

42 (Answer to life, the universe and everything!)

42 [1].

(The answer to life, the universe and everything, but what is the question?)

If global warming and climate change really matter and we don't do anything to make our environment more sustainable, the results could be catastrophic. However if climate change doesn't matter and we do something about making our environment more sustainable, then we end up with a better environment. The decision is not why would we do it, but when do we start?

Yesterday is gone, the future belongs to our children, the right time to start is now.

Foresight covers activities aimed at thinking, debating and shaping the future. [2].

Slaughter maintains that we are not yet matching suitable timeframes to suitable activities.[3]He suggests we look in time frames that look backward and forward from the present. I believe that the major indicators of our unsustainable impact on the earth will be resolved within the lifetimes of our adult children, one way or another. One of the frameworks to look at the future that Slaughter talks about is a "50 year present", a time frame that from today, looks back to 1980 and forward to 2030. [4]

Although I intend to look much further back into what were the key factors in the survival or collapse [5] of past civilizations, I am convinced that the decisions we make in the next 25 years will fundamentally determine the future of our earth.

Correct decisions made now will enhance the options that our children will have, in the world that they will inherit from us. [6]

Ken Wilbur coined the term Kosmos [7] to imply the patterned nature or process of all domains of existence. For me it provides a framework that encompasses the universe and our place in it, our interconnectedness and interdependence with everything else, in a profound and meaningful way. I use this conceptual framework to begin thinking about my place in the big picture, in a genuine and authentic manner, this is truly empowering and spiritual experience. For the first time in my life I have a framework into which I can place all my knowledge, experience, wisdom, hopes, dreams and aspirations and work with them. Through this new framework, I can achieve a synthesis and synergy through my former paradigms and perceptual filters.

Even with the perfect integral map of the Kosmos, we also need ways to understand and change the mapmaker's perception, our way of seeing [8] and understanding our place within and connectedness to everything else in the Kosmos. The spiral of existence is a great unending flow connecting mind, body and spirit with everything and everyone else.

Stories have been an effective and entertaining way to share wisdom through space and time. Great storytellers share the feeling and passion that effectively carry and communicate important messages through the ages. It fascinates me how a few special individuals could glean insights from stories that others missed completely. An example of this is fairy stories [9] that are the containers of our childish fears and those things with which we cannot deal with in our present reality. The answers are there when we have sufficient courage and understanding and are ready to face the challenges

and see new realities.

By telling the story of one Douglas fir tree growing in the forest, David Suzuki reflects on the tree's role in the ecosystem during and after life. In his latest book *Tree, A Life Story*, [10] Suzuki looks at the tree's role in the water cycle, in removing CO₂ and producing Oxygen and in acting as a nurse log for fungi and habitat for birds and insects. Through the 500 years of the Fir tree's life he recounts the things that go on in its immediate environment and counterpoints this with the bigger picture of the historical and social context through this timeframe. Through this clever device he tells a story that can be accessed at a variety of levels of complexity and to embed information in a palatable and continuously accessible format. He contrasts his view of this single Douglas fir living and dying in a once pristine wilderness, with its use as the major commercial timber product of Northwest Canada. Suzuki [11] is pushing for a radical change in the ways we perceive and use the forest.

In his book, "Collapse, How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive," Jared Diamond, tells us of past civilisations that deforested their homelands, for reasons that made perfect sense to them at the time, only to find they had compromised their very own survival. I wonder what the man who cut down the last tree on Easter Island with his stone axe [12] said as it crashed to earth? "Timber or bugger!" "What was that story about the time when the island was covered in trees and food was plentiful? Something about ecosystems and sustainability, when life was good and spirituality included a connection to place." Probably not, but as his descendents starved they probably cursed him and his contemporaries. But we wouldn't do that today would we, especially with all our technology and experience? Well it has been calculated that within 25 years [13] at the current rate, we will have destroyed most of the accessible, tropical, lowland rainforest, in the world, except for national parks and perhaps some of the Amazon and Congo basins.

We will have in fact been part of compromising the lungs of the world. Gaia [14] will survive our foolishness, she is not judgemental, and she just adjusts to the prevailing conditions. Whether those changes will always remain amenable to human survival can no longer be taken for granted. Gaia helps me conceptualise the biosphere and our impact upon it, predicated with, "you wouldn't do that to your mother would you?" asked in a combination of anger and incredulity.

