

The World Has Entered A New Zone of History

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March 28, 2007

excerpt

It is a special honor to be invited to be with you as you consider “War, Truth, Duty” as the theme of Ethics Week, and I want to thank Professor Rice for the invitation.

My work is what’s called “trend analysis,” looking at the long-term trends that are reshaping the world, and then trying to put them in an understandable context. As I’ve done this, I’ve asked myself this question: Is the world simply passing through what appears to be an extremely dangerous and difficult period of multiple crises, after which life will return to a more familiar normalcy? Or do these converging crises signal the end of the world, as we’ve known it, and the emergence of a totally new context of human existence?

My tentative conclusion, and basic theme today, is this: You and I are living through the most rapid and all-encompassing technological, social, economic, spiritual and environmental changes ever to take place simultaneously. We’ve entered a new zone of history, and in the next few minutes, we’re going to take a look at a few of the trends shaping this new period.

As we discuss this, I want to consider War, Truth and Duty within the perspective of this theme. For all three are affected by the changes reshaping every aspect of our lives.

There are many issues we could talk about—Iraq, global warming, what will happen with Iran, the presidential race that’s already underway, and much more. We’ll be able to address some of these issues in the discussion period at the end.

YouTube and China

But I want to start with two examples that illustrate my basic theme. First, YouTube. YouTube is a symbol for the Internet. For the first time in history, one person, can write or film something that everyone in the world can see, if they have access to a computer. One person reaching millions, even billions. Some anthropologists say this capacity—the Internet—is the most significant social development since the invention of writing over five thousand years ago. It’s a totally new form of communication. Throughout history, radically new forms of communication have created other drastic changes within the society in which

they occurred. So next time you're on the Internet, just pause for a moment and reflect on the significance of what you're able to do.

The second example is the rise of China...a new fact of history. We miss the point if we think of China as just one more nation. Think of China as *every fifth person in the world*; as twenty percent of the world's population. In terms of its size and speed of development, nothing like China's current rise and potential has ever happened before. This is going to be one or two of the most significant geopolitical factors for decades to come. Two centuries ago Napoleon warned that China was a "sleeping giant" when "once awake, would astonish the world." Well, China is awake!

I want to offer a few facts about China that illustrate the stunning magnitude of what China represents in the world today.. To do this, I'm going to contradict a basic rule of public speaking, which is, don't deluge the audience with a lot of facts they won't remember. If anyone's interested in having these facts, my talk will be available at the end of this session, or through Professor Rice's office.

In a few years, Chinese will be the most widely used language on the Internet.

Over the past years, one hundred million people—three times the population of California—have been moving from the western countryside to the cities in the eastern part of China. It's one of the largest migrations in history.

The Chinese produce most of the world's TV sets and video games, 80% of the toys sold in the United States, 60% of the world's cell phones, and 50% of the world's shoes.

China uses 55% of the world's cement, 40% of the world's steel, 30% of all the coal consumed in the world, and 20% of the world's copper. Of the five basic commodities used in the world—grain, meat, oil, coal, and steel—consumption in China has passed consumption in the U.S. for all but oil.

China boasts 300 car manufacturing plants. The largest hotel operator in the world will build seventy-two hotels in China by the end of next year. By the time of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, McDonald's will have built 1,050 restaurants in China.

China operates 30,000 coalmines that mine 30% of all the coal mined in the world. China uses 2,000 coal-fired power stations, and is building 500 more. So many power stations using coal is creating toxic clouds so big that they can be seen from space, drifting across the Pacific laden with microscopic particles of chemicals that cause cancer and diseases of the heart and lungs in Southern California. China will build 27 nuclear power plants in the next thirteen years.

Chinese trade with Latin America has increased 900% in the past five years. Scouring the world for resources, China has contracts with ten countries in Africa for oil alone.

The Chinese government has nearly \$1 trillion worth of gold and foreign money in their central banks. That's more than 10-times what we have in the United States. Nevertheless, as recent events showed, China's stock market cannot, yet, be taken seriously, because equities have little relationship to the companies the shares supposedly represent.

Last but definitely not least, reports suggest that China either has or is developing the capacity to detonate a few high-megatonnage nuclear charges, at exactly the right altitude, in an electro-magnetic pulse strike that would in effect fry every circuit and semiconductor in the U.S. Life in the U.S. would come to a virtual standstill.

But a large country has large problems, and China has plenty of them.

