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Steering the Future of Humankind

Twenty guidelines and principles for a paradigm shift in values and attitudes

Hundreds of organisations and think tanks study the future, but almost all project it from current trends to safeguard the parochial interests of a nation or group — national security, marketing, or outdoing the competition. A fundamental piece is missing: someone must look at the future of humankind as a whole, and at the common interests of all its women and men.

Population explosion, climate change, the depletion of resources, the spread of weapons of mass destruction and the rise of extremism are pushing humankind in an unsustainable direction. At this crossroads of disaster or enlightenment, we need to find what views we hold in common — and that means setting aside prejudices and biases, historical, cultural and religious, accumulated over time.

> *Imagine a journey to a new world, far from our earth in space and time. What kind of world would we want it to be — and how would we frame its values, laws and guidelines?*

One day a large part of mankind will head for another place in our galaxy. Will its pioneers repeat what we have lived through here, or build something we can be proud of? It would help them greatly to inherit a model devised at leisure by the best minds of the days gone by. And the structure that emerges would apply just as directly to the world of today, and the existential challenges facing us now.

Guidelines and principles of the proposed paradigm shift

01. All are born equal

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

02. Inalienable rights

All human beings possess certain basic, inalienable rights, and no one has the authority to deny them. No human being has the right to rule another arbitrarily — neither kings, nor priests, nor capitalists, the three greatest exploiters of innocent humanity. Exploitation of every kind must be nipped in the bud.

03. Freedom with accountability

There can be no compulsion in faith or belief; freedom of choice must be ensured. But with freedom of choice comes accountability. We are fully accountable for our deeds — we shall reap what we sow.

04. Natural moral law

Just as physical laws rule the universe, natural moral laws govern human conduct, and none can escape them.

05. Reason — and its limits

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

06. The rise of consciousness

Humankind has grown through physical, then chemical, then biological evolution. It has now entered a stage that may be called intellectual evolution — the rise of consciousness — which gives humans their uniqueness.

07. Protect the mind

The human brain is the acme of evolution; its high degree of consciousness is what principally distinguishes us from animals. Whatever hinders its free and proper use should be discouraged — intoxicating drinks and drugs, but also blind rage, pride and arrogance, and blindly following a cult leader or political ideology.

08. The value of life

Nature has endowed life with an extremely high, almost infinite, value — we really are children of the stars. Science and religion both recognise this; prevailing economic theory, the ruling paradigm, does not. Economics values things by supply and demand, and nature has made life plentiful, easy and pleasurable to create. Engineering principles — cost of materials plus energy plus labour — give a much truer picture.

09. A shift in consciousness

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

10. Curb Wall Street and Hollywood

The "Wall Street Syndrome" of extortionate capitalism, and the corroding effect on society of the "Hollywood Complex" — a heady mélange of sex and wanton violence, constantly on the increase — must be curbed.

11. Justice tempered with compassion

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

12. Meritocracy

Merit must be supreme: no undue favours for the privileged, no old caste system in new bottles, and no racial or other discrimination.

13. Truth and true witness

Speaking the truth and bearing correct witness is a fundamental requirement in all circumstances, without exception. Witnesses must not wait to be summoned; it is their obligation to come forward and give true and faithful evidence so that a just judgment can be reached.

14. Limits on war

War may be allowed to the aggrieved when peaceful means fail, but within limits. Retribution must never exceed the initial aggression, and even then forgiveness is better, for its healing influence on society. "All is fair in love and war" is patently false, and "my country, right or wrong" must no longer be taught.

15. Economic balance

Society needs economic balance. The resourceful must not be able to exploit the poor and underprivileged. The power of money should be controlled, and monopolies must not be allowed to exist.

16. Welfare and enterprise

The need for a welfare state is almost obvious, but private initiative and drive also need space. The dignity of labour and the freedom of capital and enterprise must be balanced — by appropriate laws, and equally by a shift in our overarching values towards compassion and equity.

17. Trustees of nature

Humans have been endowed with the ability to exploit the resources and forces of nature. This must not be done indiscriminately or carelessly, lest it become unsustainable. We should act as trustees, not owners, of nature and non-human life.

18. Competition with cooperation

Competition is the essence of life, but it must be mixed with cooperation if strife is to be avoided and each is to receive a due share — a win-win outcome.

19. Beyond nationalism

Nationalism has outlived whatever usefulness it had. It is outmoded and grossly out of tune with our globalising world, yet it remains today's ruling paradigm — is it any wonder humanity has tied itself in knots? We must grow out of it and build a new order suited to an increasingly global world.

20. Democracy by consultation

As Churchill said, democracy has its weaknesses but is the best political system developed to date. Its emphasis, however, must shift from securing a "majority vote" to the consultation and inclusion of all stakeholders in governance.

> *Workshop participants were asked to review these guidelines on purely rational grounds, after freeing themselves from acquired cultural, national and other preconceived biases and Weltanschauungen. Workshop given by Tariq Mustafa at the IRAS Conference, Star Island, New Hampshire, 7 August 2014.*