



## The Challenges of Social Evolution

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### Abstract

*The concept of modernization refers to the transition of societies through industrialization, urbanization, and technological sophistication. It is a visible manifestation of the underlying process of global social evolution. Social evolution has a direction. Its cardinal characteristic and driving force is the progressive recognition and enforcement of an increasingly broad range of universal human rights and values encompassing an increasingly broad and inclusive portion of humanity. Although most human beings are too fascinated with the rapid advances in technology and too mesmerized by the magic of the marketplace to give much importance to nebulous ethereal concepts such as values, these subtle principles are the true drivers for the most tangible material gains of the last few centuries. The more subtle a thing is, the more powerful—as great leaders have always known who stirred their followers with ideas of conquest, principles of justice and dreams of plentitude.*

### 1. The Evolution of Human Rights

The American Declaration of Independence (1776) is recognized as the first civic document to affirm what is regarded as the modern definition of human rights. That and the US Constitution (1788) and Bill of Rights (1791) recognize a number of inalienable human rights, including freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, the right to keep and bear arms, freedom from cruel and unusual punishment, and the right to a fair trial by jury, privacy and protection from unreasonable search or seizure of private property, a fair trial by an impartial jury and due process of law, protection from arbitrary imprisonment or excessive punishment, and all powers not specifically delegated to the government.

The significance of these remarkable affirmations of universal human values and rights can best be understood when examined in the light of the prevailing status of human beings in other countries around the world and by the notable exceptions which were not included in early lists of rights. The right to vote was intentionally excluded from these documents because America's founding fathers did not believe that the governance of the nation should be decided by the entire population. In practice it was extended only to the elite members of society—white, male, property-owners. Notable exceptions were denial of the right to vote to women and denial of virtually all rights to black slaves who were regarded as the property of their owners. The history of the abolition of slavery and gender inequality delineates the main pathways of humanity's social evolution up to the modern day.

The world has been long under the spell of traditional values such as monarchical authority, servile submission of the population, class distinction of aristocracy and commoners, colonialism, imperial authority and right of domination, etc. Only in the last 3 centuries has humanity been experiencing liberation from their suffocating hold. Even today, such liberation is far from universal and uniform across the world. While Western Europe and North America had begun to embrace modern notions of human rights from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, vast regions of Asia and Africa have only begun to do so in the last 100 years.

Seen in this perspective, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 represents a landmark in the history of the human race. For the first time in history, the rights of all human beings regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or nationality were recognized and affirmed to be equal. The UDHR includes not only rights recognized by some nations in earlier periods. It also broadens the concept from political rights to include a wider range of economic and social freedoms as fundamental and inalienable. The UDHR includes the right to life, liberty, security, equal protection under law, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, peaceful association, participation in government, social security, adequate standard of living, rest and leisure, education, cultural life, intellectual property, as well as social and international order in which all these other rights can be preserved. It is noteworthy that the signatories to UDHR affirmed these rights as universal principles but declined to accord the document the status of an enforceable right backed by law. *Law represents the codified public conscience of society.* The adoption of UDHR reflected an awakening and acceptance of higher ideals of justice *in principle*, but fell far short of translating the ideals into practice through laws to be enforced by governments. That had to await a further stage in global social evolution.

Even now the evolution of human rights continues to advance both by expansion to other regions and populations which have previously been excluded and by extension to other types of freedom which were not previously included in the concept. The newer rights include freedom from pollution, right for clean air, water and rights for living in a world free of nuclear weapons, etc. Even the rights of future generations are gaining recognition, but they are yet to acquire the full force of law.

The cataclysmic impact of the Great Depression made it evident to millions of middle-class Americans that political freedoms alone were not sufficient to ensure the security and wellbeing of all citizens. The 1930s demonstrated that unregulated capitalism could deprive citizens at all levels of the economic security they had come to take for granted. The introduction of the New Deal by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt was an unprecedented attempt to humanize capitalism by extending the obligations and powers of government to assume responsibility for the economic welfare of its citizens. The program was so radical in its departure from conventional thinking that it met with serious opposition on legal grounds and much of the program was eventually struck down by the Supreme Courts. Today it is difficult to even imagine a government declaring that it is not responsible for the economic welfare of its citizens.

## 2. Translating Rights into Realities

Affirmation of rights is an essential stage in the process of social development, but it represents only the first stage. The long slow evolution of human rights forms the leading edge and impetus for the process of conscious social transformation by which universal principles are being translated into practical realities for people around the world. The distance to be travelled from idea to accomplishment is great in space and time. Rights won in principle may remain simply on paper for decades or even centuries before being translated into practical action or enforced by government. Rights accorded to certain people or classes in some countries long ago are yet to reach all citizens. Rights long established in some countries have yet to be universally accepted or achieved in practice. Today different countries of the world are in different stages in the granting, guaranteeing and enforcing of the rights included in the UDHR and other rights that have since been recognized in other documents.

