



Transformation

by Edmund J. Bourne, PhD

Illustration by Janusz Kapusta

TIME IS MOVING FASTER THESE DAYS. On some level we all know that we live in a time when our earth and civilization stand at a crossroads.

What is going to change? The prevailing societal trends of unlimited economic growth and material consumption will not continue; they are not sustainable. On a global level, humanity will outgrow its adolescence, learning to become better stewards of the earth and its resources. Nations and cultures will increasingly come to honor one another as part of a global family, regardless of differences in race, religion, or nationality. Cooperation among nations will of necessity begin to supersede conflict. Such values and inclinations are now prevalent among 10 to 20 percent of the population, although they may not achieve a broad base until the challenges humanity faces reach a critical mass. Increasing problems posed by climate change, ecological disruption, diminishing resources (especially oil and water), population growth, and poverty are rapidly reaching a point where dramatic worldwide changes in priorities will be *required* to forestall global chaos.

Shifting Assumptions and Values

The change in worldview coming about at this time can be described from multiple perspectives, both conceptual and practical. This new worldview is taking the place of the old scientific-materialist worldview that has dominated Western society for more than four hundred years. Some of the dominant themes of the new worldview include these:

A conscious universe. The universe as a whole is a conscious and creative process, not a mechanistic object. Every whole system, from atoms to galaxies, has an *interiority*—a subjective aspect that exhibits attributes of consciousness such as self-organization and intentionality.

Multidimensional reality. Reality—the sum of all that is—exceeds the bounds of the physical universe and contains multiple subtle, transcendent dimensions. These subtle dimensions form the matrix of the physical universe we see.

Interconnection of all minds. Although we appear to exist in separate bodies, at the deepest level our minds are joined in a collective consciousness. At the level of our deepest soul, we are all one.

Complementarity of science and spirituality. Both science and spirituality lead to an understanding of the cosmos: science of its outer, objective aspect; and spirituality, along with the humanities and arts, of its inner, subjective, and symbolic aspects.

