Progress
- Marxist Socialism
- Christian Fundamentalism
- Islamic Fundamentalism
- Green - Environmentalist Philosophy
- The “New Paradigm” Story

There are numerous theoretical and practical disagreements among these worldviews – disagreements that involve interpretations of our past, our present, and the future. Has the last century of human history been uphill, downhill, or more of the same? Are we creating, destroying, or are we stuck in a rut? Have we been going in one direction or many? Fundamentalism, either Christian or Islamic, emphasizes past traditions, in opposition to both “Progress” and “New Paradigm” views. (The “New Paradigm” view would include Ray’s Cultural Creatives and writers such as Hazel Henderson and Barbara Marx Hubbard.) From the fundamentalist perspective, the last century has been morally degenerative. But Christian and Islamic fundamentalisms are clearly at odds with each other regarding many different cultural, political, and religious issues. Although both “Progress” and “New Paradigm” advocates may see themselves as leading the way into a “better world,” fundamentalists, Greens, and Marxists, for different reasons, see Western progress as causing past problems and leading to new difficulties and perhaps worldwide disaster. Further, the “New Paradigm” group sees the Western progress view as stuck in the past and unwilling to change.

Anderson, though, wishes to add a seventh perspective, the Postmodern view, which he sees emerging out of this complex array of points of view. Postmodernism, according to Anderson, directly confronts the complexity of our times, acknowledging that there are multiple points of view, each created in a social-historical context containing valuable insights, yet no one view having some privileged access to “The Truth.” In fact, the different points of view support flexibility in thinking, allowing us to look at things from more than one perspective and engage in dialogue, self-reflection, and further evolution. Following from this logic, one good reason for reviewing and discussing in depth the various theories and paradigms on the future is to broaden, enrich, and open up our view of today and tomorrow. But Postmodernism can also be criticized as generating too much ambiguity and chaos and a loss of standards without any sense of direction or purpose.⁹⁰

Anderson in a later book, *The Truth About the Truth*,⁹¹ a collection of essays by numerous contemporary writers, streamlines his classification scheme into four main views. In his article “Four Different Ways to Be Absolutely Right,”⁹² he identifies and describes the following four world views:

- Postmodern-Ironist
- Scientific Rational
- Social Traditional
- Neo-Romantic

Once more, Anderson thinks that Postmodernism is the most flexible and “enlightened” way into tomorrow. He believes that all three other main views are to different degrees rooted and stuck in the past. The “Scientific Rationalist” supports secular Western progress, technology, and the supremacy of reason. The “Social Traditionalist,” which would include fundamentalism and Ray’s “Heartlanders,” tend to ignore the cultural richness of humanity and oversimplify

reality into a single vision. The Neo-Romanticist, which includes Green/environmentalists and “New Agers,” is, according to Anderson, most “strongly oriented to the past.” From a technological or a scientific-rational perspective, to “Return to Nature” is both unrealistic and incredibly regressive. But all these views co-exist in our complex contemporary world, in opposition with each other over who possesses the “Truth.”

Thinking through the above themes and points of debate, one is reminded of the opening lines of Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*, quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Have the issues and concerns changed much in the last two hundred years since Dickens wrote the above words? In many ways they clearly have, but it is interesting to note that Dickens wrote these words during the last great social transformation as the Industrial Age spread across Europe and America. We are once again looking for the answer into the future – perhaps a new answer or some combination of old ones – and the confusion we feel is quite natural. As we have seen, there is a set of basic trends that provide a general picture of the nature of our times and the contemporary transformation. Yet, different theories interpret these trends differently. For example, is accelerative growth a positive or a negative trend, or is globalization good or bad? To add to the uncertainty of our journey into the future we find many answers – perhaps too many answers - often contradictory and conflicting – over the direction in which we are heading - vying for our attention and commitment on the horizon of tomorrow. At the very least, we can get an overall sense of the different views, something begun in the above discussion of Anderson’s classification scheme, and that is the function of the next chapter.