Acid rain falls on 30% of China's land; most of the biggest seven rivers are poisoned; 25% of the people have no clean drinking water; and a third of them breathe polluted air. Two-thirds of Chinese cities have air quality below World Health Organization standards — and 16 of the world's 20 most polluted cities are in China, including Beijing. The pollution in Beijing is equivalent to smoking two packs of cigarettes per day. Pollution causes an estimated 400,000 premature deaths every year in China.

So much change and growth is causing massive psychological problems. In the world as a whole, suicide ranks as the 13th cause of death. In China, it's the fifth cause of death. The Chinese government estimates that 20% of China's 1.3 billion people have some degree of psychological problem.

Yet in Shanghai, with a population of 17 million, there are only about 100 therapists. In China as a whole, there are 2.4 psychologists or therapists for every one million people. That compares with 550 per million in the U.S.

China has seen a 68% rise in juvenile crime in the past five years. Chinese teenagers are getting addicted to the Internet and taking to crime at a younger age than in any other country, according to a Chinese government report. Of China's 18.3 million teen Internet users, more than 2 million are considered to be addicts. The most vulnerable are the so-called "good kids who impress their parents and teachers," according to a study by the Communist Youth League. Internet addicts in China are, on average, as much as 10 years younger than those in the West.

I could continue, but the idea is clear. Whatever their problems, China is now a major force determining the future of the U.S. and the world. If I were your age, I'd be learning Chinese.

YouTube and China...two examples of what I mean when I suggest we are in the middle of some of the greatest changes ever to take place.

Globalization

YouTube and China are the result of two other trends I want to mention. First, globalization.

When we think of globalization, we generally think of the worldwide integration of economic and financial factors—the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, jobs moving from one part of the world to another part, and much more.

But what really is globalization? Simply put, it's the shrinkage of the world. As the world shrinks, everything is becoming more intermeshed—economics, politics, culture, traditions and religion. Thus, age-old perspectives and ways of thinking no longer hold. And it's all happening very quickly—faster than many people can adjust to.

Thus for the first time in history, we humans are forging an awareness of our existence as *a single entity*. Nations are struggling to incorporate the planetary dimensions of life into the fabric of their economics, politics, culture and international relations, and even their religions.

Globalization is changing the distribution of geopolitical power. Ever since 1945 and the end of World War II, the United States has been the dominant world power and the guarantor of at least a certain degree of stability and security. But globalization has been creating other centers of economic and political power, and so the United States is increasingly only one of several centers of geopolitical power, albeit the strongest military player.

The primary effect of globalization I would mention is the global crisis of identity taking place. It has taken a series of crises in France, Holland, Britain, Germany and other European countries for the issue of *identity* finally to be recognized as central to the contemporary global crisis. The French president states on national TV that his country faces “an identity crisis,” a crisis that increases as large numbers of immigrants from Asia, Africa and the Middle East crowd into France and Europe.

As immigration increases, the stories and myths that are the basis of national identities tend to wane. As one British historian put it, “A white majority that invented the national mythologies underpinning modern European culture lives in

an almost perpetual state of fear that it and its way of life are about to disappear.” The Catholic Church in Europe is facing the distinct probability of Islam eventually becoming the largest European religion. The fear of such demographic shifts and their potential consequences is the subtext for everything else happening in Europe today.

This issue of identity is an underlying dynamic between the Arab world and the West. They are asking themselves, “Will globalization, based on the Western, rationalistic, consumerist, postmodern ethos, ultimately mean *the end of Islam*, which is the foundation of their identity? Such unknowns form a significant part of the psychological dynamic fueling terrorism.

Profound questions arise for all people as globalization collapses the national, racial and religious boundaries that heretofore protected—and even defined—identity. “Who am I? Who is my group? Do I even have a group any more? What does ‘national allegiance’ mean in a global era? What does ‘race’ mean in a world where people of all shades of skin color are increasingly inter-marrying? What is my sense of who I am and what I believe when computerized global information systems merge all religions, philosophies and cultures into a grab bag of different possible beliefs?”

The whole human race—whether pre-modern, modern, or postmodern—is involved in a vast process of redefining identity. Some move forward into the future, some cling to the past. In a sense, we’re redefining the meaning of what we once held as the Truth of life, and thus our sense of Duty or responsibility.

Technology

We all know that the explosion of new technologies is a primary force driving global change. While elementary forms of technology are older than *Homo sapiens*, the first systematic approach to science and technology was expressed by Francis Bacon in 17th century: Bacon wrote that the “true and lawful end of science is that human life be enriched by new discoveries and powers.” Four centuries later, Einstein echoed Bacon, and emphasized that “concern for man himself and his fate must form the chief interest of all technical endeavors.”