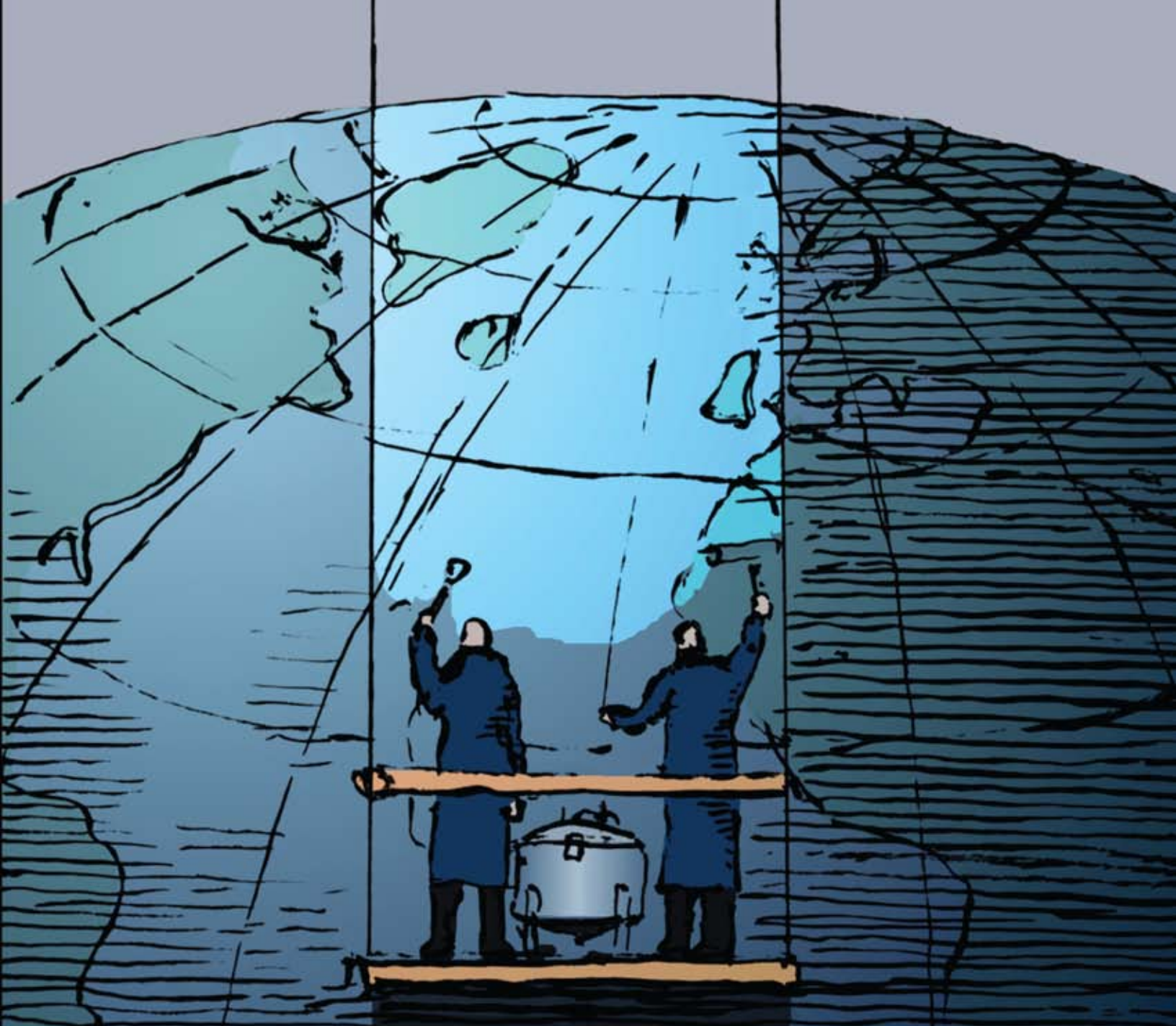
Radical empiricism. Intuitive and visionary forms of knowing are as valid as sensory-based forms of knowing, even if less subject to cross-cultural consensus.

Consciousness as a causal influence. Consciousness has inherent properties—such as a capacity for self-organization, intentionality, and meaning—that cannot be explained in terms of the material laws and processes of the natural sciences. Yet it has a causal influence on physical processes.

Natural ethics. “Ought” reduces to “is.” Ethical behavior follows the authenticity of one’s innermost nature rather than acting in accordance to culturally relative standards.

It’s clear that this new image of the cosmos differs radically from the materialist one most of us grew up with. It is as radical a change from what has gone before as the Renaissance presented to the Medieval worldview. It is an image of the cosmos that exceeds the bounds of present-day science—although it’s not inconceivable that science itself could eventually evolve to embrace it.

The emerging shift in worldview is accompanied by a corresponding shift in values, in what we deem to be



A World in Transition

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important. These new values share a common feature: *a movement away from a materialistic to a humanitarian-spiritual orientation toward life.* Greater self-awareness, attention to spiritual growth, and a sense of responsibility to the environment are seen as equally important as—if not more important than—economic success and consumption. The following values are among those that reflect the changing landscape:

Reverence for nature and the earth. We are vitally dependent on the earth; it is the matrix of all life. Living in a cooperative, sustainable relationship with the earth is more important than exploiting it for material gain.

A sense of inclusiveness toward all humanity. Choosing to look beyond self-interest to recognize that all human beings are part of the same family, regardless of racial, ethnic, national, or religious differences, and understanding that all human beings share equal rights to health, livelihood, safety, and prosperity.

Compassion. An awareness of the suffering of other human beings subjected to poverty, disease, and inhumane living conditions, regardless of who they are or where they live, accompanied by a desire to help.