The right to work illustrates the distance to be travelled between principle and practice. The change in values precipitated by the hardships of the Great Depression led FDR to conceive plans to introduce a second US Bill of Rights expanding the concept to include economic as well as political and social freedoms. The first of those on the list was the right to employment. FDR died before the end of the war and a second bill of rights was never attempted. The Economic Bill of Rights that Roosevelt espoused in 1944 included the right to a job, and in the election of 1944 both Roosevelt and Republican nominee Thomas E. Dewey indicated their support of a full-employment economy. Public opinion polls showed that postwar jobs ranked highest in public priorities. The right to work was included in the Full Employment Act of 1945. It defines this right as “opportunity for useful, remunerative, regular, and full-time” employment. It then defines government policy with respect to this right: to assure at all times employment opportunities for all who are able to work, are seeking work, have finished their schooling, do not have full-time housekeeping responsibilities.\* The act was defeated by conservative Republicans in the Senate and passed in amended format as the Employment Act of 1946. It called for “maximum” rather than “full” employment, did not provide for the “right to a useful and remunerative job” that the original bill had specified for all Americans able and willing to work.† Today India’s National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is the world’s largest public program designed to guarantee a minimum of 100 days of paid employment annually to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.‡

The right to food is recognized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights as part of the right to an adequate standard of living, and is enshrined in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It is also protected by regional treaties and national constitutions. Furthermore, the right to food of specific groups has been recognized in several international conventions. All human beings, regardless of their race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, have the right to adequate food and the right to be free from hunger.<sup>1</sup>

\* See [https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/files/docs/historical/trumanlibrary/srf\\_014\\_001\\_0002.pdf](https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/files/docs/historical/trumanlibrary/srf_014_001_0002.pdf)

† See <https://www.worldhistory.biz/modern-history/85477-full-employment-bill-1945.html>

‡ See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Rural\\_Employment\\_Guarantee\\_Act,\\_2005](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Rural_Employment_Guarantee_Act,_2005)

### **3. Embodiment of the UDHR in the SDGs**

We often forget that at the time the UN was founded and the UDHR was being formulated, roughly a third of humanity remained under the servitude of colonial rule. And a full century after slavery was abolished in USA, the American Civil Rights Movement led by Martin Luther King was required to accord a minimum semblance of freedom and equality to large numbers of black Americans. Even today the process is far from complete.

The UN Agenda 2030 represents an unprecedented effort of the world to translate these universal principles into practical reality for all human beings. The rights enshrined in the UDHR and some that were not included are contained in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals formulated by UN and adopted by 193 nations in 2015. They now constitute a core element of government development and welfare programs around the world.

### **4. From Evolution to Transformation**

Global social evolution is a process spanning millennia primarily through the unconscious, trial and error actions of individuals and communities, but only rarely by the conscious intention of the entire society. But in the 20<sup>th</sup> century things changed. Over the past century and with increasing rapidity in recent decades, the low slow process of social evolution has been transmuted into a rapid conscious process of social transformation which the whole of humanity aspires to achieve and governments around the world are committed to accelerate. In earlier times the effort focused on the affirmation of political rights and winning of political freedoms, with special emphasis on the right to property and the right to vote in democratic societies. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was broadened to include a wide range of economic rights. And most recently it has been extended to embrace social, cultural and environmental rights as well—both for present and future generations.

Today an unofficial consensus is emerging that the world community possesses both the obligation and the capacity to meet the basic needs of all human beings. We confront the paradox of a global society in which billions of people still lack assured access to even the basic aspects of human security, while at the same time the world possesses sufficient knowledge, skill, technology and financial resources to meet the needs of all. Today the world community possesses \$350 trillion in global financial assets, much of it circling the globe daily in search of higher speculative returns and investment in energy-intensive, climate destabilizing technologies which pose an existential threat to the future of humanity.

Economics was originally conceived as the dismal science of scarcity. It is now widely regarded as the dismal science of the inequitable and unjust redistribution of social power. What we lack today is not the capacity but only the recognition and willingness to act. The attempt of Economics to separate itself and insulate itself from Political Science, Law and the exercise of social power is a failed effort to pretend that the law of the economic jungle is indeed the fairest and most efficient form of economic system.

