

The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies Volume 3: Directions and Outlooks (1996)

Introduction to Volume Three

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Volumes One and Two of the Knowledge Base explore structural aspects of futures studies such as concepts, methods and organisations. Volume Three is organised around 'directions and outlooks'. These notions provide many of the resources we need to engage in the task of moving the futures agenda forward in the 21st century. The insights presented here embrace many polarities: East and West, North and South, male and female, theory and application, criticism and speculation, and more. The point is that 'directions and outlooks' provide a set of understandings and propositions that serve to illuminate the emerging near-term future landscape. Futures Studies involved a continuous process involving scanning, interpretation, evaluation, and so on. Hence, our view of the future landscape evolves as our understanding and insight develops. That is why it requires constant attention and why organisations that ignore this process risk failure.(1)

Part One entitled 'New Directions', begins with two papers written from a feminist perspective which both contain critiques of patriarchal societies and assumptions. The first, by Vuokko Jarva, questions the male–female dichotomy, and then contrasts 'male knowing' with 'female sciring'. Jarva juxtaposes male social engineering with the notion of 'female enabling design' which is seen as an image of hope. The second paper by Ivana Milojevic begins with an exposition of feminist research, and then considers a dialogue between feminism and futures studies. It draws a number of conclusions from non-sexist futures research, and then speculates on the future of feminist research per se. Overall, the two papers suggest a role for feminist thinking in the futures field.

The following paper by Qin Linzheng conveys much of the distinctive flavour and approach of this prominent Chinese futurist scholar. As China develops and moves toward centre stage internationally, it is vital to engage with this mode of thinking and expression. Mika Mannermaa then picks up the theme of 'chaos and coherence' in relation to futures. He summarises much recent thinking on these matters, and provides an overview of chaos theory and evolutionary perspectives. Yehezkel Dror contributes a trenchant account of the deficiencies of futures studies. Yet his critique is balanced by an in-depth exploration of what he terms 'quality criteria' for improving futures work. These include novel concepts such as 'thinking in history' and 'sophisticated uncertainty'.(2) The chapter illustrates how a well-grounded critical view can benefit the field. This theme is also exemplified by Wendell Bell who puts forward a case for a 'futurist code of ethics.' This chapter concludes with several practical proposals for the establishment of such a code.

Next, Sohail Inayatullah reviews the ideas and work of a number of macrohistorians, many from earlier ages. In so doing, he brings new sources

of understanding and insight into futures work. Here, indeed, is one of the deep sources of grounding for futures enquiry. Eva Hidig then considers some of the implications of two distinct paradigms in futures research that she calls 'evolutionary' and 'critical.' Mike Hollinshead offers an account of the futures enterprise that is both 'critical' (in the sense of being informed by an understanding of social factors) and historically grounded. Among his conclusions are that 'we should be looking at the private behaviour of individuals and of their inner lives for clues about the direction of the future rather than statistics of technologies, economies and the human population'.³ In so doing he anticipates some of the themes in Part Four, Integral Futures. Finally he is followed by a piece by Sesh Velamoor that suggests a new framework for FS drawing on notions of 'extended evolution, Gaia and self organisation'. Overall, Part One illuminates some of the best leading edge thinking in the field.

Part Two shifts the focus away from Futures Studies per se toward outlooks for the new millennium. Ashis Nandy's work explores the theme of shamanistic dissent and shows how the shaman both disturbs and transcends conventional Western thinking. The chapter picks up the themes of liberation and dissent and concludes with an attempt to 're-imagine the Third World'. Mahdi Elmandjra takes up the theme of cultural diversity. He regrets some of the ways this diversity has been abused and misinterpreted, but sees in it a key to ecological survival and more effective communication between cultures and nations. He concludes that Western futurists must take careful account of the transformations (cultural and otherwise) now occurring in the world.

The theme of envisaging a sustainable society is summarised by Lester Milbrath. He provides a clear account of how Western society has become unsustainable and considers steps for 'learning our way out' of the trap.⁽³⁾ Closely allied to this theme is the chapter by Charles Birch on values for the twenty-first century. In his view, these key values can be organised around notions of peace, justice and ecological sustainability. Also included here is a discussion of the theme of 'justice for non-humans'.

Godwin Sogolo then tackles the theme of progress in relation to the futures of Africa – and finds it deficient. The predicament of Africa is clearly related both to the large-scale loss of past cultures and traditions, as well as the real difficulties of imagining and implementing imported western notions of its futures. Susantha Goonatilake continues this theme and takes us deep into the futures of current transformations caused, in part, by new genetic and reproductive technologies. His treatment of such themes through a Buddhist perspective leads to quite unfamiliar concepts and conclusions.

