

Chapter 15: Making Headway During Impossible Times

Introduction

In a pluralistic world there's no single way to understand or describe the global emergency. That said, there are more and less productive ways of attempting to do so. Shopping lists of symptoms abound and they may be useful to the extent that they identify areas of concern and forewarn that various actions and responses may be necessary. But Einstein's insight that problems cannot be resolved at the level on which they're first understood or described is widely overlooked. In other words, while accurate problem description is a valid and useful first step, it's only that. A second step requires a meta-level overview and a third seeks to develop relevant responses that can be developed and applied at a number of levels and in a variety of contexts.

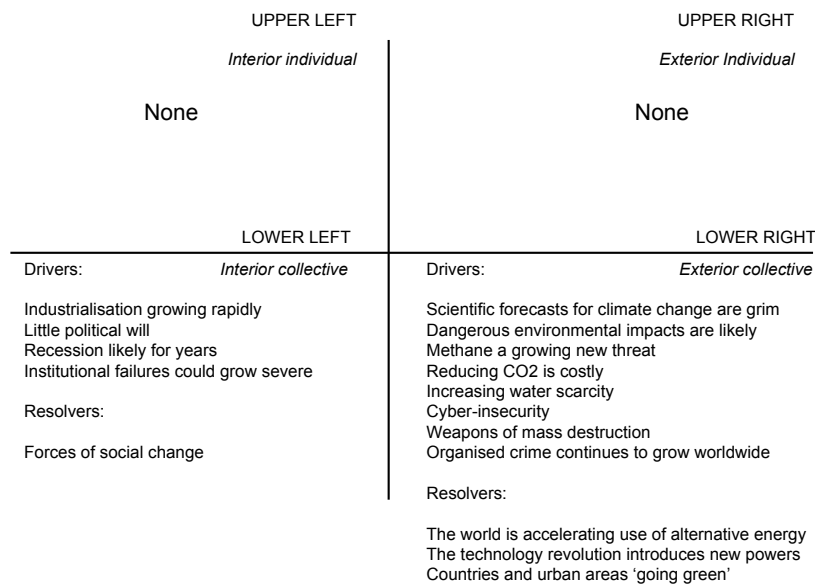
This chapter looks first at a couple of conventional perspectives on the global emergency from within the futures / foresight community and attempts to draw out both what they offer and some of their limitations. It asks, what are these accounts telling us and what are they missing? It provides a brief justification for using the four-quadrant model, touches on an integral controversy and shows how a number of 'proto solutions' can be envisaged. The latter can be thought of as 'solutions in embryo' that need to be drawn out, developed, critiqued and applied by many agents in many different ways. While the paper considers possible implications it is, however, very much a work in progress. Its subject matter will continue to emerge and be further explored over time.

Conventional perspectives on the global emergency

William Halal and Michael Marien are to be congratulated for engaging in a public debate about what they call the Global Mega Crisis (GMC) and for extending the conversation to others.¹ Although it is not yet widely joined this may well be the most significant conversation on the planet today. As is clear from the foregoing chapters, the crisis has not sprung upon us out of the blue - it's been steadily emerging over the last century. We've seen how, during this time many observations and warnings about the planetary condition have been offered, yet have mostly been ignored. Culturally speaking, we've simply not been paying attention.² Such oversights can be seen as one way of identifying an underlying cause of the GMC - lack of clarity about the ever growing and disruptive mismatch between interior and exterior development.

Halal's analysis places a high level of confidence in the ability of 'technology' to move things forward. I agree with Marien that he is wildly over optimistic about this. 'Technology' is not merely 'stuff.' It emerges from complex social processes and is ever and always ambiguous. It's metaphorically a double-edged sword that takes away even as it purports to give. So we cannot expect 'technology' in any shape or form to help us resolve the GMC or global emergency other than in marginal ways. Marien's broader and generally downbeat view is more in tune with the views set out above.