References Chapter Three

-
- ¹ Glennon, Lorraine (Ed.) *Our Times: The Illustrated History of the 20th Century*. Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1995; Christian, David *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004, Chapter Fourteen.
- ² Zey, Michael G. *Seizing the Future: How the Coming Revolution in Science, Technology, and Industry Will Expand the Frontiers of Human Potential and Reshape the Planet*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994; Wright, Robert *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2000.
- ³ Toffler, Alvin *Future Shock*. New York: Bantam, 1971; Toffler, Alvin *The Third Wave*. New York: Bantam, 1980; Toffler, Alvin *Power Shift: Knowledge, Wealth, and Violence at the Edge of the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Bantam, 1990; Toffler, Alvin, and Toffler, Heidi *Creating a New Civilization: The Politics of the Third Wave*. Atlanta: Turner Publishing, Inc., 1994; Toffler, Alvin, and Toffler, Heidi "Getting Set for the Coming Millennium" *The Futurist*, March/April, 1995; Anderson, Walter Truett *Reality Isn't What It Used To Be*. New York: Harper, 1990; Anderson, Walter Truett *Evolution Isn't What It Used To Be: The Augmented Animal and the Whole Wired World*. New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1996.
- ⁴ Watson, Peter *The Modern Mind: An Intellectual History of the 20th Century*. New York: HarperCollins Perennial, 2001, Chapters One, Four, and Six.
- ⁵ Lombardo, Thomas "Romanticism" in Lombardo, Thomas *The Evolution of Future Consciousness*. Bloomington, Indiana: Author House, 2006.
- ⁶ Watson, Peter, 2001, Chapters Ten to Thirteen.
- ⁷ Lombardo, Thomas "Hegel, Marx, and the Dialectic" in Lombardo, Thomas *The Evolution of Future Consciousness*. Bloomington, Indiana: Author House, 2006.
- ⁸ Bloom, Howard *The Lucifer Principle: A Scientific Expedition into the Forces of History*. New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1995.
- ⁹ Tuchman, Barbara *The Guns of August*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1962.
- ¹⁰ Watson, Peter, 2001, Chapter Eighteen.
- ¹¹ Watson, Peter, 2001, Chapters Nine and Twelve.
- ¹² Watson, Peter, 2001, Chapters Thirteen, Seventeen, and Nineteen.
- ¹³ Watson, Peter, 2001, Chapter Twenty-Three; Sartre, Jean Paul *Being and Nothingness*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1953.
- ¹⁴ Lombardo, Thomas "Science, Enlightenment, Progress, and Evolution" in Lombardo, Thomas *The Evolution of Future Consciousness*. Bloomington, Indiana: Author House, 2006.
- ¹⁵ Watson, Peter, 2001, Chapter Twenty-One.
- ¹⁶ Watson, Peter, 2001, Chapter Twenty-Four.
- ¹⁷ Watson, Peter, 2001, Chapters Seven and Thirty.
- ¹⁸ Fukuyama, Francis *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: The Free Press, 1992.
- ¹⁹ Moore, Stephen and Simon, Julian *It's Getting Better All the Time: 100 Greatest Trends of the Last 100 Years*. Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 2000, page xi.
- ²⁰ Watson, Peter, 2001, Chapter Twenty-Five.
- ²¹ Watson, Peter, 2001, Chapter Twenty-Six.
- ²² Watson, Peter, 2001, Chapter Thirty-Five; Best, Steven and Kellner, Douglas *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1991; Best, Steven and Kellner, Douglas *The Postmodern Turn*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1997.
- ²³ Watson, Peter, 2001, Chapter Sixteen; Kuhn, Thomas *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962; Feyerabend, Paul "Problems of Empiricism" in Robert Colodny (Ed.) *Beyond the Edge of Certainty*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965; Feyerabend, Paul "Problems of Empiricism II" in Robert Colodny (Ed.) *The Nature and Function of Scientific Theory*. London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969.
- ²⁴ Watson, Peter, 2001, Chapters Twenty-Eight and Thirty.
- ²⁵ Nisbet, Robert *History of the Idea of Progress*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994, Pages 317 – 357; Polak, Frederik *The Image of the Future*. Abridged Edition by Elise Boulding. Amsterdam: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, 1973.
- ²⁶ Watson, Peter, 2001, Chapter Thirty-Three; Lasch, Christopher *The Culture of Narcissism*. New York: Warner Books, 1979.

