

Integrating the Future

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Introduction

With all the emphasis we see in spiritual communities about the importance of being in the NOW, it can be easy to forget how important it is to keep a careful eye on the future. After all, aren't our thoughts about the future just another way to distract ourselves from connecting to our "true self" in this present moment? Here's what Ken has to say: "The way you approach the present isn't just determined by the way you approach the past, but by the way you approach the future. The richer conception of the future you have, the richer your life in the present becomes." Listen as Ken sorts out the various schools of futurism, what each has to offer from an integral view, and how it's just as important for us to integrate the future in our awareness as it is to integrate the past and present.

In the 20th Century there were two main schools of futures thinking. One was characterised by positive extrapolation, the other by negative extrapolation. The positive school focused on the good things that had emerged from modernity: liberal progress, continual improvement etc. It focused on the *dignity* of modernity. The negative school reflected the disenchantment of the world: flatland, environmental degradation, the notion that modernity had devalued feelings and emotions – basically a *Blade Runner* future. It depicted the *disaster* of modernity. Both tended to concentrate primarily upon the sciences and to omit any consideration of spirituality.

Then in the 1960s a third school emerged. This focused on transformation and was essentially green. It saw some truth in both the positive and negative views. It focused on a coming transformation of world consciousness, new paradigm thinking, a new view of the universe and world. It was generally positive and 'New Age' but in terms of its background was closest to evolutionary schools. It took the view that things could get better. It was romantic and spiritual. It remained close to science in part because the evolution of science and technology is easier to appreciate (than with, e.g. spirituality). Technology becomes more and more powerful. It continues to grow. Even now we expect to see rapid growth of, e.g. robotics, genomics and nanotechnology.

Then people like Bill Joy pointed out in 'Why the Future Doesn't Need Us' that new technologies were likely to create their own calamities (such as the 'grey goo' problem emerging from nanotech). He suggested banning research into potentially dangerous lines of enquiry. But countries like China and the Philippines would continue them anyway (so that strategy would not work).

Overall, there have been times when futurists have included notions of a spiritual transformation or new paradigm (both LHQ concerns). It is, however, important to think of developments in science and technology (RHQ) as well. A key figure here is Kurzweil and his account of a coming 'singularity.' He asserts that this will 'change the rules' of existence. It's a result of extrapolating technical capacity

year after year, as in Moore's Law. Machines become smarter than humans. The point is, we simply don't know what will happen. In a negative view we could be living in *The Matrix*. In a positive view 'intelligent machines' could help us to solve major problems.

My concern is to consider phenomena such as the singularity through an integral lens. That is, to ensure that all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all types and all states are included. In this process we'll consider technical issues and hopefully integrate them with spiritual ones. It's an all-quadrant view of what the future could be bringing our way. We need to meet those developments with integral understanding.

For example, what kinds of problems might we expect the machines to help solve? (Not only) global warming and food shortages (but also) how to increase the amount of interior development? How to include states and structures in our education systems? How to help cultures evolve from egocentric to ethnocentric to worldcentric? If we fail to do this, technology will be in service to wherever humanity finds itself (i.e. in terms of its interior development). Currently 70% of humanity appears to exist at ethnocentric or lower levels.

Futures studies are relatively new to the integral scene. About a decade ago Richard Slaughter edited a special issue of *Futures* on this. (N.B. It was in fact only 4 ½ years ago, in 2008.) There are now some eight schools of futures thought (Dennis Morgan has developed this view in recent work – see his recent post). So we're still looking to bring them together in a more integral approach. This could be considered a wild card, but the consequences would be enormous.

Currently spiritual and integral voices are not part of the global dialogue. They need to be included. The fact that they are still ignored is as much of a disaster as anything for the future. An integrally informed evolutionary view opens up (a hitherto overlooked) door to the future.

Final comment: the way you approach the present is not merely determined by the past but also how you approach the future. The richer conceptions of the future that you have the richer your life in the present becomes.

<http://whatnextintegral.com/integratingfuture/>

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