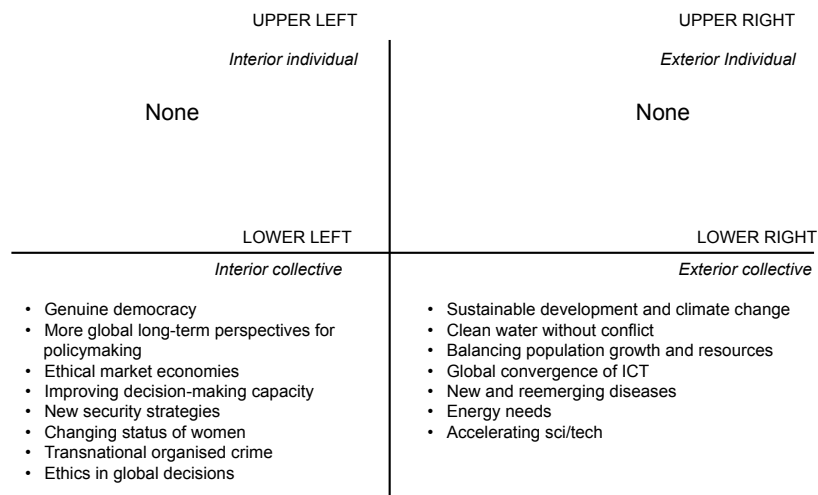
Figure 15.1 Overview of Driver and 'Resolver' Domains



Where I differ from both is that there are capabilities within individuals and cultures that have thus far hardly figured in such debates. This can be seen by considering the 'drivers' of the GMC along with the far fewer 'resolvers' (factors that may help resolve it) in Figure 15.1. What this reveals is similar to the pattern I found when surveying the literature on global warming (chapter 13, above).³ That is, most attention is given to Lower Right (LR) phenomena, i.e. the familiar collective exterior world.⁴ Less attention is paid to the Lower Left (LL) domain, i.e. the interiors of collective cultures. No attention is paid at all to the Upper Left (UL), or individual interiors nor, interestingly, to the Upper Right (UR) of individual action. In this view one can see that the debate omits the domains of human self-knowledge and human action. It is therefore unconsciously biased.

This is a huge oversight but also a surprisingly common one. In fact it is reproduced in the vast majority of publications dealing with the global predicament, in scenario projects and institutional foresight initiatives. A second example is drawn from an ambitious American futures project with 30 or more 'nodes' situated around the world. The Millennium Project (MP) has been running for about 15 years and is considered by some to be an exemplar of this kind of work. It aspires to be globally interconnected, have links with practitioners around the world, employ state-of-the-art methodologies and therefore provide a broad conceptual grasp of the GMC. Much of its work is framed around what it calls the '15 global challenges.' Figure 15.2 presents these.

Figure 15.2 Overview of MP ‘Global Challenges’



There are similarities and differences with Figure 15.1. Here, for example, the LL (interior collective) quadrant is dominant, not the more usual LR (exterior collective). This means that the MP has paid at least as much attention to cultural issues as to technical ones, which is worthy of note. What Figure 15.2 also shows, however, is that none of these great world-shaping issues have been related back to the development (or lack of it) of individual humans from which they in fact originate. The underlying message is that these ‘global challenges’ are unrelated to individual human understanding or action. In other words this approach provides another one-sided ‘map’ of global issues that completely overlooks human agency. What we have here is, in one sense, a category error and in another a clear example of paradigm blindness. It is simply not credible to work from within a US context and overlook the human sources of global dysfunctions that clearly operate there.⁵

What do conventional accounts tell us?

At least two main consequences follow from the above. First, conventional accounts that privilege LR (external collective) phenomena such as cities, infrastructures and technologies, can certainly be vital starting points. They bring to our collective attention a highly relevant global agenda that we ignore at our peril. These are indeed serious issues. But work that ends at this point or, as in the second example above, only includes the LL (interior collective) domain of cultures, languages and institutions, is only dealing with half of the story. So, second, such accounts also tell us that the framing perspectives and conceptual foundations that are being evoked are inadequate and lagging behind what might be called the ‘growing edges’ of futures enquiry.

The four-quadrant model of an Integral perspective is widely used but is by no means the only new tool to have emerged from the latter.⁶ Nevertheless, it helps us take the next steps by providing part of a larger, more coherent and more systematic framework. In this expanded view we can identify many of the human (as opposed to technical) sources of the global emergency along with some of the most promising avenues that lead towards various kinds of resolutions (see below). There are several reasons for this. First, the model draws attention to the interior development of individuals and of cultures and – critically - reveals the shaping power of each.⁷ Second, it balances inner / outer and individual / collective factors. Third, it is an objective framework that is not culture specific. It does not tell anyone what to think.