-
- ²⁷ Quinn, Daniel *Beyond Civilization: Humanity's Next Great Adventure*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999.
- ²⁸ Watson, Peter, 2001, Chapter Forty-One; Bloom, Allan *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1987.
- ²⁹ Brown, Donald *Human Universals*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991; Pinker, Steven *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. New York: Penguin Books, 2002; Wilson, E. O. *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975.
- ³⁰ See Lombardo, Thomas "Darwin's Theory of Evolution" in Lombardo, Thomas *The Evolution of Future Consciousness*. Bloomington, Indiana: Author House, 2006 for a history of the early development of the theory of evolution.
- ³¹ Watson, Peter, 2001, Chapters Thirty-Four, Thirty-Nine, Forty-Two and Conclusion.
- ³² Gitlin, Todd *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms Our Lives*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001.
- ³³ Watson, Peter, 2001, Conclusion; Huntington, Samuel *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Touchtone, 1996; Friedman, Thomas *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999.
- ³⁴ Christian, David, 2004, Chapter Fourteen.
- ³⁵ Gribbin, John *Genesis: The Origins of Man and the Universe*. New York: Delta, 1981; Gribbin, John *In Search of the Big Bang: Quantum Physics and Cosmology*. New York: Bantam, 1986; Davies, Paul *God and the New Physics*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983; Davies, Paul *The Cosmic Blueprint: New Discoveries in Nature's Creative Ability to Order the Universe*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988; Davies, Paul *The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992; Prigogine, Ilya and Stengers, Isabelle *Order out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature*. New York: Bantam, 1984; Kaku, Michio *Visions: How Science will Revolutionize the 21st Century*. New York: Anchor Books, 1997; Adams, Fred and Laughlin, Greg *The Five Ages of the Universe: Inside the Physics of Eternity*. New York: The Free Press, 1999.
- ³⁶ Glennon, Lorraine, 1995.
- ³⁷ Kelly, Kevin *Out of Control: The Rise of Neo-Biological Civilization*. Reading, MA: Addison - Wesley, 1994; Anderson, Walter, 1996; Clark, Andy *Natural-Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- ³⁸ Isaacson, Walter "Time's Choice: Who Mattered – and Why" *Time*, Vol. 154, No. 27, December 31, 1999.
- ³⁹ Wilson, E.O. *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998; Wilson, E.O. "The Biological Basis of Morality" *The Atlantic Monthly*, April, 1998b.
- ⁴⁰ Fukuyama, Francis, 1992; Isaacson, Walter, 1999.
- ⁴¹ Kahn, Hermann *On Thermonuclear War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960.
- ⁴² Toffler, Alvin, and Toffler, Heidi *War and Anti-War: Survival at the Dawn of the 21st Century*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1993.
- ⁴³ Meadows, Dennis, Meadows, Donella, and Randers, Jorgen *Beyond the Limits*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992.
- ⁴⁴ Joy, Bill "Why the Future Doesn't Need Us" *Wired*, April, 2000.
- ⁴⁵ Kauschke, Hans-Gerhard "Going Height Crazy: Super Skyscrapers of the Future" *The Futurist*, November-December, 1986; Barrett, David B. "Global Statistics" in Kurian, George Thomas, and Molitor, Graham T.T. (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of the Future*. New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1996.; Gappert, Gary "Cities" in Kurian, George Thomas, and Molitor, Graham T.T. (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of the Future*. New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1996.
- ⁴⁶ Anderson, Walter, 1990.
- ⁴⁷ Gleick, James *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1999.
- ⁴⁸ Sawyer, Deborah "The Pied Piper Goes Electronic" *The Futurist*, February, 1999.
- ⁴⁹ Watson, Peter, 2001, Conclusion.
- ⁵⁰ Cornish, Edward *Futuring: The Exploration of the Future*. Bethesda, Maryland: World Future Society, 2004, Chapter Two.

-
- ⁵¹ Henderson, Hazel *Paradigms in Progress: Life Beyond Economics*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1991; Theobald, Robert *Turning the Century*. Indianapolis: Knowledge Systems, Inc., 1992; Toffler, Alvin, 1990.
- ⁵² Postrel, Virginia *The Future and Its Enemies: The Growing Conflict Over Creativity, Enterprise, and Progress*. New York: Touchstone, 1999.
- ⁵³ Clark, Mary E. "Mind: New Modes of Thinking" in Kurian, George Thomas, and Molitor, Graham T.T. (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of the Future*. New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1996.
- ⁵⁴ Lombardo, Thomas "The Psychology and Value of Future Consciousness" in Lombardo, Thomas *The Evolution of Future Consciousness*. Bloomington, Indiana: Author House, 2006.
- ⁵⁵ Postrel, Virginia, 1999, describes this conflict as the clash between "stasis" and "dynamism".
- ⁵⁶ Tipler, Frank *The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God, and the Resurrection of the Dead*. New York: Doubleday, 1994.
- ⁵⁷ Ray, Paul "What Might Be the Next Stage in Cultural Evolution?" in Loye, David (Ed.) *The Evolutionary Outrider: The Impact of the Human Agent on Evolution*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1998; Ray, Paul and Anderson, Sherry *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People are Changing the World*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000.
- ⁵⁸ Theobald, Robert, 1992; Meadows, Dennis, Meadows, Donella, and Randers, Jorgen, 1992; Slaughter, Richard "Futures Concepts" in Slaughter, Richard (Ed.) *The Knowledge Base of Future Studies*. Volume I. Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia: DDM Media Group, 1996.
- ⁵⁹ Stock, Gregory *Metaman: The Merging of Humans and Machines into a Global Superorganism*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993; Wright, Robert, 2000; Bloom, Howard *Global Brain: The Evolution of Mass Mind from the Big Bang to the 21st Century*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2000.
- ⁶⁰ Kurzweil, Ray *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence*. New York: Penguin Books, 1999; Kurzweil, Ray *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*. New York: Viking Press, 2005; Moravec, Hans *Robot: Mere Machine to Transcendent Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- ⁶¹ Gleick, James, 1999.
- ⁶² Fukuyama, Francis *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order*. New York: The Free Press, 1999.
- ⁶³ Henderson, Hazel, 1991.
- ⁶⁴ Havel, Vaclav "The Need for Transcendence in the Postmodern World" *The Futurist*, July-August, 1995.
- ⁶⁵ Zohar, Danah and Marshall, Ian *The Quantum Society: Mind, Physics, and a New Social Vision*. New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1994.
- ⁶⁶ Naisbitt, John and Aburdene, Patricia *Megatrends 2000*. New York: Avon Books, 1990.
- ⁶⁷ Capra, Fritjof *The Turning Point*. New York: Bantam, 1983.
- ⁶⁸ Hubbard, Barbara Marx *Conscious Evolution: Awakening the Power of Our Social Potential*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 1998.
- ⁶⁹ Snyder, David Pearce "The Revolution in the Workplace: What's Happening to Our Jobs?" *The Futurist*, March-April, 1996.
- ⁷⁰ Henderson, Hazel, 1991.
- ⁷¹ Cornish, Edward, 2004, Pages 22 – 29.
- ⁷² Cornish, Edward, 2004, Page 16.
- ⁷³ Lombardo, Thomas "The Great Awakening, Culture, and the Discovery of Death" in Lombardo, Thomas *The Evolution of Future Consciousness*. Bloomington, Indiana: Author House, 2006; White, Randall *Prehistoric Art: The Symbolic Journey of Humankind*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003; Calvin, William *A Brief History of the Mind: From Apes to Intellect and Beyond*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004; Diamond, Jared *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1992.
- ⁷⁴ Vinge, Vernor "The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era" *Vision-21: Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering in the Era of Cyberspace NASA-CP-10129*, 1993 - <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/faculty/vinge/misc/singularity.html>.
- ⁷⁵ Eldredge, Niles and Gould, Stephen "Punctuated Equilibria: An Alternative to Phyletic Gradualism" in Schopf, T. J. M. (Ed.) *Models in Paleobiology*. Freeman Cooper, 1972; Gell-

