

# FOREWORD

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Human groups rise and fall with the order generated by their world-views. From hunting tribes to nation-states and to global empires, a community needs to have a credible explanation for what life is about, and what makes life worth living. When the people lose faith in these explanations, entropy begins to unravel the ties that bind a civil society together. Selfishness, greed, and momentary pleasures become the only values that motivate action. No surplus psychic energy remains to pursue long-term goals, to invest in the future, to risk on new ideas. In short, the sources of human creativity dry up, and cultural evolution halts for the time being.

Of course the causal sequence involved is open to debate. Materialists will claim that it is the decline in economic productivity or defensive capability that triggers the loss of belief in the world-view. But it is just as likely that confusion in the ideational system has as much an effect on society as material conditions do. In any case, the two seem to be closely related, and it is likely that the two processes — the material and the ideational— mutually affect each other.

It has been a truism that Western civilizations have long benefited from a set of beliefs that helped their energies focus on a set of behaviors that can loosely be tagged as “progress.” From the Bible we have inherited the notion that as children of God we have inherited the earth and all its resources, to do with them as we pleased. A few thousand years later the evolutionary evidence has been read to mean that humankind was the final pinnacle of a process of competitive selection, which meant again that humans — or at least the more “evolved” members of the race— were entitled to whatever they could use or abuse, on their own terms. These myths of origin with their corollaries go a long way explaining why Europeans could focus with such unremitting energy on building cathedrals and factories, schools and armies. And before modern times myths of similar power, developed by Egyptians priests and Chinese

sages allowed those societies to do the same. As all the authors of *The Great Adventure* agree, the time of the organizing myths of the West is passing. Even in the wealthiest and most peaceful nations, the malaise with our ways to explain to ourselves what life means keeps growing. From Scandinavia to South Africa, from the United States to Japan, waves of surreal ideas and lifestyles wash over the populace, eroding traditional patterns of action and belief. It is a scenario so obviously reminiscent of the end of Rome, when esoteric cults and dissipation drained the citizens' purpose, that it is almost not worth mentioning.

In times like these a new world-view often arises at the margins of power, at the periphery of the action unfolding on the main stage. The followers of Jesus, the Buddha, Confucius, or Mohamed were not among the leading cadres of their respective societies. Martin Luther or Karl Marx were also toiling outside the glare of the footlights, where one can see more clearly what is happening, and what is likely to come about. Philadelphia in the 1770s was not exactly at the center of the civilized world. The recurring question of the chapters in this book is, Where is the new covenant going to emerge from?

The answers are varied and interesting, so that this book as a whole is in many ways an answer itself. Not a definitive one, of course — no book could be more than a few decades ahead of the twisting and turning march of evolution. But the themes introduced by the authors are likely to be among the central ones of any new world-view.

First of all, David Loye's central insight, which motivates this book, is in my opinion right on the money. The organizing principle of the new faith—a faith of human beings about human beings—is evolution itself. Not the traditionally taught evolutionary scenario dominated by competition and selfishness, but an understanding closer to the original Darwinian one that sees cooperation and transcendence of the self as the most exciting parts of the story. Ervin Laszlo builds on this theme by arguing that the central organizing principles of past ages— Myth, God, and Reason— will have to be replaced by Holos, or the embodied understanding that we are part of a larger system.

The mechanisms for achieving this integration are explored in subsequent chapters: they include the refinement of the powers of love, partnership, communication, and creativity. The authors suggest the exhilarating notion that these traits, so much treasured but so seldom

practiced, are in fact part of the evolutionary process all along, even at the level of atomic bonds, and certainly at pre-human biological levels. If they are right, there is more hope for the future than many of us would have dared to believe.

Like many of their predecessors, the proponents of this new dispensation are not working from an established power-base. Although they are learned and accomplished scholars, most of them do not lead large labs in famous universities. They do not work within the problematics of a single discipline. This gives their writing prophetic power, as well as an appearance of being unprofessional by the usual standards of academic specialization. This, of course, is par for the course of any paradigm revolution.

It will be interesting to see how the ideas represented in this book develop in the years to come. Will they grow into a critical commentary to mainline thought, acting as a loyal minority in the parliament of ideas? Or will they develop into a new professional realm, with its own exclusive conceptual framework, evidence, and procedures? The last chapters by David Loye suggest that at the very least a new pedagogy may emerge, one that starts with a holistic perspective and adopts a systemic approach to understanding reality. Whether or not this “fully human theory of evolution” becomes a central concept in academic thought, it is certainly a Great Adventure, one in which we are privileged to take part.

Claremont Graduate University