

The Foresight Principle: Cultural Recovery in the Twenty-First Century (1995)

Foreword

Hazel Henderson

It is a pleasure to welcome *The Foresight Principle* and its lucid, comprehensive map of the growing futures research movement. Richard Slaughter is a futurist par excellence as well as a valued colleague. This book fills a deep need in today's cultural transitions and confusions - expanding the contexts for further human development. Change is occurring at many levels: personal, community, corporate, national, and in ecological and global restructuring processes.

Richard Slaughter is a superb teacher. He has provided a broad, coherent framework for thinking about all those dimensions of our current transition from the dominant culture of the past three hundred years based on instrumental rationality, reductionist science, and the efforts to create an earthly paradise of material abundance. Slaughter recognises the achievements of this era and its ideology of industrialism and summarises the new problems its limited worldview, short-term philosophy and epistemology have created - from ecological destruction to social pathologies and personal angst. Yet he uses all this as prologue to a careful assessment of our human potentials and possibilities for social innovation to transcend our current dilemmas. I subscribe to precisely this kind of disciplined and honestly normative futures research.

Too often in meetings of professional futurists there is a gulf of misunderstanding between so-called value free, objective technological and social forecasters and those whose research is clearly based on normative scenarios and ranges of alternative policies for creating preferred futures. A similar gulf often separates futurists who are not only researchers, writers, and thinkers but also activists and social innovators. Slaughter masterfully shows the continuum linking all these groups and honours their respective contributions to creating the extended foresight that we humans must now develop.

This book will serve to excite interest in the whole field of futures research and its still budding potential for the next stages of human development. Slaughter's style is clear and direct, without sacrificing subtlety and deep reflection. *The Foresight Principle* serves as both a college text and an exciting introduction to the field for concerned citizens and general readers. Even thoughtful high school students will find it engrossing. Many young people who are in despair and alienation will find a road map here to offer new meaning to their lives beyond the narrow options of today's job market.

I can imagine how many teachers will use this book as a basis for new courses in futures studies and to encourage learning of the new skills of social innovation. As an educator, Slaughter has pioneered such courses and fostered foresight in universities and social institutions in many countries beyond his present home in Australia. I hope this book will be read by all those politicians, administrators, and business people who care deeply for their children and grandchildren. My own experience confirms how widespread such concerns are. I found them in government, during my service as a member of the original Advisory Council of the US Office of Technology Assessment; as an environmental and civic activist; and as an early participant in the burgeoning movement of socially concerned investors and companies.

Most of the millions of people concerned with the future of the planet and the human family become activists - no matter what their walks of life or professional careers. In some way, today's human and ecological crises are activating the most aware humans and awakening consciences worldwide. In many cases, the young are leading the way because they have the most at stake. In 1992, the United Nations Earth Summit in Rio produced an outpouring of such concern. Its Global Forum linked activists and citizen groups who share longer time horizons and concern for future generations. While government representatives argued from pre-set positions in the official meetings, thousands of representatives of civic organisations cooperated on mutual agendas. They drafted their own treaties to push their respective governments, and shared manifestos and declarations of new principles for human behaviour and responsibilities toward each other, other species, and the planetary ecosystem.

Nothing less than the outline of an 'Earth Ethics' emerged out of the Earth Summit to provide a backdrop of higher human awareness and moral striving for the agreements signed by the 178 countries present and summarised in Agenda 21. It was a personal privilege to participate in this great global gathering and an honor to provide a chapter for the for the United Nations volume, Ethical Implications of Agenda 21, on how the global economy and financial system can evolve to meet the challenges of restructuring industrial societies for sustainable development. It is now clear that all societies since World War II have confused means (i.e. GNP-measured economic growth) with ends (i.e. the goals of truly human, sustainable development on a small, ecologically compromised planet).

One never expects social innovation to emerge from existing institutions or worldviews. Today, the planet is dominated by two sets of large institutions: nation states and global corporations. Neither can be expected to lead in the great transformation to sustainable forms of human development. National governments are losing sovereignty due to six great forces of globalisation, as I have elaborated in *Paradigms in Progress*, the globalisation of industrialism and technology, of finance and information, work and migration, human effects on the biosphere, and the globalisation of the arms race and human cultures. 1 Governments can no longer guarantee security, development, environmental protection, or even coherent macro-economic management to provide jobs to their citizens in face of these global forces.