Concern for humanity and its fate.....is this the chief interest of technological research today?

Let me interject here that I’m a firm believer in technology. A few years ago I had a quadruple heart by-pass operation using the latest medical technology. So I’m sold.

Simply from an economic standpoint, in the 20th century, the U.S. grew by \$48 trillion, much of that growth based on new technology.

But questions arise as to whether we really know what we're doing. I mentioned China and the Internet addicts the government is concerned about. Well, the other day I was meeting with six or eight college students. We were talking about what's going on in the world, and I asked them what they thought about where technology is headed. One girl said, "Well I don't know about technology in general, but as far as the Internet goes, I am completely addicted to it. Every morning when I wake up, the first thing I *have* to do is go to YouTube and see the latest videos that were uploaded over night. I know I'm addicted to the Internet."

I was a bit surprised by this, and asked the other students if they felt the same way; if they felt addicted to the Internet. "Absolutely," was the response from everyone. Then I asked if addiction to the Internet would characterize most of the other students on the campus. Totally, no question about it, they said.

Think of what addiction means. It means that I no longer control my life; that something else—whether the Internet, drugs, shopping or whatever the addiction is—controls my life to a certain extent. Thus addiction of any kind diminishes me as a person.

But let's go back to Einstein's "concern for man himself and his fate must form the chief interest of all technical endeavors." In other words, that is the highest Duty of scientific research. But is that what is happening?

Doubts are being expressed. The *Economist*, probably the most authoritative news magazine in English, asks, "Is the speed of technology development exceeding humanity's moral and mental capacities to control it?" *Newsweek* magazine says flat out that "information overload is outstripping our capacity to cope, antiquating our laws, transforming our mores, reshuffling our economy, reordering our priorities and putting our Constitution to the fire."

Why do they make such statements? For one thing, the experts tell us that the pace of technological change doubles every decade; that because technological change is growing at an exponential rate, the 21st century will see one thousand times more technological change than did the last century.

What does such rapid change do to us as individuals? Psychologists have long known that subjecting people to more change than they can fit into their mental picture of life causes serious psychological problems. Thus the U.S. government estimates that half of all Americans will, at some point in their lives, experience some form of mental illness. Some experts even say that by generating such rapid change, we are tampering with the preconditions of rationality.

How is communications technology affecting Truth? I once had dinner with Alvin Toffler, who was one of the world's foremost authorities on how technology is changing our lives. I asked him, "What is the result of everyone having access to all philosophies, all social and political theories, all knowledge, all spiritual beliefs,

all news simply by the press of a computer button." He replied, "It's the end of truth." I don't think he was suggesting that truth doesn't exist any longer. Rather, I think he meant that we're at a point where truth is no longer accepted as "self evident" as it says in the Declaration of Independence. It's ever more difficult to achieve a consensus on what is Truth. We certainly don't know the truth of why we got into Iraq. But even more, look at the disagreement of what is the truth regarding abortion, stem cell research, marriage, or even what constitutes a family. People have different views as to what constitutes "Truth" on these issues.

Information technologies fragment collective systems of belief, whether political, religious or philosophical. This is why our political parties are becoming less relevant. It's also why two former Speakers of the House of Representatives, Tom Foley and Newt Gingrich, one a Democrat and one a Republican, agree that the House of Representatives is, in their words, "dysfunctional." More people have more information with which to make up their own minds on an issue. Whose "truth" are we talking about....the forty-eight million Christian fundamentalists who believe the world will literally end in our lifetime; the scientists who believe we are entering the "Post-human" era as they create a specie "superior" to the human being; the biologist who say we are near the time when the male will no longer be necessary for procreation; the modernist who believes the past has no meaning or lessons for us today; the postmodernist who believes reality is but a social-linguistic construct?

Or take the issue of Duty. What is our duty to our children? What are we doing to them? One effect is that our technologies have speeded up the pace of life so much that books are now written for seven-year-old children advising them how to recognize stress in their lives, and what to do about it. Clearly, parents no longer control the information environment in which their children grow up; and such control has been a prime duty of parenthood for the past three hundred years. Indeed, many researchers of the effects of technology on children say we have now come to the "end of childhood" as a special category of growth, with its unique needs.

As we look to the future of technology, what is our Duty to coming generations? Some scientists are seeking to create certain technologies not to improve the human condition as Einstein urged, but for purposes that appear to be to replace human meaning and significance altogether. Some of the world's most brilliant scientists are seeking to create what they call the Post-Human Age. Create something they think is better than the human being.