The history of social evolution challenges and refutes this false ideology. All social progress during the past five centuries has been achieved based on the progressive democratization

of power. Social power assumes many forms and expresses in countless ways. The capacity to govern, produce, consume, educate, wage war, ensure peace and security, communicate, transport, discover, invent and create are all forms of social power—powers of the society to accomplish through collaboration and collective effort what individuals cannot achieve by acting independently and individually. Democracy has spread around the world during the past two centuries because historical evidence confirms the fact that societies of people acting in freedom to protect themselves are stronger, more stable, and secure than those in which rights and privileges are confined to an aristocratic, autocratic or military elite.

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Education has been adopted as a universal norm because an educated public is more productive and effective than one which is uninformed. Bestowing equal rights on women and minorities has been a liberating force of immense power for the advancement of society during the past century. Global efforts to provide universal access to bank accounts, telephone, internet, and information are based on the same principle. *That society is strongest which most fully and effectively empowers all of its citizens by ensuring their access and secure achievement of the broadest range of rights.* The progressive distribution of social power has guided the evolution of humanity up to now and it will continue to do so in future.

Extension of human rights is not only an act of liberating people from oppressive restrictions on their freedom. It also involves empowering them and equipping them with the capacity to exercise them. The right to food is not a freedom unless sufficient and affordable food is available and citizens possess the economic means to procure it. The right to employment means little if the functioning of the economy does not generate sufficient job opportunities or provide sufficient access to financial resources and training to equip every citizen to create their own. The right to employment in a market economy is the economic equivalent of the right to vote in democracy, for without a job, citizens lack the power to exercise their most fundamental freedoms.

Increasingly the attainment of our fundamental right to Human Security depends not only on the local and national governments under whose authority we live but on the action of the global community as a whole. Freedoms are individual, but rights are collective because they can only be ensured when they are collectively enforced. An invisible virus consumed by one individual anywhere on earth can infect millions of citizens and bring down economies around the whole world. Therefore, the further evolution of human rights necessitates also a further evolution of global society to put in place effective instruments for global governance and multilateralism. The right to a healthy environment with access to clean air and water does not lie within the capacity of individuals to achieve for or by themselves, unless they are actively protected and enforced by governments at the global level.

## **5. The Right to Human Security**

The evolution of human rights has in turn spurred an evolution in our conception of security. The notion of national security against foreign invasion or personal security of life and property is too narrow to adequately describe either the aspirations of humanity or the responsibilities of governments today. The 17 SDGs embody a comprehensive conception of Human Security that embraces and seeks to realize the political, economic, social, cultural and ecological dimensions. It also recognizes that all of them are interdependent and each of them can only be effectively secured when they are all secured. Today the common human aspiration for a safe, secure, prosperous life includes all of these dimensions.

Among the many pressing challenges confronting humanity today, the Pandemic is the most immediate and physically tangible. Climate change is the most distant—but not very distant—and most cerebral. COVID-19 has generated other palpable threats to food and job security, aggravating tendencies to social unrest, political extremism and competitive nationalism. But all of them are interlinked with one another and with the overarching quest to achieve universal and sustainable prosperity for one and all.

The concept of Human Security addresses minimum human needs very broadly and inclusively defined. The concept of Prosperity encompasses a larger vision of abundance and plenitude for all, a dream once held by the Middle Class which gradually has spread to all classes and is now threatened not only by the partial shutdown of the global economy but also by the approaching impacts of climate change. More than anything else, it was the dream of enjoying the levels of prosperity prevalent in the West that tore down the Berlin Wall, lifted the Iron Curtain and ended the Cold War. It was this too that moved the nations of Western Europe to put aside centuries of intermittent conflict and incessant acrimony to forge the most remarkable association of nations in history, the European Union. It was this dream that motivated Communist Party leaders in the former Soviet republics and satellites and in China to embrace different forms of Western liberalism in defiance of ideological orthodoxy. It is this which inspired the awakening of aspirations and release of dynamic energies that have propelled the rise of India and the global ascendancy of China.

Though lip service has been given to the ideal of prosperity at earlier times in history, the vast majority of people, in fact nearly all but a small aristocratic, privileged elite, accepted poverty as something unavoidable and to be endured. Only after the birth of modern science and technology and consequent rise in farm and industrial productivity, did large numbers of people begin to believe that poverty can be banished. The Western world achieved this miracle sooner than the rest of the world, spurring first Japan and then others to follow in rapid pursuit.

## **6. Transforming Social Organizations**

It was widely believed that the adoption of modern industrial technologies would generate the same results in Asia and Africa as they did in the West, but it was gradually recognized that the process of development is much more complex and the changes required are not merely material. Closer examination of the miracle revealed that prosperity required more

than mere science and technology. It depends also on the universalization of education, the awakening of aspirations, and the reorganization of all dimensions of society to support freedom for individual initiative and innovation attributed to expansion in education, spread of democracy, acceptance of scientific values and adoption of technology, etc.