Figure 12.3 showed one of the outputs of a 2009 international survey on the State of Play in the Futures Field (SoPiFF, see chapter 12, above).⁸ The latter provided early empirical evidence that integrally-informed futures / foresight methods were uncommon to say the least. In one respect this could be considered ‘normal’ in that it takes time for new or renewed methods to diffuse from their originating contexts and to be more widely taken up. In this instance, however, a factor beyond unconscious bias also came into play and requires brief comment.

A most egregious error

In March 2008 I and a group of colleagues (mainly staff and students of the former Australian Foresight Institute) published a special issue of *Futures* on Integral Futures.⁹ It sought to take a ‘first pass’ look at a new and emerging area and to consider some early implications. I wrote specifically to colleagues that it was indeed an exploratory project and that feedback was welcome. The issue was later dubbed ‘one of the most important futures publications of 2008’ by the APF.¹⁰ Unfortunately, however, one particular colleague, whom I’d known and worked with for some 20 years, took exception to our work and immediately organised a ‘rebuttal’ issue of the same journal.¹¹ This appeared exactly two years later and sought not so much to critique our work as to demolish it and us as well. So instead of the kind of productive critique and commentary that we’d intended, we were subjected to quite poisonous and bitter abuse that accused us of being ‘Wilber acolytes’ with ‘hegemonic’ intent. I was particularly sorry to discover that some young and emerging scholars well known to me had been drawn into this fruitless exercise.

For a while I was unsure of how to respond. Over time, however, a group response emerged and was published in the *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*.¹² One of the contributors to the earlier special issue (Chris Riedy) wrote a conciliatory response and one (Dennis Morgan) wrote a finely judged rebuttal. A third person (Dana Klisenin) who’d not been involved in the earlier controversy wrote a beautifully nuanced piece that put a name to this ‘most egregious error’ (i.e. ‘disparaging the life’s work of one’s colleagues’) and drew the whole set of responses together. I wrote a short introduction that sought to counter the notion that ‘Integral anything’ is something to fear or demonise. So this unfortunate ‘controversy’ was brought to a conclusion – at least for the time

being. One lesson here is that, in contrast to positive critique that helps move things along, the new is often resisted and misrepresented, thus hampering efforts to make progress.¹³

There are, however, indications that the false dichotomies of either / or thinking can be readily transcended as people from different areas start to consider how different methods and approaches can be mutually beneficial. One that came to my attention as this chapter was being finalised considers how two approaches to integrally informed coaching can each illuminate the other. Jim Arsenault compares and contrasts Wilber's Integral model with that of Otto Laske whose 'four quadrants of dialectic offer a more comprehensive and deepened view of each of the Integral quadrants.' He adds that 'understanding and realising in one's thinking the four quadrants of dialectic through a professional study of dialectics enhances one's effectiveness as a coach.'¹⁴

Arsenault considers the distinction between looking 'at' clients and looking 'as.' In the former case 'looking at our clients through a particular lens, we are able to gather evidence to assess the client's approximate 'location' according to the lens we are using.' Then, he continues, 'we are able to look as the client and imagine how we might get along in the world with this particular view of reality.' In summary, 'looking at and looking as allows ... coaches to craft practices that are fitting for the client at a particular place in their developmental journey.'¹⁵ He suggests that, while those working in the Wilberian tradition make their own evidence based assessments originating from their use of quadrants, lines, levels etc, those in the Laske tradition have access to more standardised assessment tools which allow a coach to make more accurate assessments of 'the client's sense-making, meaning-making and psychological profiles.' For the writer this is like 'adding a zoom lens' to assessments made by the former. The result, therefore, is not a stand off or a battle for dominance but a conversation. Finally he emphasises that there are benefits to be had in both 'directions.' For those in the Laske tradition 'having even a basic understanding of the AQAL model and integral theory can be of tremendous value' and, 'integral is inspiring as a scoping tool and as enabling systems modelling.'¹⁶