Mann, Murray *The Quark and the Jaguar: Adventures in the Simple and the Complex*. New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1994.

⁷⁶ Best, Steven and Kellner, Douglas, 1991; Best, Steven and Kellner, Douglas, 1997.

⁷⁷ Anderson, Walter Truett *All Connected Now: Life in the First Global Civilization*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2001.

⁷⁸ Huntington, Samuel, 1996; Freidman, Thomas, 1999; Barber, Benjamin *Jihad vs. McWorld*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1995, 2001.

⁷⁹ D'Souza Dinesh *The Virtue of Prosperity: Finding Values in an Age of Techno-Affluence*. New York: The Free Press, 2000.

⁸⁰ Easterbrook, Gregg *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*. New York: Random House, 2003; DeGraaf, John, Wann, David, and Naylor, Thomas *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic*. San Francisco: Berret-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2001.

⁸¹ Cornish, Edward, 2004, Chapter Fifteen.

⁸² Seligman, Martin *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*. New York: Pocket Books, 1998.

⁸³ Eisler, Riane *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987; Eisler, Riane *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995; Goerner, Sally *After the Clockwork Universe: The Emerging Science and Culture of Integral Society*. Norwich, Great Britain: Floris Books, 1999.

⁸⁴ Glenn, Jerome and Gordon, Theodore *2004 State of the Future*. American Council for the United Nations University, 2004; Millennium Project - <http://www.acunu.org/millennium/challeng.html>

⁸⁵ Hubbard, Barbara Marx, 1998; Hubbard, Barbara Marx *Emergence: The Shift from Ego to Essence*. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing, 2001; Hergenhahn, B.R. and Olson, Matthew *An Introduction to Theories of Personality*. 6th Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003, Chapter Six.

⁸⁶ Sardar, Ziauddin *Rescuing All Our Futures: The Future of Future Studies*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999.

⁸⁷ Lombardo, Thomas "Science, Enlightenment, Progress, and Evolution" in in Lombardo, Thomas *The Evolution of Future Consciousness*. Bloomington, Indiana: Author House, 2006.

⁸⁸ Anderson, Walter Truett, 1990; Anderson, Walter Truett (Ed.) *The Truth About the Truth: De-Confusing and Re-Constructing the Postmodern World*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995.

⁸⁹ Anderson, Walter Truett, 1990.

⁹⁰ Wilson, E.O., 1998; Wilson, E.O. "Back from Chaos" *The Atlantic Monthly*, March, 1998c; Watson, Peter, 2001, Conclusion.

⁹¹ Anderson, Walter Truett, 1990.

⁹² Anderson, Walter Truett "Four Different Ways to be Absolutely Right" in Anderson, Walter Truett (Ed.) *The Truth About the Truth: De-Confusing and Re-Constructing the Postmodern World*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995b.