The element required for the successful application of modern technologies is illustrated by the success of the Green Revolution, which raised a food-aid-dependent India to food self-sufficiency in five years and made it a net food exporter within a decade. Green Revolution has been widely mistaken to be proof of what science and technology can achieve on their own. But it is now realized that the achievement depended on a much broader range of organizational and social factors. The doubling of India's food-grain production in 10 years was the achievement of tens of millions of mostly uneducated farmers who had first to be convinced that the new technology was viable and the new varieties were marketable. The real challenge was to educate and motivate farmers to alter centuries-old practices. The organization of 100,000 demonstration plots persuaded farmers that the hybrid varieties could survive and generate higher yields in the conditions prevalent in India. The Food Corporation of India (FCI) was established to ensure that those farmers who produced marketable surpluses would be able to sell them at remunerative prices, rather than suffer heavy losses when harvests were abundant. FCI was established to transport and market surplus production in food-scarce regions. Guaranteed floor prices were established to ensure remunerative prices to sellers and reasonable prices to buyers in regions where harvests were poor. This was accompanied by a host of other organizational innovations for production and distribution of hybrid seeds and fertilizers, warehousing for storage of surpluses, coordination of agricultural research and extension of agricultural education and training.

A similar strategy was devised to educate tens of millions of small farmers and landless families to transform India into the largest dairy producer in the world within a decade through what became known as the White Revolution. The rural affluence it generated formed the foundation for industrialization and marked the first important advance in India's economic emergence as an independent nation. In both cases, innovations in social organization played an even greater role than technology in rapid modernization.

Once rural prosperity began to spread, many rural youth were sent by their now prospering families for college education. Most refused to go back to the farm after graduation and sought only urban white-collar employment. The educated youth began demanding employment as if it were the responsibility of the government to provide jobs. Such a concept was unheard of even in Western democracies and least of all in the U.S. Even as America had been reluctant to extend the concept of human rights to economic factors in the 1930s, human rights activists in India who championed for freedom of speech, religion, the right to justice and the right to vote were slow to accept that these rights should be extended to include the right to gainful employment also. Such a drastic revision in the concept of citizen rights and the social responsibilities of governments took decades to evolve.

The problem of graduate unemployment surfaced in countries such as India in the 1970s, prompting governments to do something to dissipate the rising resentment among

educated youth. Politicians started recommending self-employment for these unemployed youth or even outright condemned these youth as unemployable. But such a recourse to self-employment required a drastic revision in the mindset of India, where the historical entrepreneurial spirit of its earlier history had been suppressed by centuries of colonial rule and strict bureaucratic regulation. It required not only a change of social behavior, but also the creation of new social institutions designed to release and support individual and social initiative, as the institutions of Green Revolution and White Revolution had done.

A strikingly successful example of innovative social organization was the establishment of Grameen Bank in 1983 by the Bangladeshi economist and Nobel Peace laureate Muhammad Yunus. Yunus pioneered the creation of micro-finance credit unions providing tiny loans to fund small and micro industries. Initial loans were in the range of \$150 to \$750 per family. People who borrowed these loans started petty shops, small workshops, bakeries, fruit and vegetable shops, etc. This scheme was so successful that the return of loans was around 99%. Yunus soon discovered that lending to women was safer and had greater impact, ushering in a global movement to empower women entrepreneurs through micro-financial institutions. What Yunus did in Bangladesh quickly spread to neighboring India and other countries around the world in the form of self-help microfinance groups with banks actively supporting these groups with necessary funds.

## **7. The Ideological Disease**

The problem of eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in developing nations over the past half century were primarily physical, institutional and human—the need to develop physical infrastructure, power plants, factories, schools and hospitals, to establish a wide variety of new laws and new institutions, and to extend education and training to hundreds of millions of people who had been deprived of it in the past. Whereas, the problem confronting Western society today is more subtle—because it is subtle, it is far more powerful. It is primarily ideological. It is a problem founded on flawed and discredited ideas on how to control the distribution of social power under conditions of surplus.

The end of the Cold War presented a unique opportunity to build an inclusive global society dedicated to promoting the common good of all humanity. But the opportunity was missed. Instead, the collapse of communism was interpreted as a unique opportunity for the West to proclaim and impose as the reigning ideology a set of neoliberal concepts which had been discredited during the Great Depression. The collapse of communism was heralded as the ultimate victory for capitalism, whereas in fact it came to announce the failure of both systems—one which suppressed freedom to enforce equality and the other which suppressed equality in order to impose unbridled freedom for domination by the strongest.