In my own recent work on the global emergency, and for reasons set out above, I chose to employ standard futures-related literature as background, drawing on more widely distributed material dealing with phenomena across all the domains discussed above. Although I am reluctant to admit it, facts must be faced. The futures field has made no perceptible dent in the trends that continue to threaten and undermine our collective futures. The dominance of administrative, technical and academic influences in futures enquiry is evident in many places including the results of the SoPiFF project and the abstracts for a major international futures conference in 2011.¹⁷ For such a vast and ramified field far too many people go to work every day on issues related to the secondary human economy and too few on the those associated with the primary natural one (see below) that's now under unprecedented threat.

The value of Integral perspectives emerges time and again both within the Integral community and beyond it.¹⁸ A direct and I think unambiguous result of

this approach is the ability to assemble a broader and more coherent picture both of the global emergency / GMC itself and of what I call 'proto solutions' as outlined below.¹⁹ These are 'solutions in embryo,' as it were, that can be expanded, re-defined, re-interpreted etc. in unlimited ways in different cultures and environments.

'Proto solutions' for an emerging agenda

When confronted by the issues explored here it's not unusual for people to feel disempowered or fatalistic. Indeed, it's surely understandable that if individuals are operating within conventional worldviews within which reality *appears* cut and dried they may well feel that they have few options beyond business as usual. Yet an Integral perspective makes it clear that *what any individual perceives depends upon the internal resources that he or she brings to the task*. By understanding what this means in a little depth we open up a truly vast arena of possibilities and real world options.²⁰

This is by no means a new idea. It was beautifully summed up by E.F. Schumacher some years ago when he wrote that 'at the level of man, there is no discernible limit or ceiling. Self-awareness ... is a power of unlimited potential.'²¹ So here, in no particular order, are some examples of what might be called 'emerging imperatives' or 'requisite actions' that constitute effective responses to the global dilemma.

- We need to shift from viewing the Earth as merely a set of resources for human use (a utilitarian view) and to begin to see it as a complex web of living and non-living components of which we are a part (that is, an ecological view).
- We need to stop ignoring the most significant signals that are being generated by the global system and begin listening to them, taking them seriously, and working out what they mean both for personal behaviour and public policy. Environmental scanning and strategic analysis are tools that have been mainly used in limited ways—mainly economic and technical applications—by corporations and governments. Environmental scanning in the public interest is overdue and vital.
- The widespread dismissal of the *Limits to Growth* (LtG) perspective and its later manifestations needs to be re-assessed and thoroughly revised. While systems modelling is by no means immune to criticism, the deeper understanding of the global system that arises from this and related Earth science needs henceforth to be factored into all major decision-making processes.
- We need to recognise that the extremes of the growth-addicted (cornucopian) view were based on assumptions about the capacity of the global system to absorb impacts without serious damage that have been invalidated. Equally, the consumerist dream that was constructed upon this basis urgently needs to be retired in favour of a more encompassing and durable ethic that accords with the new realities.
- Similarly, since what right wing apologists everywhere like to call 'free enterprise' leads directly to the collapse of the global system we need to

recognise that the ascendancy of the neo-cons and their model of so-called 'economic rationalism' is finally over. Both need to be superseded by what Schumacher called an 'economics of permanence.' Such shifting toward steady-state economies not be easy and will take time. Yet the sooner the process is engaged, the better.

