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Future of Humankind — a Required Paradigm Shift in Values and Attitudes

Sooner rather than later, one day, a big chunk of mankind will be headed boldly for another place in our Galaxy, where no human has gone before. It will undoubtedly be a challenging experience, but also one full of inherent potential. The future will literally be in their hands. The big question is: shall we end up repeating the experience we have encountered here on Earth, or shall we try to make it into something different that we can be proud of?

It will largely depend on what type of governing structure our future explorers manage to put in place. Will it be based on one of our existing ruling models — perhaps that of the prevailing superpower? Or will we have learnt that this approach has been discredited, and that we must find a fresh model managed by a restructured and upgraded United Peoples Organization, perhaps an outgrowth of the current United Nations?

In any case, it would greatly assist the pioneers if they could access a model devised at leisure by the best minds of days gone by. Let us imagine being the planners of that mission and try to identify what their guiding principles and paradigms should be.

The best part of the exercise may turn out to be that the structure that emerges would not only serve the needs of the imaginary future emigrants but be directly applicable to the world of today, in meeting the many existential challenges facing us squarely now: climate change, the population explosion, declining non-renewable resources, the spread of WMDs and the recent rise in extremism.

Guidelines and Principles of the Proposed "Paradigm Shift"

1. It is a self-evident truth that all men are born equal (Jefferson). There are no superior races, no chosen people, nor any promised lands. The laws of nature hold equally for all.

2. Freedom of choice must be ensured. There can be no compulsion in faith or belief. But along with freedom of choice comes accountability. We cannot ignore that we are fully accountable for our deeds. We shall reap what we sow.

3. Just as there are physical laws ruling the Universe, there are also natural moral laws governing human conduct, from which none can escape.

4. The values of the Age of Reason and rationalism must rule the day. But alongside that, it needs to be accepted that "matter is not all there is". Science, though dazzlingly successful, has its limitations.

5. Humankind has evolved through a long process of growth through physical, then chemical, and later biological evolution. It then entered a stage which may be called intellectual evolution, or the rise of consciousness, which gives humans their uniqueness.

6. The human brain is the acme of evolution. It is what principally distinguishes us from animals,

through its high degree of consciousness. Thus, all activities which hinder the free and proper use of this superior faculty deserve to be discouraged, including the use of intoxicating drinks, drugs and similar substances. Even getting truly angry, being overcome by pride or arrogance, or blindly following a cult leader or political ideology must be discouraged vigorously.

7. Nature has endowed life with an extremely high (almost infinite) value. We really are children of the stars. This is well recognized by both science and religion, but unfortunately not by prevailing economic theory, which happens to be the ruling paradigm. Economics values things on supply and demand, and nature has made the creation of life plentiful, easy and pleasurable, leading to a low value. Engineering, on the other hand, bases value on the cost of materials plus the energy used plus the labor employed, and gives a truer picture.

8. Technology is driving us inexorably towards globalization, but our political, economic, social, cultural and religious institutions have failed to keep pace with the growing needs. A paradigm shift in our outlook is essential. As Einstein reportedly said, "Problems created at one level of consciousness cannot be solved at the same level."

9. The "Wall Street Syndrome", based on extortive capitalism, and the corroding effect on society of the "Hollywood Complex" — a heady mélange of stimulant sex and wanton violence, constantly on the increase — need to be curbed.

10. Justice for all is an absolute requirement, but justice tempered with compassion. The emphasis should be on preventing society's ills rather than curing them.

11. Meritocracy must hold supreme. No undue favors for the privileged classes, no old-style caste system in new bottles, and no racial or other discrimination should be permitted.

12. Speaking the truth is fundamental to society, along with the need for correct witnessing under all circumstances. No exceptions are to be allowed. Witnesses must not wait to be summoned; it is their obligation to come forth and bear true and faithful witness to provide the evidence required for a just judgment.

13. War may be allowed to the aggrieved when peaceful means fail, but limits must apply. Retribution must never exceed the initial aggression, and even then forgiveness is better, since it has an overall healing influence on society. The common homily "all is fair in love and war" is patently false. Similarly, "my country, right or wrong" must not be taught any longer.

14. Society needs economic balance. Resourceful classes should not get the chance to exploit the poor and underprivileged. The power of money should be controlled. Monopolies must not be allowed to form and exploit.

15. The need for a welfare state is almost obvious, but private initiative and drive also need to be encouraged. The dignity of labor and the freedom of capital need to be ensured.

16. Enterprise needs to be balanced both by appropriate laws and, equally, by working towards a paradigm shift in our overarching value system that emphasizes the need for compassion and equity.

17. Humans undoubtedly have been endowed with the ability to exploit the resources and forces of nature. This must not be done indiscriminately and carelessly, to avoid unsustainability. The attitude of a trustee rather than an owner is called for towards nature and non-human life.

18. Competition is the essence of life, but it must be mixed with cooperation if strife is to be avoided and each is to get their due share — a win-win situation, like a well-oiled team.

19. As Churchill stated, democracy has its weaknesses, but it is the best political system developed to date. However, its emphasis needs to shift from securing a "majority vote" to the "consultation and inclusion of all stakeholders in the process of governance".

20. Nationalism has outlived its usefulness, if it ever had any. It is a totally outmoded concept, grossly out of tune with our rapidly advancing technology and increasingly globalized world, and yet it remains the ruling paradigm today. Is it any wonder humanity has tied itself in knots? We must grow out of this syndrome and replace it with a new order more in tune with the requirements of our globalizing world.

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