The globalization of supply chains and markets and the financialization of economies which took place after 1990 created a new frontier, unregulated and beyond the reach of law, a Wild West or Global Casino in which trillions of dollars could freely roam the world in search of speculative returns, tax havens and unregulated markets. The rise of a rampant form of neoliberalism founded on the specious, indeed absurd idea that the sole purpose of business

is to maximize shareholder value, ran rampant. Public property in former East European hands was transferred to private owners is perhaps the largest theft in history. Multinational corporations freed from the tethers of national governments asserted unprecedented power over national policies and international politics.

The transition to the new millennium in 2000 promised unrivaled supremacy for neoliberalism. The dot com boom and the deregulation of banking seemed to ensure that technology and money would reign supreme. The dot com bust which quickly followed the turn of the century was short lived. Markets were revived by an unprecedented expansion of financing to the US housing industry, until it ultimately led to the Subprime Mortgage Crisis and the global financial collapse of 2008, in which trillions of dollars in assets disappeared literally overnight.

The true extent of the neoliberal disease only became apparent when European banks were struck by the same disease as their US counterparts. The crisis led to a steep recession and soaring levels of unemployment which lingered for five years. The European experiment in closer unity and financial integration was stalled in its tracks. The US experienced levels of economic inequality not seen since the Roaring '20s. Governments and economists refused to recognize the true source of the crisis and the right means of addressing it. Instead they provided the largest bail out of private business in history to reinforce the existing system, rather than to treat the underlying doctrinal disease. The perpetrators were saved and quickly returned to the old ways. The legislation put in place to prevent a recurrence of 2008 was quickly dismantled to permit a return of the same disease.

An even greater calamity a few years later when the COVID-19 Pandemic struck at the weak underside of the global economy and brought it to its knees. This second lightning strike on the fortress of neoliberal ideology has resulted in a clamorous challenge to the prevailing orthodoxy, but has yet to lead to abandonment of its underlying premises. Rather, western economies have adopted policies such as quantitative easing which are completely antithetical to that orthodoxy, while continuing to speak the old language.

The most visible consequence of this Perfect Storm has been the revival of appeals to the fundamental rights of all human beings. Instead of debating ideology, the world has begun to assert the supremacy of values and human rights and affirm its commitment to the principles enshrined in the 17 SDGs. Diplomats, academicians and politicians have started talking about the responsibility of government and society to provide every citizen with the right to gainful employment, food security and healthcare.

Leading thinkers decry the manifold divorce between economy and human wellbeing: the divorce between financial markets and the real economy—the equity markets reaching record heights at a time when unemployment and inequality are soaring; the divorce between economics and the deteriorating environment; the unregulated adoption of labor-replacing, energy-intensive technologies; the divorce between economy and political freedom; the divorce between economy and social stability; and the divorce between economy and human wellbeing. Meanwhile financial speculation continues unabated, aided by the latest round of quantitative easing.

## **8. Retreat from Democracy and Multilateralism**

Equally threatening is the impact of runaway economy on political institutions at the national and global level. The stress of economic hardship and conflict between ideological factions have spurred a hunt for scapegoat groups to blame, especially immigrants, a polarization of societies and the revival of populist appeals to narrow interest groups. Democracy is in retreat. Autocratic leaders and policies are on the rise. The stability of societies is at risk.

Simultaneously, there is a vacuum of leadership at the international level and a decline in support for multilateral institutions at precisely the moment when they are needed most. For the real problems plaguing humanity today are global in origin, reach and magnitude. The Pandemic, competitive economic nationalism, rising unemployment and inequality, unregulated technological adoption, the breakdown in international arms treaties and cooperative security agreements, the surge in political and economic refugees and, most of all, the looming threat of climate change all require collaborative action between all nations. None can be effectively addressed by nations acting separately and independently of one another.

The emergence of the World Wide Web as the first truly global social institution has transformed the world. Global economies have become much more tightly interconnected and interdependent, so that any disruption in one country quickly spreads to others. Political and social events are communicated instantaneously to people wherever they are. The rapid spread of Fridays for Future launched by Greta Thunberg, the #MeToo movement and Black Lives Matter is illustrative. So too, the reversion to autocratic governance at the national level and national assertiveness internationally have spread like a contagion. Global cooperation and coordinated action are urgently required to deal with these challenges at a time when multilateral institutions have been severely weakened. The problem is also aggravated by the threat and proliferation of nuclear weapons. Disarming the nuclear powers and dismantling the nuclear stock pile call for a coordinated effort of nation-states yet to be achieved.