- The best way of responding to the great issues of global warming, peak oil and the like is to understand them as unambiguous indicators of our collective need to change course and re-establish human civilisation on a different, more enduring, basis. Picking holes in the latest IPCC report or seeking temporary prominence through, e.g. climate change denial, are poor substitutes for action and, over time will be seen as such.
- Currently notions of 'collapse' and 'descent' (i.e. from the dangerous peak of industrial over-demand) are beyond the pale of political discourse nearly everywhere. Yet the sooner our elected representatives and major institutions seriously engage with the reap prospects of 'collapse/descent' the better are our chances of moderating both.
- Equally, the longer we choose to ignore these concerns the more widespread, damaging and uncontrollable this process will be. For example, every year that passes means that less oil remains to energise the necessary transitions and the greater will be the impacts on global ecosystems and other species. Facts of this kind also constitute social driving forces that will encourage the early uptake of social foresight.
- We need to recognise that proposed transition strategies may all be worthy of consideration but they are also expressive of very small and non-representative constituencies, mainly derived from the currently rich nations. The relative absence of voices from the non-West and the non-affluent constitutes a striking imbalance that urgently needs to be corrected. This must be a global conversation that accommodates differences of every kind.
- In such a conversation developmental factors from the upper left and the lower left need to be brought into focus and used to clarify interactions that, otherwise, remain confused such that different viewpoints are difficult or impossible to reconcile. This is one of the reasons for the failure of the November 2009 Copenhagen meeting and many similar events in which a great deal of hope have been invested. Without much greater clarity here future initiatives will also prove fruitless or under deliver.
- In particular we need to recognise that dynamic factors within the upper left have been almost universally overlooked in the search for solutions and strategies. In the process a vast amount of human capability has been overlooked and under valued. To correct this we should be seeking to develop a spectrum of responses within which each person and social grouping can find their own truth and, from this, their own mode(s) of response. While there are clear global imperatives, there's no 'one size fits all' when it comes to personal, group and community responses.

Figure 15.3 Domains of generic responses

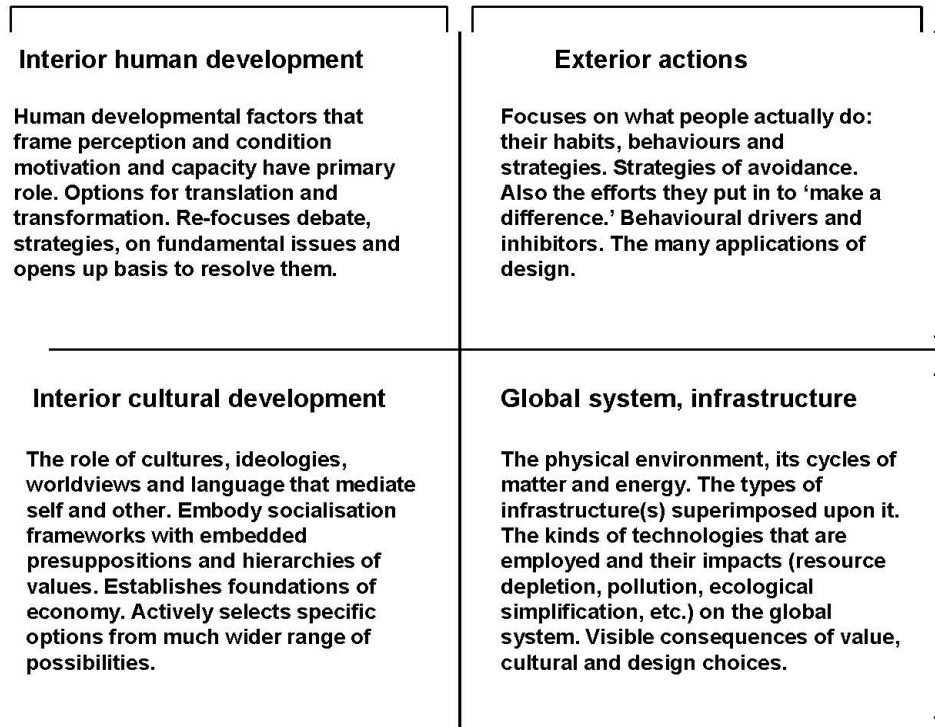


Figure 15.3 uses the four quadrants to condense and summarise much of the foregoing into what I've called 'domains of generic responses.' It's clear from this that we cannot hope to make headway into dealing with the GMC or global emergency with conventional thinking. That is, if we only address one, two or even three of the domains I've referred to. We have to deal with all of them, as well as the many interactions between them. This suggests a profound re-balancing of our efforts, our attention and such of our material wealth as remains available.

In order to re-focus some of the issues discussed above, and also to bring this chapter to a close, I am going to return to one of the most central concerns of our time – the need to deal with our addiction to growth.