Listen to what some scientists are saying:

Marvin Minsky, cofounder of MIT's Artificial Intelligence Laboratory: "Suppose that the robot had all the virtues of people and was smarter and understood things better. Then why would we want to prefer those grubby old people? I

don't see anything wrong with human life being devalued if we have something better."

MIT's Sherry Turkel sees the "reconfiguration of machines as psychological objects and the reconfiguration of people as living machines."

So how are we to view such statements? What are we really dealing with? How is it that a tiny percentage of humanity—a few scientists—takes it upon itself to radically alter what has been known for the last forty thousand years as a "human being?" This is not science fiction we're been talking about; it's what is happening with some of the best and brightest scientists in the world, and they expect to see the results of their work within the next two or three decades.

It is clear that in *some* realms of scientific research, we are no longer concerned with meeting any human need, nor is there any defined ethical framework within which R&D takes place. What seems to be driving some scientific research today is a mania for exploring the outer limits of nature, of the "possible," regardless of the consequences. It is the fascination with power.

Freeman Dyson, one of America's foremost theoretical physicists, and present at the first test of a nuclear bomb, speaks of how scientific power can inflate the human ego. Dyson describes how some scientific research can result from an illusion of unlimited power. Says Dyson, this quest for unlimited power is a result of "what you might call the *technical arrogance that overcomes people when they see what they can do with their minds.*" (Emphasis added)

Richard Tarnas, professor of psychology and philosophy at the California Institute of Integral Studies, and author of the highly acclaimed *Cosmos and Psyche*, suggests that as scientists and technologists pursue their vision of technological transcendence, "unconscious factors are ignored. It's just these unconscious factors that will eventually disrupt the developmental trajectory so confidently predicted by technologists." He adds: "Purveyors of such future scenarios are blissfully—and often manically—unaware of the deeper psychological impulses driving their quest, the shadow side of their aspirations, and the superficiality of their understanding of either evolution or consciousness. When one is unconscious of so much, one can be certain one's plans will not go according to schedule....and that their visions are likely to be highly inaccurate—though not without consequences."

What Does This Mean for Me?

So how is the individual to live in a world that is changing in such basic ways? I would offer a few suggestions.

First, limit my information intake to what I absolutely need to know. This may be difficult when they're so many interesting blogs, websites and chat rooms on the

Internet. But the more time I spend on non-essential information, the less time I spend simply in comprehending essential information. In a sense, I diminish my "Truth intake."

Second, study technology and how it has changed people and entire societies throughout history. Technology is not simply a passive tool. It changes us as we use it; it alters our perception of life. For example, the invention of the automobile altered the basic structure and relationships within the American family. Television changed the content and nature of American politics. The Internet is diminishing our sense of both time and place. So don't just use technology; study it and how it's affecting you in both good ways and bad.

Third, study the high points of the last century so that today's events are understood within the context of the historical, cultural, technological and psychological trends that have shaped contemporary life. For example, we need to understand the 20th century shift of Western culture from a Christian-based culture, to modernism and, more recently, to postmodernism. For culture is a reflection of what is taking place in a peoples' inner life. We cannot adequately understand contemporary America unless we have some idea of this historical unfolding.

Fourth, pursue those activities that deepen the inner life. Contemporary culture tends to be very shallow, and if we feed off of it, if that's our daily diet, we become shallow people. We need to seek depth in our lives in whatever way is natural for each of us. Maybe it's reconnecting yourself to nature by taking more time walking in the woods or the mountains, or relaxing at the beach. Maybe it's listening to some of the music of the world's greatest composers, or reading some of the world's great literature. Maybe it's reading about the lives of Buddha or Christ, or reading the Koran, or Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, or the *Upanishads*. But however you do it, build depth and greatness into your lives.

Finally, I want to comment on the third element of the theme of Ethics Week, and that is War. There are many causes of war. But we have such destructive power now, that we have to understand the origins of war at a much deeper level than ever before. For the future of planet Earth is at stake.

I suggested at the beginning that the world is experiencing one of the greatest periods of change in history. When nations shift from one period of history to a new period, that shift doesn't take place out in space somewhere, out in the ether. *The basic change takes place inside of us as human beings.* It is we who are changing, even though we may not be aware of it. For the change is taking place at the level of our unconscious life. What is happening is that a new orientation, a new worldview is being born within us. We are beginning to see ourselves as a single specie, and that's a totally new sense of identity that supercedes all other forms of identity. Our whole outlook on life is expanding. As that happens, it's a turbulent time, both inside us individually, as well as in the

world as a whole. There is personal and collective turmoil. Particularly now, with instant global communications, which not only transmit information, but also transmit emotions and psychic states of mind.