Integration of the feminine. A movement away from traditionally “masculine” values of hierarchy, autonomy, top-down control, and exploitation toward “feminine” values of inclusiveness, cooperation, interrelationship, nurturance, and love.

Valuing intuition. Trusting one’s deeper intuitions or hunches (along with reason) as good guides for making decisions.

Voluntary simplicity. Cultivating a simpler life, both for the sake of inner peace and to leave a lighter footprint on the earth.

Respect for being present. Living mindfully, or “in-the-now,” is valued as much as left-brain analysis and the desire to predict and control the future.

The primacy of unconditional love. Unconditional love and forgiveness are the highest values in our relations with others. If we are all one, then to harm another person is to harm ourselves. The operative question in all situations of interpersonal conflict reduces to *What is the most loving thing to do?*

Shifts in our values ultimately lead to shifts in the way we act. Already many of us are beginning to change the way we behave toward ourselves, each

other, our communities, and the larger environment and humanity of which we are a part. Vision and practice are inseparable. A shift in the collective worldview is likely to accompany (though not necessarily cause) the types of fundamental changes in values and actions required by humanity at this time. This worldview shift is part of a broader change that includes a far-reaching cultural, economic, and political restructuring of society. Such a shift happened in Europe during the Renaissance and also much earlier in ancient Greece. This time it is happening globally and, unlike in the past, it may occur rapidly, over several decades rather than one or two centuries.


Some degree of deconstruction of the old world order is probably necessary for a new consciousness to emerge. Decay and rebirth are characteristic of all forms of evolution, whether biological or cultural. A global shift in worldview, values, and actions is inevitable. Whether it *precedes* and redirects humanity away from chaos or *follows* an epic global breakdown remains an open question. Either way, the shift is destined to come about.

A Growing Movement

What percentage of the population embraces part or all of these shifts in perceptions and values? According to Paul Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson in their 2000 book *The Cultural Creatives*, about 25 million Americans (or 12 percent of adults) strongly endorse most or all of the above values, while another 25 million are concerned about the ecology and well-being of the planet without necessarily embracing spirituality or personal spiritual growth. Ray is completing a new survey that estimates 30 percent of Americans to be Cultural Creatives. In Western Europe, he has found the number to be slightly higher—about 35 percent of adults. Although 60 million Americans are a large group, Ray and Anderson suggest that up to now these individuals have not become sufficiently aware of one another to form a unified political force that could promote change at the governmental level.

Certainly the group these authors describe exists, but its role may have shifted as a result of the global terrorism and political conservatism that have had such a broad impact on American society (indeed, the entire world) in the years since their book came out. While the

Cultural Creatives have not yet gained significant political leverage at the national level, their strength may be gradually increasing at the grassroots level and in local communities. With the Internet available today to more than a billion users, these concerned citizens are now better able both to communicate with one another and to act as a unified force in developed countries.

Seven years after the appearance of *The Cultural Creatives*, environmentalist Paul Hawken explored a similar theme in his book *Blessed Unrest* (2007). He believes the earth's best chance resides in a vast network of nonprofits and community organizations dedicated to both environmental protection and social justice. Like the Cultural Creatives, many of these grassroots organizations are not aware of one another, yet collectively they are making a significant difference in the world on a wide array of fronts, such as climate change, species loss, poverty, disease, indigenous peoples' rights, conservation, and the development of alternative energy technologies, to mention just a few. Hawken suggests that this vast humanitarian movement can be seen as humanity's "immune system" — a pervasive response to the "disease" perpetrated on the planet by corporate values of unlimited economic growth and exploitation of natural resources. Although this diverse movement has no single ideology, Hawken believes that its basic values—respect for the earth and the dignity of all human beings—will gradually infiltrate the culture at large, ultimately including the very corporate and governmental institutions that the movement presently confronts. This will happen from the ground up and offers the basis for optimism in a time when so many are sounding pessimistic warnings about the earth's future. 

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