Beyond the growth imperative

Given continuing reverberations from the 2008/9 global financial crisis, the near-default of the USA and continuing structural issues within the EEC, many people around the world are hoping for a more stable and less crisis-ridden outlook. The near-universal desire is for a return to 'healthy economic growth' to boost confidence and stimulate a world wide economic recovery. Wherever one cares to look, a resumption of growth is seen as the solution to our current difficulties. But that's simply not the case and pretending otherwise will lead us into greater difficulty than most of us imagine, or perhaps can imagine.

In working on part one of *The Biggest Wake-Up Call in History* I spent a good deal of time researching what we collectively know about the state of the global system. What I discovered was that while knowledge advances and details

change the underlying trends are unmistakable and unambiguous. For example a 2009 study headed by John Rockstrom of the Stockholm Environment Institute concluded that humanity had already crossed three Earth boundaries that were better not crossed: climate change, reduction in species diversity and an out-of-kilter nitrogen cycle. It also reported that we're on track to exceed four more by mid-century: ozone depletion, fresh water usage, ocean acidification and land use changes.²²

What really stands out is that even at this relatively late stage we're not generally aware of these facts or their implications. Alternatively, if we are, there's a strong tendency to discount them, push them to the side, and pretend that they don't really concern us. These are obviously upper left issues. Looking at the situation with fresh eyes, however, means that we can more easily spot current contradictions and perhaps start to resolve them. For example, currently thousands of highly educated and very capable people spend many hours each working day scrutinising a range of high-tech screens that display up-to-date information on currency movements and market changes. These people are, in other words, completely *au fait* with the detailed operation of the secondary human economy. But, equally, they're almost completely ignorant of trends within the primary Earth economy upon which our lives and wellbeing depend.

It would, of course, be entirely possible to reverse this situation and have large numbers of informed people monitoring the results of climate change studies, species loss, ocean acidification and the like. We have the technical capacity and also, I would argue, a very clear need. But in affluent, growth-oriented, consumer societies there's little interest, and virtually no installed capacity, to detect and interpret the messages or 'signals' that the global system constantly emits. It's left to various scientific sub-groups, NGOs and minor political parties, all of which can be, and are, readily dismissed. *The penny has simply not dropped that the growth economy is already deeply in debt to the primary earth economy and falling into greater debt with each passing year.* Some suggest that we started to exceed Earth limits back in the 1980s. While most people have enjoyed the products of economic growth, there's now compelling evidence that we must not merely constrain old-style growth but bring it to an end.

I'm not alone in coming to this conclusion.²³ Other observers have also shown exactly how and why we need to wake up and bring to full awareness a clear understanding of where the earlier paradigm is leading. It's a situation that will severely test our species as there are no simple answers or easy exits. Continuing old-style growth basically tears up what might be called 'natural capital' and transforms it into short-term goods and services, many of which we don't need anyway. Or it accumulates in remote data stores of unreal 'bubble money' that is purely symbolic.

Looking to growth to provide social wellbeing has been compared to expecting cancer to improve human health. Part of the problem is that to recognise how dysfunctional growth has become is just too challenging for those whose wealth, income, social standing and personal identity are all tied up with and dependent

upon the earlier system. These are mostly upper left concerns so that is indeed where attention needs to be directed.²⁴

Waking up to our real predicament can certainly be shocking and painful. Yet there are huge benefits to be derived from doing just that. Gaining greater clarity about our real situation means we can stop being passive and begin dealing with it. It means that we can be more honest with ourselves, our families, our colleagues and the less well off, both here and overseas. To know that you and yours are heading for a global train wreck of huge proportions means that you have a chance to either avoid it or at least minimise the impacts. Trend is not destiny. There are more pathways to sustaining and sustainable futures than have ever been widely and seriously considered.

Currently, climate change and the onset of peak oil are occurring at a time when, if we had our heads screwed on right, we'd be gearing up as if for a wartime economy and changing what we do in a multitude of useful ways. But, despite repeated attempts by various people and groups, mainstream attitudes and practices are barely aware of these uncomfortable new realities. It could be concluded that notions of growth and business-as-usual are such deeply embedded addictions that they won't be surrendered until parts of the natural world are collapsing in our faces.