One of the requirements of the shrinking of the globe is the need for all people to be able to understand and appreciate the “other” in different cultures, races, religions and modes of living. And by the “other,” I mean that which is different from us, and therefore seems strange. It’s very hard for us to be open to the “other,” to understand it, and not to judge it from our own experience or preconceived point of view.

And one reason we do not relate to the “other,” and are not open to other religions, cultures, and doing things differently than we do, is because we don’t see the wholeness of our own personalities. And by that I mean while we see our positive qualities, we don’t see the dark side, the shadow side of our own character, both personally and in national life. We tend just to look at the more constructive aspects and to disregard what might be considered the negative features.

We’re all made up of two parts: our personality is made up of what might be called “opposites.” There’s good and evil, love and hate, generosity and selfishness, joy and sorrow, courage and cowardice, humility and arrogance, and much more. And what we tend to do as individuals, and as a nation, is to see ourselves through our positive qualities, and not face the negative, the inferior qualities. Because we don’t face this dark side in our character, we project that on to another person. We say, “He’s the evildoer; it’s his fault.” We judge and sometimes condemn what is strange and different, rather than try to understand and be open to it. And we do the same thing as a nation. We say the other nation is the evildoer, without seeing the evil in our own country.

This is human nature, and all people and nations do it. So the U.S. president condemns Iran as part of the “axis of evil,” and Iran calls America “the Great Satan”...each country projecting onto the other country the unrecognized shadow in its own character.

It’s not pleasant or comfortable to face the shadow and the inferior qualities in our ourselves and in the character of our nations. And so we don’t do it. It contradicts the image we have of ourselves. But I suggest all nations would do well to remember Robert Burns’ poetic lines, “Oh would some power the gift to give us, to see ourselves as others see us.”

What I’ve been suggesting is an underlying dynamic affecting the world today. Obviously, many other issues are at work, for the transition we’re experiencing is complex. But at the center of this transition is a war taking place in the individual and the collective soul where worldviews are born. The more we understand this, the more individuals and nations are able to see and accept the dark side in

their own lives, then we become larger personalities, and our life deepens and broadens out. We gain a wider perspective, and we find ways of understanding and reaching out for the other person, race or nation. Eventually, we begin to bridge differences, and build cooperative relationships with other people and nations.

This is not esoteric theory. This was part of the process of reconciliation at work between Germany and France after they had fought three wars within seventy-five years. It was part of the process of reconciliation in South Africa under Nelson Mandela. More recently, this process has been helping develop a cooperative relationship between Indonesia and Holland, who had ruled Indonesia for three hundred years. In a rare act of statesmanship, the foreign minister of Holland, while in Indonesia, publicly expressed regret for Holland's attitude and actions that had denied Indonesians their freedom for so long. At the same time, the President of Indonesia declared that he wants Indonesia to be "a bridge" between the Muslim world and the West.

The world has entered a new zone of history. In the final analysis, it's not technology or war that shapes the future. It's people. People make technology; people make war. Thus the future depends on us as a people, and whether we can find a deeper understanding of ourselves as individuals, as well as what divides us from other people. If a global age is going to work, if we're going to build the planetary civilization that is emerging, then nations have got to understand and come to terms with the dark side of personal and national character. Similarly, we must begin to appreciate the "other" in people, cultures and religions that search for the same fulfillment in life that we seek.

It seems to me that you here at CCBC are in a perfect position to begin to do this, for there are 350 students from 66 countries attending CCBC. You are the world in miniature. I hope each one of you takes the time to develop deep friendships with people from other countries; to understand and appreciate the differences in your customs and ways of doing things. Open your mind and heart to what is unexpected and different, and you will find great value in it.

There is a new dimension of Truth attempting to unfold itself for the world. It's happened before in history, and now it's our turn to live at a time when a fresh orientation is emerging for the whole of the human family.

With this new unfolding of Truth comes an enlarged requirement of Duty...a duty to understand what's happening, and to engage in the war within our own soul, as well as within the collective soul of our nations. Then there will come a heightened hope that we can avoid the technological dangers and destructive wars that seem to threaten human existence today. Then, and perhaps only then, will we bring to birth a new era of deeper meaning and greater unity for future generations.

