The Biggest Wake Up Call in History*

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Part One: Understanding the problem

Part one provides an overview of what has been termed the 'planetary emergency' and I refer to as the 'civilisational challenge.' Both terms suggest that, if we understand what is at stake, the prospects for dealing with it are greatly improved. Hence the array of threats that we face should not be viewed as leading inexorably toward disaster. The fact is that the these threats can be re-framed and collectively seen as constituting a vast wake up call to humanity that, in turn, demands innovative and far-reaching responses. To the extent that we heed and understand early warning signals then we buy ourselves time coordinate our efforts and to act. Part one draws on a wide range of available and unconventional sources in order to establish just what 'the problem' is. In so doing it paints a broad picture of a world slowly descending into chaos. Grounds for changing this outlook are explored in part two.

Chapter 1: What is the challenge to civilisation?

Chapter one provides a global overview of humanity's collective impacts on planet Earth. It summarises conclusions from research on the global system, assesses the state of the world's oceans and considers our impacts on other species. It then relates these to social, cultural and economic factors and especially to critiques of market-led economic theory. It concludes that, residual uncertainties notwithstanding, a sound framework exists for understanding and coming to grips with global change. The growth dynamic that has been dominant for some three centuries has become counter productive to the point where it needs to be phased out and replaced. In view of the magnitude of the changes required conflicts have arisen in many places, especially between those who still hold to the view that old-style growth and development remains viable, and those who do not.

Chapter 2: Conventional responses

Chapter two examines conventional social responses to global change. Among the most significant is the reception accorded to significant 'signals of change.' The track record of 'missed signals' in the US and Australia is outlined. Evidence is presented that those responsible for wise government and social policy have missed or ignored information that provided and provides vital evidence about global change processes. Overall, the social capacity for detecting and interpreting such information is shown to be inadequate. The issue is also approached through considering how disasters occur. Again, it's suggested that the track record here is problematic. Two other manifestations of 'business as usual' are reviewed. One is the widespread habit of looking to new technology to solve problems. Another is the rise of consumerism and the deliberate stoking of demand through pervasive advertising. Overall, conventional responses are simply not up to the task. Many of them actively impede progress in understanding and dealing with the world we've collectively created.

Chapter 3: Is 'overshoot and collapse' credible?

Chapter three is pivotal. It seeks to resolve the question of whether or not the hypothesis that humanity is now set on s path characterised as 'overshoot and collapse' is correct. It reviews the *Limits to Growth* project as it has developed over more than three decades, evaluates later research on its findings and concludes that humanity is indeed living a long way beyond its means, thereby continuing to degrade its global life support system. The 'collapse' thesis can therefore not only be substantiated, it has also become *a structural reality* to which we must respond. A key implication is that there are significant gaps between humanity's ability to perceive and understand this fact and the magnitude of the actions that are responsible for creating it. Two important caveats are also noted. First, and despite appearances, the above does not necessarily amount to a 'gloom and doom' conclusion. Second, the notion of 'collapse' is not as monolithic and settled as it may first appear. Other aspects of the story considered below suggest a more positive and enabling outlook.

Chapter 4: Contexts and extremes of 'overshoot'

Chapter four focuses on concrete realities, particularly those confronting some of the poorest in the world. Aspects of their plight in a number of locations are outlined and linked with the emerging impacts of climate change. It then looks at Las Vegas and Dubai, two environments where 'hyper development' has reached new extremes and, in so doing, represents the immanent end of the high-tech, rapid growth and energy intensive model. The latter is also linked back to the success and subsequent failure of neo-conservative, free market oriented, ideology. While both still retain much of their raw instrumental power we should recognise that their time is past and their usefulness has ended.

Chapter 5: Confronting the collective shadow

Chapter five examines several linked phenomena that have been widely overlooked in this context. They can usefully be approached through what psychologists refer to as 'the shadow,' or repressed contents of consciousness. Just as the human shadow is held to rob individuals of autonomy and power it is suggested here that organised crime exerts similar costs upon societies and, indeed, the whole world. If the nations of the world are to unite to deal with global challenges, they cannot afford the loss of these resources and the vitality they represent. While often portrayed in a decidedly positive light, globalisation and the Internet have contributed to this situation and current attempts to resolve it have been largely unsuccessful. Other activities that are currently still considered technically legal are involved in spinning 'unreal value' disconnected from the real world of people and ecologies. The 'fantasy economy' of international finance has lost credibility over recent times due to recurrent crises. But the point is not merely to 'fix' the existing system but to replace it with one that is fairer, responds to human needs and also respects the limits of planet Earth. This chapter concludes with a summary of part one.

Part Two: The search for solutions

The literature on global problems mainly addresses the world 'out there' but widely overlooks the world 'in here.' Part two addresses this imbalance. It begins with what are among the major issues of our time – global warming and peak oil. It reviews recent work on both and introduces elements of an Integral perspective. The latter throws new light on such issues and arguably brings new clarity to them and therefore to possible solutions.

Chapter 6: Reframing climate change and global warming

Chapter six begins the attempt to move beyond conventional thinking, limiting values and standard responses. It is divided into three parts. The first briefly introduces key elements of the climate change dilemma. The second outlines several aspects of an approach or perspective that arguably throws new light on global issues and on possible solutions. This Integral approach introduces four domains of reality (known as the four quadrants), specific lines and levels of development in each and, lastly, a systematic approach to values. Careful use of these distinctions allows us to outline new approaches to climate change, global warming and other issues raised in part one. The final section reviews a sample of climate change literature, considers emergent patterns within it and suggests a number of ways forward that are further developed below.