Whatever anyone thinks about the present Australian government's attempt to put a price on carbon emissions (or indeed that of any other) the debate around it has been pretty pathetic and completely missed the main issue. If it's *this* hard to put one such measure in place, how much more demanding is it to imagine that a whole raft of others would be proposed and implemented? Yet this is what it will take to get us off the growth path and into a steady state economy.

In the interim we could begin by re-using some of those high-tech screens and re-directing a few traders in two specific ways. The first is to reconsider their upper left motivations and values, with all that they imply. The second is to move away from the secondary economy and back to the primary Earth economy which is under unprecedented duress from the over-success and over-growth of a single adolescent and unfinished species - *Homo sapiens*. It is, after all, only a matter of time before we are caught up in processes of global adjustment that go way beyond human control.

Conclusion

Overall, what I think emerges from this book is a much clearer picture of where concerned individuals, groups and organisations need to re-direct their attention. Solutions will not emerge from new technology and associated infrastructures, no matter how 'green' or apparently 'sustainable' they are widely considered to be. They will begin to emerge when people look more honestly and clearly upon their own interior selves and understand that the most potent sources of innovation and 'progress' lie within agents of knowing themselves.

The central proposition put forward here is that it's the very sense of self in all its complexity and potential depth that determines what capacities are brought to bear on the global emergency – and hence the character and usefulness of solutions that can emerge.²⁵ The cultural environment in which newly aware selves emerge into and operate within also dictates how well or poorly these capacities are nurtured, whether they are fully developed or extinguished. To me this is a vital and profoundly empowering prospect that, properly understood, changes everything.

We are indeed in the early stages of a global emergency and the time to wake up is now.

(4565 words)

Notes

¹ Marien & Halal, 2011.

² See '60 years of insight into the global system' in Slaughter, R. 2010, p. 28.

³ Slaughter, R. 2009.

⁴ Futures work in the US has been stranded here for as long as I can remember - which is why it has a pervasive tendency to merely 'skim the surface' of social reality.

⁵ Slaughter, R, 2008, Special issue of *Foresight* (vol 10 no 4) Is America the Land of the Future?

⁶ For a useful overview of uses and approaches, see Collins, T. and Hines, A. 2010.

⁷ Wilber, K. *Integral Psychology*, Boston, Shambhala, 2000.

⁸ Slaughter, R. (ed) The state of play in the futures field, Special issue, *Foresight*, 11,5, 2009.

⁹ Slaughter, R. (et al) Integral Futures, *Futures*, 40, 2, 2008.

¹⁰ See entry for April 28th, 2009 at: <http://richardslaughter.com.au/>

¹¹ See Inayatullah, I. 2010.

¹² See under heading 'Critical Responses', in *JITP* 6, 2, 2011, p. 105.

¹³ This same process has been highly visible in Australia as the current Labour government has placed a great deal of political capital at risk in order to establish a price for carbon emissions. The current opposition has used every device in the book to delay, confuse, challenge and undermine these efforts.

¹⁴ Arsenault, 2011, p. 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid* p. 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid* p. 5.

¹⁷ See book of abstracts for YIRCoF '11 – the Yeditepe International Research Conference on Foresight and Futures, August 24-26, Istanbul.

¹⁸ See reviews by Cacioppe, R. in the *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice* 6, 2, 2011, pp 157-162. Also that by Healy, P. in (forthcoming). The latter, in particular, clearly demonstrates the value of an Integral Futures perspective in the mind of an alert and objective observer whose focus is not on contending theories but on relevance to real-world people and situations. After publication

both reviews will be available from:

<http://www.foresightinternational.com.au/reviews>

¹⁹ Slaughter, R. 2010, p. 153.

²⁰ I explore some of these in Part Two of Slaughter, R. 2010.

²¹ Schumacher, 1977, p. 48.

²² Rockstrom, 2009.

²³ See Gilding, 2011 and Jackson, 2011.

²⁴ Part two of *Biggest Wake-Up Call...* explores this issue in some depth.

²⁵ The emphasis here is not only on cognitive development but a wider range of factors including: values, self-sense, moral reasoning, worldview etc. See Slaughter, R. 2010, *Ibid*, pp. 172-9 for three examples of individuals who exhibit some of these qualities along with some real-world consequences.