Jerry Ravetz then takes up the theme of paradoxes and the future of safety. He considers new challenges in the management of uncertainty, ignorance and danger. He takes a new look at what might be meant by 'safety' and suggests some constructive ways of employing paradox. Next Ervin Laszlo tackles the vast theme of 'human evolution in the third millennium.' He sketches in two distinct modalities of evolution, what he calls 'extensive' and 'intensive'. The former is characterised by conquest, colonisation and

consumption, the latter by connection, communication and consciousness. Significantly, he sees substantial grounds for hope in this forward view. Alan Fricker's paper on 'the ethics of enough' supports that stance by showing how shifts in that area can help to impel human systems in sustainable and sustaining directions. Ian Lowe takes yet another cut in his 'first survive the 21st century.' Here, with admirable wit and brevity, he both critiques the existing order and points out some very straightforward ways that it can adapt to the new global conditions.

Ivana Milojevic contributes a strong paper on globalisation that profoundly questions many of the underlying assumptions of the existing order. She considers the impacts of globalisation upon women and follows through with two contrasting scenarios that she dubs 'globotech' and 'ecarmony.' These are used to redefine various global priorities. Ron Crocombe then changes tack with a piece on the outlook from New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. It is a timely reminder of how differently the world appears from different cultural and geographical locations. Part Two concludes with a fine overview by Bart van Steenberg of the biotech revolution. He considers the potential for a 'biologically focused' meritocracy and some of the new political cleavages that may result.

Part Three addresses the 'long view' ahead. First is Herbert Gerjouy's panoramic overview of events and transformations that may occur over the next thousand years. The chapter is not in any sense predictive; rather, it is a rare attempt to construct a speculative and imaginative framework. Next, a chapter by Duane Elgin is founded on an account of possible long-term stages in human cultural evolution.(4) This perspective is perhaps a non-fiction equivalent of the far-future novels of Olaf Stapledon.(5)

Francisco Sagasti's paper offers a brief macrohistory in its own right. It suggests that what he calls the 'Baconian age' (based on science and progress) is now ending and sketches out some of the long-term challenges that have emerged for the species. By contrast, Bruce Tonn attempts to develop guidelines for long-term environmental policy and an ethical framework that addresses the long-term future. Finally Jerome Glenn and Theodore Gordon present a version of their 'Millennium 3000' scenarios. Overall, these contributions illuminate the fact that, although the future is very uncertain, it is by no means the 'empty category' or 'blank screen' of popular misconception; rather, it is a fascinating and challenging tapestry that we help to create and unmake every day.

Part Four considers the theme of Integral Futures. Richard Slaughter explains how this perspective arises as a product of developments in the field over time. His chapter provides an overview of some of the conceptual and methodological innovations involved. Next Joseph Voros looks more closely at one of the latter in his piece on 're-framing environmental scanning'. He provides a framework that allows scanners to become aware of the influence of their own and others' perceptual filters, thus bringing new precision and clarity to this work. Peter Hayward then presents a companion piece to his earlier one on the lineage of foresight (in Volume One Part Four). Drawing on

Gebser's work on structures of consciousness he considers the worldviews of foresight, suggesting that foresight evolves with changing worldviews and their associated human and cultural capacities. Advanced scholars will find this and the earlier piece indispensable to a deeper understanding of applied foresight.

Richard Rowe contributes a useful piece that explores some of the ways integral methods (and especially what has been called the 'integral operating system') support more advanced modes of futures and foresight enquiry. Mark Edwards then applies an integral view to 'global developmental pathologies' showing how this approach brings new clarity and understanding to this vexed and challenging area. He is followed by Ken Wilber's own introduction to integral theory and practice. This relatively short document sets out the essentials of the perspective in a way that even newcomers will find accessible. Finally a paper by Marcus Barber performs a similar service for the approach to value systems pioneered by Clare Graves, and later by Chris Cowan and Don Beck.

Integral futures is not for the naïve or the faint hearted. It is both challenging and mind stretching in its own right. Yet careful attention to the work presented here suggests that within this new perspective lie many of the answers to questions and global dilemmas that challenge humanity as never before. Those who acquire and master these new tools and perspectives will find new ways forward for themselves as well as for the hard-pressed organisations and cultures in which they are located.

Notes

1. Slaughter, R (1995) *The Foresight Principle*, Adamantine Press, London.
2. Dror, Y (1994) *The Capacity to Govern*, (executive summary), Circulo de Lectores, Barcelona.
3. Milbrath, L (1989) *Envisaging a Sustainable Society*, SUNY Press, New York.
4. Elgin, D (1993) *Awakening Earth*, William Morrow, New York.
5. Stapledon, O (1937) *Last and First Men*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool.

SLAUGHTER, R.A. *The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies, Vol. 1: Foundations; Vol 2: Organisations, Practices, Products; Vol. 3: Directions and Outlooks*: Futures Study Centre, Melbourne (1996) ISBN: 0-9586654-0-0 set; 0-9586654-1-9 vol 1; 0-9586654-2-7 vol 2; 0-9586654-3-5 vol 3.

Original book out of print.

This collection available on CD-ROM as *The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies, Professional Edition*, Foresight International, 2005