Today, governments must cooperate, by pooling their sovereignty via many international agreements and treaties, such as those in Agenda 21 and many existing UN protocols which already protect workers, consumers, and human rights in all countries. At the same time, global corporations are pursuing policies and trade agreements which are still predicated on global competitiveness - tantamount to economic warfare, using the same old rules and GNP scorecards of 'progress' and 'wealth'. A 'third sector' is now visible in the world: a growing global civil society in many countries, composed of citizens and voluntary organisations which are still referred to inappropriately as non-governmental organisations (NGOs). As I have described elsewhere, this diverse network of millions of aware, active, grass-roots futurists, and Earth-keepers are rapidly linking beyond their computer conferences on INTERNET, PEACE NET, ECONET, TOGETHERNET, and many others. An Earth Council was launched in 1993, based in San Jose, Costa Rica - a prototype 'world people's parliament for a sustainable future'. Based on pre-industrial, deep ecological wisdom from all the world's indigenous cultures, these global civil networks incorporate the best of modern science, ecological wisdom, and green technologies and strategies for restoring the earth.

This emerging global civil society will be served by its own Global Television for Sustainable Development network, covering all continents, to amplify grass roots successes in creating more sustainable models for replication, for appropriate replication elsewhere. As this global civil society emerges and its social innovations are amplified on television, a quantum leap in human learning and empathy is possible. As the global civil society is empowered it can lift some of the burdens from governments in many countries and provide alternatives to passive global consumerism and advertising-driven corporate marketing.

Happily, social innovations, 'greener' technologies, and new rules and agreements are breaking through in most countries. In addition, new quality-of-life scorecards, with data clearly presented from many disciplines (rather than over aggregated in money terms as in GNP) and monitoring all the multiple dimensions of true wealth and human progress, are proliferating, from the United Nation's development program's Human Development Index (HDI) to my own Country Futures Indicators (CFI).² All 178 countries which signed the Agenda 21 agreements pledged to overhaul their GNP national accounting systems to include valuing environmental costs and benefits as well as all the productive hours worked which are unpaid and ignored in GNP. As I have pointed out, for decades this 'love economy' of cooperative work such as volunteering, growing food, do-it-yourself housing and repairs, parenting children, caring for elders and the sick, maintaining healthy households, etc. accounts for some fifty per cent of all productive work even in industrial countries, and much more in the 'Two Thirds World' as Elise Boulding, author of *Towards a Global Civic Culture*, calls the developing countries. Today, we must acknowledge that all countries are developing in different ways, hopefully toward a more sustainable future, and many in the North will need to learn from those in the South.

Richard Slaughter identifies many of these trends and social innovations. It is clear that we cannot allow trade negotiators and economic advisors with out-dated economic textbooks to continue 'levelling the global playing field' from their narrow perspectives, which results only in levelling rain forests and homogenising all the world's cultures. We are learning that cultural diversity needs to be savoured and is as important as biological diversity. In the emerging ecological perspective, diversity, both cultural and biological, is seen as a resource just like coal and oil, except more valuable. Obsolete economic worldviews and methods are reproducing some of the worst features of 19th century capitalism in Eastern Europe and Russia as well as in Latin America and Asia. This 'rear view mirror' economics still underlies trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Uruguay General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT).

What is needed is an overhaul of all the Bretton Woods institutions: the GATT, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank which were all set up as part of the United Nations in 1945 and reflect a now vanished world. Today we must level the global playing field upward by raising its ethical floor. The girder work underlying this higher floor is composed of the many global agreements already mentioned to protect people everywhere and all the earth's ecosystems. Such an ethical floor should include a 'bandwidth' within which today's wage differentials can be narrowed (in the same way that currency fluctuations are contained today). This can slow the mad rush of corporations and global investors seeking out cheaper labour and unprotected environments.

The transition will be slow and painful from today's helter skelter competition. Meanwhile, we will learn that in a global commons such competitive games end in lose-lose tragedies for all players and the ecosystems. Economists are learning what systems theorists, ecologists, and futurists already know: what goes around, comes around. When niches in markets fill up, as they have in today's crowded, polluted

cities and societies, these markets transform into 'commons' (i.e. closed systems which all players must use cooperatively). Markets are usually open systems and can still support win-lose, competitive games. Today, the seamless global economy itself has transformed from the open competitive 'global playing field' of the economic text books into a commons with all the same characteristics of other 'natural' commons: such as the Earth's oceans, air, and electromagnetic spectrum.

All commons require cooperative win-win rules because their resources flow indivisibly and can only be used collectively. Economists need to learn how to identify when a market is filling up and turning into a commons and help devise the best ways of changing the rules from competitive win-lose to cooperative win-win. Most economists still use textbook references to open systems, not as commons but as 'common property resources', implying that they must be owned by someone. This distortion creates many inappropriate policy approaches and collides directly with the emerging understanding that humans do not own or control the planet but are part of the web of life and must operate within the limits of ecosystem niches. Indeed, we are learning that markets are good servants but bad masters and that the 'invisible hand' is not derived from God but is our own.