Even greater is the need generated by the looming existential threat of global climate change and associated environmental pollution. This calls for drastic reduction in carbon emissions, conservation of scarce natural resources, reduction in excessive and wasteful consumption, such as the unconscionable waste of food. Reduction of carbon emissions calls for a coordinated massive global effort to switch to renewable energy sources within the next decade, supported by a tax on carbon emissions, elimination of fossil fuel subsidies, massive reforestation, working and life style changes to reduce unnecessary movement, a shift to organic farming and reduction in meat consumption, and innovative financial strategies to support the necessary investments.

Some of the more prosperous sections of economically advanced nations may be aware of and receptive to such radical measures. But the vast majority of the earth's population lives in developing countries which are still aspiring to achieve even a modicum of the prosperity achieved in the West and they are far less receptive to "no growth" scenarios. Effective

global cooperation can only be achieved based on a shared vision of the future in which the aspirations of all humanity are given an opportunity for fulfillment. The 17 SDGs and 169 targets adopted by 193 nations represent the first concrete step in creating that shared vision. They must now be translated into practical catalytic strategies to support inclusive progress in countries around the world. A retreat from multilateralism now would surely prevent or seriously delay this essential next step and exasperate the pressing challenges we face, perhaps by confrontation with an even greater calamity than the Perfect Storm unfolding today.

The problems we confront will not wait much longer for humanity to wean itself from narrow nationalist competitive ambitions, outworn ideologies, sectarian conflicts, class struggles for power and privilege, and persistent ravaging of the earth's environment. There is an urgent need to strengthen multilateral institutions and take initiatives leading to the formation of a world government that has sufficient knowledge, authority and support to implement its resolutions. The League of Nations failed soon after its birth, but the knowledge gained and nascent initiatives taken were transferred to the UN system and have guided its progressive development over the past 75 years. The flaws in the current system reflect the unwillingness of its member-states to grow beyond nationalism.

The evolution of the nation-state marks a great achievement in human history—the creation of heterogeneous communities of people of different physical inheritance, communities, tribes, ethnicity, religion and increasingly of different national origin as well. But this remarkable achievement is only a stage in global social evolution and not the end point. It took many centuries for regional kingdoms to evolve into modern nation-states which could balance the rights of each individual with the shared interests of the collective through voluntary association and freedom for individual initiative. It will require at least many decades, and possibly much longer, to effectively arrive at the right formula to move beyond. That must include a truly effective, inclusive, harmonious global system that affirms and protects the rights of each individual human being, and respects and provides latitude for the rich national and cultural diversity of the community of nations which constitutes the creative gene pool for our future social evolution.

The present United Nations system has the potential to evolve in that direction and emerge as a global world organization with enough authority over member nations. But the present arrangement of veto power which rests only with the five permanent members of the Security Council is a serious impediment to the emergence of the UN as a truly global organization. Voices of protest are being heard in the General Assembly and it is hoped that the voices will get louder and louder until the Big Five are disarmed of the veto power and all nuclear weapon states are disarmed of their arsenals. These are two essential conditions for the further evolution of global governance. Today they look like immovable objects and unassailable obstacles. But let us not forget that we have already lived through changes of equally unexpected, remarkable momentous significance. Just 35 years ago, the Iron Curtain, the dominance of the Communist Party and Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, and the division of Germany appeared to defy all hopes of change. The first crack in the impenetrable walls was announced by Gorbachev's call for *glasnost* and *perestroika*. It led within two years

to the fall of the Berlin Wall, in three to the reunification of Germany and in four to the dissolution of the USSR and to the division of Europe.

## **9. The Power of Dissent**

The greatest changes in history have not been brought about by great armies or powerful empires. They have been an expression of the rising aspirations of ordinary people. Martin Luther's challenge to Catholic dogma launched the Protestant Reformation. The cry of protest against taxation without representation in Boston led to American independence. Gandhi's non-violent Salt March led eventually to Indian freedom and in quick succession to the dissolution of colonial empires around the world. The inspiring speeches of Martin Luther King which fueled the American Civil Rights Movement stirred the conscience and hearts of a nation to affirm in practice what two centuries earlier it had declared in words. Rousseau, Voltaire, and Marat vocally challenged the absolute power of monarchy in France. Greta Thunberg's refusal to go to school on Fridays in order to protest against her government's refusal to address the climate threat inspired people around the world with a message that thousands of climate scientists have been trying to deliver for three decades.