There are 12 problems associated with our present unsustainable course that loom large and need to be adequately addressed, within the next 25 years. As they are all intimately interconnected, we must deal with them all, not just the easiest or most palatable options.

1. The destruction of natural habitats [15] including forests, wetlands, coral reefs and ocean bottoms.
2. Wild foods especially fish; 2 billion of the poorest people depend on the oceans for protein.
3. Loss of biological diversity (biodiversity including agricultural genetic material), a significant fraction of wild species, populations and genetic

diversity has already been lost and much more is doomed if we continue on our present path.

4. Soil loss to wind, water, acidity, salinity and most importantly soil fertility, we have must stop treating one our most precious resources, fertile soil, like dirt.

5. Energy in the form of fossil fuels, particularly oil, natural gas and coal will become scarcer and more expensive over the next 50 years.

6. Freshwater is becoming scarce; already 1 billion people lack access to safe, reliable drinking water.

7. The amount of solar energy fixed per acre by plants photosynthesis, hence plant growth per acre, depend on temperature and rainfall.

8. Poisonous and noxious chemicals [16] released into the air, soil and water affect the air we breathe, the water we drink and the soil we grow our food in and graze our animals on.

9. Alien species, that is introduced species that over run indigenous species and cause havoc to the natural ecosystems, like the cane toads, rabbits and foxes that were introduced into our unsuspecting environment and changed it fundamentally and forever.

10. Human activities produce gases that affect the ozone layer and produce greenhouse gases that promote global warming. These include CFC's and CO₂.

11. The explosive growth of world population is testing our ability to revision a more sustainable way to live with a more gentle ecological footprint [17].

12. What really counts is not the number of people on the earth but their impact on the environment, their environmental footprint [18]

The best future is based on Sustainability First Principles, the worst based on Fortress world. One is a vision of justice and equity of resources, the other a nightmare of global decay, inequality and poverty.

Fortress world is almost here; our killing capacity grew rapidly through the 20th century. 19Killing capacity as measured by weapons lethality index with a sword as 1; a modern battle tank as 160,00020 and a 25-megaton warhead has a Weapons Lethal Index of 10.521 billion.

We need new ways of measuring what is fundamentally important and while it is particularly difficult to let go of one's past values and standards, when they become incompatible with survival they must be abandoned.

Gross Domestic Product [22] (GDP) [23] is the driver in the first world, but like King Midas, we will find that we cannot eat gold, nor will it keep us warm at night and it does not deliver eco-system services upon which our very survival depends. The tiny Kingdom of Bhutan, in the Himalayas has developed a concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) based on their spiritual tradition of Buddhism.

This is an esoteric concept to westerners; probably because they are so spiritually bankrupt they need to fill the void with rampant consumption.

The people of Bhutan are happy in a way that western people can only dream about because they practice karma and a concept of enoughness.

Concepts such as the triple bottom line [24] are methodologies that are designed to measure economic growth, environmental quality and social equity. The really only common metric is the economic growth; the other dimensions are subject to the attitude and commitment of the company reporting against this method.

Sohail Inayatullah [25] seeks to address this flaw by bringing in a concept of the quadruple bottom line, by including spirituality into the equation. This more eastern philosophy to accounting brings a dimension that is more about feeling and attitude, a caring more compassionate way of measuring the total impact of a business transaction. Victor Frankl [26] sums up my concept of attitude in an extract from

"A man's search for Meaning," when he says, "to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Danah Zohar [27] talks of spiritual intelligence [28] and spiritual capital [29] where people's philosophy can be expressed in their reality, a synthesis of common purpose, ethics and business savvy creating a more integrated, holistic and sustainable outcome that satisfies the highest aspirations of the company and community.

So by carefully examining the past and learning how to extrapolate what we have done and what we are doing we may be able to get a better handle on what our probable future will be.

For our children's sake I fervently hope that we can revision our future through a more compassionate and ethical response to the looming problems and change our direction and momentum before we overshoot the earth's carrying capacity and tip into global collapse.

Through these two little stories to I try and understand and give a plausible explanation of how attitude can influence reasons and perhaps outcomes.