All countries today have 'mixed economies' (i.e. various mixtures of markets and regulations) while economists have no theories about these mixes. Indeed, it is more fruitful to look at economies as sets of rules derived from the various cultural DNA codes of all societies (their different values, goals, and traditions), as I have elaborated elsewhere. Thus, economists will need the assistance of many other disciplines - from anthropologists to zoologists - and all studies of the human development process will need to be systemic and interdisciplinary. Futurists will play key roles as well, in developing and institutionalising foresight. This book will be an indispensable tool in fostering the multi-cultural dialogues and understanding to move us all along.

Hazel Henderson December 1993

Notes

Henderson, H. *Paradigms in Progress: Life Beyond Economics*, knowledge Systems, Indianapolis, 1992.

Hazel Henderson, *County Futures Indicators* (CFI) and trademarked, 1991.

Introduction

The 1990s are significant for two key reasons. The first is that something old is coming apart at the seams, while something new is attempting to be born. The 'something old' is the industrial system which has reigned supreme on this planet for over two hundred years, changed it almost beyond recognition and brought it to the edge of catastrophe (so far as humans are concerned). The 'something new' is a renewed culture and worldview that is struggling to emerge from the ruins of the old. The latter does not yet have a name. It is certainly not 'post-industrial', nor 'the information age' and still less 'the age of leisure'.

How can we know that something new is, in fact, being born? Well, we cannot know for certain. There are no future facts. But the evidence is there for anyone to consider. What has most forcefully impressed me during almost twenty years' work in futures is a developing 'congruence of insight'. It is an insight about what has gone

wrong, what implications this has for the present and what the outlines of a viable future may look like. The insight emerges from so many sources: the words of native peoples all over the world, the fears of young people, the views of social critics and the mature reflections of futurists and others.

I do not believe that the future can be predicted. There are no 'iron laws' that govern the process of human and cultural development. There are rules of thumb, fruitful directions, a host of urgent practical measures - but no blueprint. We cannot engineer the human future so much as reclaim it from the abstracted imperatives of power, profit and planetary degradation that have dominated the 20th Century, and then re-direct it in a different mode and a different direction.

The central claim of this book is that, while the future is, in a strictly rational, logical sense, unknowable, that does not leave us helpless. Far from it. Unlike the physical body, the human brain/mind system is not locked into a narrow 'creature present'. It is so beautifully constructed that we are able to roam at will through times past, present and future. What we cannot see directly or deduce, we can model, construct or imagine. The view ahead is certainly not clear in all respects, but neither is it as dark or problematic as many imagine. Once we leave aside the absurd conceit of predicting social futures, we open to a broad array of approaches, techniques, methods and practical arrangements which together provide us with a broad-brush overview of our context in time: past, present and near-term future.

This brings me to my second reason for believing the 1990s to be particularly significant. There is, of course, a tendency to believe that one always lives 'at the hinge of history' because that is where one is, and hence what one sees with greatest clarity. But viewpoint is deceptive. We always exaggerate the 'mental map' of our time and place. Yet the significance of the 90s is not just a matter of individual biographies or perceptions. Something else has been going on during this time which is a consequence not so much of individual behaviour as of collective impact.

In Victoria, Australia, there is still a small, brilliant bird - the helmeted honeyeater. It used to be common in scrubland and forest in this region. Now there are merely a few dozen individuals left. Twenty years ago I lived in Bermuda and there saw the same story - 20-odd pairs of Pterodroma Cahow, the Bermuda Petrel, living where once there had been millions. Despite all the many news reports, TV documentaries and activities of countless conservation and wildlife groups, I don't believe that people really understand just how far the human race has gone in unraveling the threads of life on this planet.

It's my belief that 'the man or woman in the street' cares about their family, their standard of living, their job and the kind of car they drive, or would like to drive. But, on the whole, they tend not to care about distant abstractions such as tropical forests, spreading deserts, vanishing species or even - though it promises to affect them directly - the thinning ozone layer. Somehow during our evolution we adopted the habit of focusing on 'me and my group', 'here' and 'now'.

It is this habitual mode of perception, more than any external threat, that is driving our species to the edge.

So the second reason why the 90s are critical is not that we happen to be here at this time. It is due to the fact that by now have more than ample evidence that the collective impacts and wider implications of industrialised cultures are far more hazardous than is commonly believed. In short, we are confronted with a terrifying choice: either find a different set of principles and practices upon which to erect a

notion of 'the good life' or watch the whole thing decay into the biggest mess this world has ever seen.

A bit strong? I don't believe so. A more sanguine view is that 'necessity is the mother of invention', that, in other words, human ingenuity expressed through technical virtuosity will save the day. Yet such a view has, by now, been decisively undermined. We now know with certainty, that technical fixes are limited in their ability to solve systemic problems. We have such a problem: there are too many people living in ways that are too destructive of the global commons. Hence, the global system - the air, the water, the soils, the forests, animals and birds - is sending us the message outlined above.