Freedom of speech is a fundamental right which has set in motion wave after wave of social evolution since ancient times to the present day. It is only after the birth of democracy that dissent has not been violently suppressed and often accompanied with punishment of death. Even in democratic England, news about the French Revolution taking place across the English Channel was strictly censored for fear it would inspire the English masses to also rise up against the aristocratic ruling class. Marx, Lenin and their Bolshevik colleagues were exiled from their homelands for daring to voice dissent, as freedom fighters were in India while it remained under British rule. Robert Oppenheimer, head of the Manhattan Project that produced the atomic bomb and a founder of WAAS, was stripped of his security clearance, branded as a collaborator with the Soviet Union, and suspected of selling nuclear secrets to the USSR, because he had the courage to speak out about the dangers of nuclear weapons. Even today free speech and dissent are suppressed in nations around the world. In countries where that is not possible, they are being undermined by the intentional proliferation of fake news and unverifiable allegations. The Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai was shot by fundamentalists for daring to campaign demanding the right to education for women. We remember her only because she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts. Dissenters are arbitrarily arrested, disappear or die of mysterious causes. Until very recently the LGBT Community was persecuted around the world and forced to live in secrecy. Only now they are being accorded a greater measure of freedom and tolerance.

## **10. Evolution of Individuality**

The process of social evolution often referred to as modernization consists of many strands and lines of development. It is a movement that has taken place over millennia from small, isolated, insulated and relatively homogeneous groups of people to groups of increasing size, diversity and complexity—from the family, village, community, tribe, clan, sect, caste, class, and small regional kingdom to larger ethnic, religious, social, economic and political

groupings. Thousands of years of slow social evolution recently gave rise to emergence of a world of about 200 independent nation-states. We forget that just 75 years ago there were only about fifty relatively independent nations and the rest were considered subordinate entities in a global system of colonial empires. It continues even now to evolve from these fragmented elements into a more and more interconnected, interdependent, unified global society.

Social evolution has also proceeded on other lines. It has passed through three successive levels of organized human activity—physical, vital or social, and mental—each dependent on the others emerging successfully building on previous levels. The process has progressed from a world dominated by physical characteristics and things in which land, territory and property were the source of all wealth, social status and power to stages in which the capacity for cooperative relations between people and mental development of science, technology and organization have become increasingly dominant. In the first stage, land was the principal resource. The wealth of agriculture focused on physical production on the land controlled by landed aristocracies who ruled the world for millennia. As trade and commerce developed, social relations between people became increasingly important. The ascendancy of Europe from the 15<sup>th</sup> century was made possible by successive commercial revolutions which enabled the relatively tiny European states to grow into global empires by trade, in which the capacity to relate and cooperate with others for mutual benefit became more important than the capacity to produce. Over the last two centuries the products of science, technology and organization supported by the spread of education have become the dominant drivers of social advancement. Mental and intellectual development gave birth to the Age of Enlightenment, the scientific revolution, the democratic revolution in social and political ideas that began centuries ago and is still in process, and a series of industrial revolutions that have taken us from steam and electricity to computers and artificial intelligence.

This progress denotes not only a change in activities and social values, but a change of consciousness as well. Humanity has become more mental and less physical, more reliant on its capacity for thinking, invention, innovation and creation and less dependent on physical means of limited capacity. Application of mind has enabled us to convert common sand into silicon chips, communicate at the speed of light around the world, travel more in a day than any human ever travelled in a lifetime. We worship the science and technology that made this possible. We benefit from the evolution of increasingly complex forms of global social organization. But we fail to realize that they are merely some of the many expressions of the growing development of the powers of our mental consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

The progressive development of mental consciousness is also responsible for another central thread of social evolution of utmost importance. It is the development of individuality. Human individuals have existed as long as our species. But like the members of other species, human individuals were characterized by their common characteristics much more than their differences. Nature's principal objective has always been the perpetuation of species, rather than that of its individual members. The group derives its power from the subordination of individual interests to the interests of the larger group. Obedience, subordination and loyalty to the group always predominated over the rights and freedoms of individuals, except

perhaps those of the social and political elites whose dominant positions depended on the sacrifices made by lower levels of society. That is why patriotism exalts the defense of the nation as such an important element of national consciousness. The defense of the group is of paramount importance to every nation. But what happens when the group happens to be humanity as a whole?

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*“The true individual is one who is fully conscious of all that he or she has received from the social collective and equally of an inherent obligation or responsibility to act in a manner that enhances the lives of other individuals and of the society as a whole.”*

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Alongside this natural law of social evolution, there is another of increasing significance and ultimate importance. It is the law of the development of individuality. For individuality is the means and medium for the conscious evolution of the consciousness of the species. The birth of ideals, ideas, innovations, inventions and creativity begins in the minds of one or a small group of individuals with the capacity and courage to think differently and challenge conventional beliefs. The individual is the source of the creative mutations which continuously enhance the consciousness of society. Our capacity for mentality and individuality is the reason why human beings alone have continued to develop and evolve over millennia, while other species have remained unchanged.