The people who live below a high dam in a narrow valley were surveyed about their attitude to this "sword of Damocles" situation where undoubtedly, if the dam breaks, many of them will perish. The interesting fact picked up in the survey was the people half way down the valley were the most terrified by this prospect, followed by people farthest away. The people living in the shadow of the dam and consequently the most in danger professed little concern. This phenomenon was explained as psychological denial, they couldn't have stayed there if they believed they were in imminent danger. I believe a lot of people are in psychological denial about the consequences of their actions and how they impact on a much bigger picture. They then put their heads in the sand believing that technology will fix the future so they go about their business as usual, but do they really?

The waterfall story recounts two methodologies of a white water rafting adventure. The first is just get your gear, jump in a paddle down the middle of the river, however when a large waterfall appears directly in front of you, there is no time to take action to avoid disaster, the typical overshoot and collapse technology. At least the end is quick, if a little premature and bit messy. Live fast and die young and let the future take care of itself.

The second scenario is more of a considered futures type approach. Get the relevant maps and talk to others who have gone before. Get properly provisioned, with requisite safety equipment, preferably go with someone who has done it before. Check the prevailing weather conditions, let people know of your plans and then set out in a careful and considered manner. Stay close enough to the bank so that you can bail out if necessary. You may take a little longer, but when you reach dangerous waterfalls you will be able to pull out,

portage past the danger and continue safely to your destination. Our most important task is to learn from the past, understand the present and design and navigate to the most preferable future, where all sentient beings can enjoy a happy and sustainable lifestyle. A certain future, that we can then hand with pride and love to our grandchildren.

The answer to Life [30] the Universe and Everything is 42, [31] but what is the question?

Footnotes

1. See footnote [31], please read the essay first.

2 <http://www.cordis.lu/foresight/definition.htm> Thinking the future is used for forecasting, technology assessment, future studies and other forms of foresight try to identify long-term trends and thus to guide the decision-making and mapping the most preferable future.

Debating the future using foresight is a participative process engaging as many different stakeholders as possible to get a comprehensive understanding of a range of possible futures.

Shaping the future: Foresight aims at identifying possible futures, imagining desirable futures, defining and designing strategies.

3 Futures for the Third Millennium, page 6

4 Some milestones, 2007 global urbanisation reaches halfway mark, 2010 global crude oil production peaks, 2012 developing fisheries disappear, 2015 OPEC oil dominance begins, 2018 arable land reaches its limits, 2020 superbugs rule, antibiotics become less effective, 2030 global natural gas peaks, 2034 global water availability declines to low, 2045 weather related losses cause global bankruptcy.

5 It has often been said, "those that fail to learn the lessons of history are condemned to repeat them."

6 The Earth Charter elegantly sums up my feelings. Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.

Earth Charter, The, (www.earthcharter.org)

7 Kosmos contains the cosmos (physiosphere), bios (biosphere), nous (noosphere) and theos

theosphere) Sex, Ecology and Spirituality, page 46

8 "We can only see what we can see", a concept explained in Spiral Dynamics developed by Cowan and Beck from work pioneered by Dr. Clare Graves. Through Spiral Dynamics, Graves explains how human nature emerges along developmental paths from one equilibrium state to the next. These stages each add layers to the next and level of existence and offer a particular view of the world as defined by a unique set of perceptual filters. These different views of reality lead to different decision making processes and ways of being in and seeing the world. Spiral dynamics, was conceived by Graves as an emergent, cyclical, double helix model of adult biopsychosocial systems development.

9 Carl Jung pioneered how fairytales could be used to interpret dreams and add immeasurably to us understanding ourselves and our place in the world and why we were the way we were.

10Suzuki Douglas Fir Tree <http://www.kuow.org/defaultProgram.asp?ID=8103>

11 author of more than 30 books, a scientist, broadcaster, head of the Suzuki Foundation

12 When the axe first came into the forest

The trees said to each other

The handle is one of us. Jas H Duke.