How should we respond? Well, outright denial is pretty effective, and we've had a lot of practice at it. If we choose this path whole industries will help us to block out reality. A cocky self-confidence is another. There's good reason for it - look at what we have collectively achieved; it's not all bad by a long chalk. Or we can pin our hopes on science and technology. They can always find a better way, right? Wrong. They can help. But they only address a part of reality. They are silent on questions of value, purpose and meaning.

However the human race chooses to deal with this difficult time (and I am in no doubt that there are plenty of possibilities) the answer will, I feel, be bound to involve foresight. That is why I have written this book. That is also why I have explicitly linked it with the theme of 'cultural recovery in the 21st Century'. So perhaps I should here try to clarify what I mean by foresight, and why I believe it to be so crucial for our future.

The key thing is this. For a very long time our species has learned painfully through experience. It has dragged itself out of the primeval darkness and constructed an impressive sequence of civilisations. From our present vantage point at the edge of the most powerful civilisation ever, we can look back and see what experience has taught us: how to domesticate cattle, plant crops, make tools, use fire, construct buildings, write and so on. All on the basis of accumulated experience. It has worked so well that we find it hard to realise that we have passed beyond the time when experience serves us well. For that same body of accumulated experience is now sending us spurious messages. It is saying: 'cut that forest', or 'build that power plant' or 'drain that marsh'. *But experience is not telling us much about the consequences.* Part of the issue is that the age we live in, while sharing much with the past, is genuinely and structurally different.

The Achilles heel of experience, for us, is that it is not strong enough to make us institute system-wide adaptive change. If we were limited to experience, we would have to experience catastrophe before we could prevent it. Clearly this is an absurdity.

Foresight is not the ability to predict the future. It is a human attribute that allows us to weigh up pros and cons, to evaluate different courses of action and to invest possible futures on every level with enough reality and meaning to use them as decision-making aids. As will be seen below, humans use foresight every day of their lives. They build and buy houses, they have children, save for their old age and take holidays. All involve foresight. The simplest possible definition of the term is that it is opening to the future with every means at our disposal, developing views of future options, and then choosing carefully between them.

In the 1990s the whole human species faces a number of choices that will determine not only the character of its future, but even if there will be one. For as the products

of instrumental reason have proceeded from the labs to the factories, and from the factories to our living rooms, and as the confidence accompanying this process has caused us to think that we are secure and unthreatened, so, at a deeper level, the collective unconscious knows differently. It knows that now, more than ever, everything is at stake. As the technologies of distraction have become more insidious and compelling, so our proud and powerful culture has steadily moved toward the abyss.

In this sense foresight can be painful. We need to be able to confront the consequences of our collective blindness and not only acknowledge the abyss, but look directly into it. Only in so doing will we understand the need for foresight at the social level. In our dangerous post-modern world, where certainty is so difficult to find, we need to consider those Dystopian futures where the human experiment fails. Such insights are needed to prompt us into action. Fortunately they are available. While foresight can indeed cost money, we don't need to invest vast sums in researching the dynamics of late industrial cultures. Enough knowledge about the ways they may overshoot certain important limits via unregarded exponential growth has been garnered over recent years to provide a very clear picture about where we are and what this means.

So foresight can clearly act as a kind of early warning system saying, in effect, 'this is where we do not want to go'. That is a useful message. What map would be useful without marking clearly areas of difficulty or danger? But there are other, and more creative, uses of foresight. One of them is to begin the process of deciding just exactly what it is we really want, and then putting in place the means to achieve it.

So this book is not just about warnings from the future. Threats. Things we must do...or else! It is also about the ways we can define essential aspects of futures worth living in - and then move toward them. Part Three is therefore devoted to the theme of cultural recovery in the 21st Century. Most people would probably be very surprised at the amount of 'leverage', 'steering capacity', autonomy and decision-making power that still resides fully in our hands. But times change, the wheel is turning and we would do well not to assume that time is on our side.

The 1990s then, are a time of crisis and of opportunity. This has nothing whatever to do with the approach of the year 2,000 and the new millennium, important as this is in other, more symbolic, ways. The same crisis and opportunity would be upon us if we called it the year 200 or the year 6,000. However, one thing is certain. We will not get to the year 6,000, or even 3,000 if we cannot re-think, re-image and re-value our place on this small planet in the coming decades.

Foresight, then, stands at the juncture between terror and promise. It permits us to move beyond the conditions and constraints of who we are, where we are and what we may, or may not, have inherited from the past. It says to us something like the following:

Here, look, this is what the stakes appear to be.

What are you going to do about it?

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Available on *Towards a Wise Culture*, CD-ROM (Foresight International, 2005), with reviews, images and commentary.