Chapter 7: Beyond collapse – an emerging narrative

Chapter seven reviews the global energy dilemma and the issue of 'peak oil' by analysing and evaluating several authoritative sources. It acknowledges the seriousness of the former and the value of the latter, but then proceeds to identify an emerging narrative that redirects and refreshes the debate. The use of Integral concepts helps to generate a different 'take' on the nature of long-term solutions and to accomplish three things. First, there is a move beyond the original 'overshoot and collapse' thesis to a narrative based on the notion of 'descent.' Second, our ability to understand and conceptualise aspects of the macro change process is improved. Third, we can start to move beyond 'gloom and doom' responses to explore the emerging grounds of action and hope.

Chapter 8: Transition strategies

Chapter eight begins by considering the value and limitations of empirical science. The Integral concepts introduced above are extended and used to characterise individual and social worldviews. They are subsequently employed to review and evaluate a number of transition strategies or perspectives that have been put forward. Several conclusions emerge. First, they tend to confirm the need for major shifts in current ways of life including: shifts away from passive consumerism; reductions in energy consumption across the board; re-localisation, especially in relation to food production; the pursuit of strategies to increase resilience; restoration of the natural environment: and, overall, the need to wean societies away from their addiction to economic growth. A second conclusion reinforces an issue encountered above, i.e., the disjuncture between the

relatively simple *description* of such thorough going shifts in current ways of life and the *personal and psychological burdens* of such changes. Finally it notes how various approaches appear to cluster around a default notion of decentralised, small-scale societies. Accordingly, questions are posed about this 'new orthodoxy.'

Chapter 9: Enhancing awareness

Chapter nine pursues two themes that have been running like an underground stream throughout this work. The first brings clearly into focus the domain that has received *least* attention in relation to the global predicament - the interior characteristics and potentials of individuals. To that end it draws on further aspects of the Integral perspective to reveal some of these interior realities that help to shape the more familiar external ones. The second theme explores how the approach taken in this book suggests an significantly expanded frame of awareness and action. Case studies are then provided to show how these notions have been put into practice in areas such as futures studies / foresight work, AIDS awareness and strategies for communicating about sustainability.

Chapter 10: Responding to a world on the edge

Chapter ten begins by summarising some of the conclusions that have emerged above. It then sketches in aspects of an emerging global agenda. Next it considers how *social foresight* can emerge from widely shared sources and, in so doing, help to focus shared attention on the issues raised here. It then looks further at two specific strategies for responding to these dilemmas. The first is what Integral practitioners call 'translation', i.e., level specific options that help individuals to act more effectively at whatever stage they may have already reached. Equally, understanding 'where people are coming from' makes it possible to design 'core messages' in ways that have resonance and meaning across a wider spectrum of individuals and groups. The second option is more difficult to achieve but, overall, it is arguably more powerful and productive. This is known as 'transformation' and involves more thorough going development to new stages of operational capability. The notion of 'waking up' is further considered in this context and, it is suggested, greatly expands the palette of options available. Overall, the perspective outlined here helps to reveal aspects of global issues that, being largely grounded in non-material factors, have thus far been widely overlooked.

Chapter 11: Vision to action

The final chapter considers how certain visions of the future can serve a number of useful purposes. First, they show that the options currently being envisaged by no means exhaust those that are possible or preferable. Second, they provide starting points for individual action and social innovation. Third, under the right circumstances they can catalyse social processes that, over time, enact possibilities that were previously invisible and out of reach. This identifies a critical turning point. While earlier chapters reviewed notions of 'overshoot and collapse' futures and varieties of 'descent' from the peak of industrial civilisation, the fact is that *there are other options* – 'post-collapse' and 'post-descent, futures.' As these are better understood, humanity can, in a sense 're-equip' in

order to follow a different track. In order to establish a broad framework of possibility this final chapter considers post-collapse, post-descent futures at a high level of generality. The use of an 'imaging matrix' identifies a 'sweet zone' where many of the concerns here are resolved. The chapter then moves to a more close-up view of three contemporary individuals who have each experienced their own awakening with results that are directly relevant to the thesis of this work. Briefly, what such exemplars show us is that the deep-seated changes so depicted can be widely adopted here and now in our own time. If pursued decisively with intelligence and appropriate values they prefigure a very different future world.

Conclusion

The conclusion wraps up the argument by depicting two forces acting at the same time upon humanity. First there is the prospect of a disastrous crash, or precipitous descent, that will decimate humanity and destroy large parts of the remaining natural world. This 'push' force is already beginning to drive large numbers of people beyond their existing zones of comfort or of coping. Second, there is the attraction, or 'pull' force, that holds before us new and renewed modes of individual and social development. As has been demonstrated throughout the book, these bestow exactly the gifts that are needed in our time – broader and deeper understanding, more effective modes of communication and action, greater capacity to re-connect with each other and the world that sustains us. To the extent that we can utilise both of these forces, a viable transition leading to sustainable and sustaining futures becomes ever more possible and likely.

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*This is a chapter outline and summary of an eBook by Richard Slaughter that will be available on the Foresight International website later in 2010.

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