13The little green book

14Since first conceived by James Lovelock in the 1960's the concept of Gaia has developed and matured. Originally Lovelock suggested that the Earth is 'regulated at a state comfortable for life because of the behaviour of living organisms'. A good modern definition of Gaia (from an essay by Lovelock in Nature in 2003) suggests that 'organisms and their material environment evolve as a single coupled system, from which emerges the sustained self-regulation of climate and chemistry at a habitable state for whatever is the current biota.' Reference: Lovelock J. (2003) The living Earth. Nature 426,

769-770 15 Tragedy of the commons is a concept that helps explain why, where resources such as fishing grounds or communal grazing areas are over exploited. The reason people use is because, " if I don't get it first someone else will surely get it, even if it unsustainable, why should I deny myself and family?" 16 Rachel Carson's seminal work of the 1960's, Silent Spring, alerted the world to the dangers of DDT but we learn slowly. 17 The present carrying capacity of the world at average global consumption is about 4.8 billion people. It has been estimated that there are 8.8 billion hectares of biologically productive land and 2.3 billion hectares of productive water adjacent to it on the earth. Industrialised countries require 6 ha of productive surface area to support their patently unsustainable lifestyles; at that rate the earth could only support about 1.2 billion people. At average global consumption we need 1.8 ha/p and for a satisfactory vegetarian diet we need 0.5 hectare per person of productive land.. If there were equity of distribution of biologically productive surface area we would all have access to 0.24 ha/p.

18 On average western industrial cultures consume 32 times the resources and cause 32 times more waste than a third world person. Even if only China moved from third world to first world status the impact would be to double present consumption

19 Green book 224

20 Therefore if 6.25 battle tanks had been deployed in Rwanda for the 100 days, many of the 1 million Rwandans who died of machete wounds could have been saved

21 Enough destructive power to kill the entire population of the world 1.7 times (10.5 billionKPI bomb / 6.2 billion people)

22As Robert Kennedy said concerning GDP, "it neither measures wit nor our courage neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country it measures everything in short except that which makes life worth while."

23GDP is an overall measure of economic activity, of buying and selling and money being exchanged.

GDP not only masks the breakdown of social structure and the natural habitat upon which the economy, and life itself , ultimately depend: worse, it actually portrays such breakdowns as economic gains

24 The triple bottom line is a concept of balancing economic growth, environmental quality and social equity, Earthwatch Institute. The term "triple

bottom line" was first coined by John Elkington, in his book "Cannibal's with forks"(1998).

Elkington, J. Cannibals with forks: The triple Bottom Line of 21st Century business - ISBN 0-86571-392-8 Published by New Society Publishers 1998
25http://www.metafuture.org/Articles/spirituality_bottom_line.htm

26 We who lived in the concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: The last of his freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way. --Viktor E. Frankl, "Man's Search for Meaning"

27 www.pegasus.com

28 spiritual intelligence how we understand the deeper meanings of life, the purpose and values that underlie our behaviour.

29 Spiritual capital is the wealth or power an individual organisation has, based on their deepest meanings, values and purposes

30 I chose the title "42", after an incredible journey and an awe inspiring task to contextualize my current world-view. My gratitude to great thinkers like Jung, Thoreau, Wilbur, Diamond, Slaughter and Neilson is profound. Their dedication to their process and generosity in sharing their wisdom is inspirational. Having no edges to my paradigms is a bit like having no safety net, but I feel the fear and do it anyway.

31 According to the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, researchers, who are really a hyper-intelligent race of beings, construct Deep Thought, the second greatest computer of all time and space, to calculate the answer to the Ultimate Question. After seven and a half million years of pondering the question, Deep Thought provides the answer: "forty-two." "Forty-two!" yelled Loonquawl. "Is that all you've got to show for seven and a half million years' work?"

"I checked it very thoroughly," said the computer, "and that quite definitely is the answer. I think the problem, to be quite honest with you, is that you've never actually known what the question is."

Deep Thought informs the researchers that it will design a second and greater computer, incorporating living beings as part of its computational matrix, to tell them what the question is. That computer was called Earth and was so big that it was often mistaken for a planet.

The question was lost five minutes before it was due to be produced, due to the Vogons' demolition of the Earth, supposedly to build a hyperspace bypass. (Later in the series, it is revealed that the Vogons had been hired to destroy the Earth by a consortium of philosophers and psychiatrists who feared for the loss of their jobs when the meaning of life became common knowledge.)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Answer_to_Life,_the_Universe_and_Everything
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