Modernity has brought with it a period of unprecedented recognition of the central role and contribution of individuality to the evolution of the human race. From the time of the Renaissance, the Reformation and Enlightenment, individuality has been in the ascendant. It was exalted as the source of all creativity during the Renaissance, the source of all spiritual virtue during the Reformation, the source of new knowledge during the Enlightenment, and the source of wealth creation during the successive industrial revolution.

But the concept of individuality now prevalent and pervasive has acquired a perverse connotation akin to the biological concept of survival of the fittest. It has come to be confused with individualism, the egoistic pursuit of self-advancement by each person in competition with all others.

The true value of the individual as affirmed by the great humanistic psychologists of the last century does not lie in unbridled selfishness and self-centeredness. The true individual is one who is fully conscious of all that he or she has received from the social collective and equally of an inherent obligation or responsibility to act in a manner that enhances the lives of other individuals and of the society as a whole. Those we revere as greater leaders pass this test. They live for others and in others as well as in themselves. They have the independence of mind and courage to think differently and the sincerity and goodness of heart to wish and work for the wellbeing of all.

Throughout history humanity has been experimenting with different ways to promote the development of our species either by the subjection and subjugation of individuals for the sake of the collective or by the unbridled freedom of individuals to pursue their own welfare regardless of its impact on other people. In recent centuries it has produced two extreme ideologies: one glorifying the nation and reposing all power and authority in the state as exemplified by fascism and authoritarian communism; the other glorifying the individual and reposing all virtue in the individual no matter how self-centered or egoistic, as the supreme truth as exemplified by the most extreme form of neoliberal capitalism. Both models are inherently flawed. Both have failed and are destined to always fail by their own inherent self-destructive tendencies.

Humanity is at a crossroads in which it is time to break the opposition between these contradictory social philosophies and seek a reconciliation that can at best serve only as a temporary compromise. All social evolution up to this point has been preparing us for this next phase in which society fully recognizes the full value of each and every one of its individual members by according them the full spectrum of human rights and equitable distribution of social power, yet at the same time instilling values that generate a sense of responsibility of each for the wellbeing of all.

Society has and will continue to experiment with different means to achieve this end, but it will only succeed when and in the measure it succeeds in awakening a consciousness of these spiritual values in its members through education. And the education needed differs radically with what we associate with the word today. For today education is an instrument for socialization and conformity—both in behavior and in belief. It disseminates what it claims to be knowledge and insists on students accepting and repeating it. It promotes disciplinary siloes which arbitrarily divide indivisible social reality into airtight compartments that abstract knowledge from life and deprive it of its vitality and validity. Modern education is a product of the Industrial Revolution that seeks to mass produce standardized workers to fit into equally standardized jobs, but mostly succeeds in transferring flawed ideas and half-truths that are valued simply because they are considered the pathways to salaried employment. At a time when humanity needs creative individuals who think originally, we are foisting on youth a form of education which develops the capacity to remember and repeat without understanding or relevance to the real world or their own lives.

What the world needs is an education that is a true instrument for conscious social evolution. It has to engender the capacity for independent thinking rather than memorization of facts and repetition of prevailing theories. Its aim must be not the transmission of information or even knowledge but the development of the mind, personality and values of the student by the capacity to acquire knowledge, judge and decide for themselves. It must be person-centered, rather subject-centered education, value-based rather than value-neutral. It must foster a kind of thinking that unites and integrates rather than divides and distinguishes. It must foster a kind of mental rationality that is conscious of its own inherent limits and also conscious of the frontiers of higher and deeper knowledge open to discovery by seeking truth within ourselves and by developing the capacity for intuition that transcends what can be known by rational thought.

The rebellion against mass education began in America during the heydays of the 1960s and compelled American universities to expand the diversity of the subjects taught and increase the freedom of individual choice. Fortunately, things are gradually changing everywhere. Gone are the days when rote learning was the norm. Now children in at least some countries are actively encouraged to question everything they study and try to find answers for ‘what?’, ‘how?’, and ‘why?’. Such an education seeks to foster innovative thinking which is one hallmark of individuality.

But much more is needed. Education needs to be reinvented. And the society that is the first and best in creating a system which fully develops the capacities of its individual members will qualify to be the leader in the evolution of global society through the next stage of its emergence.

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**Notes**

1. UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Fact Sheet No. 34, The Right to Adequate Food*, April 2010 <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet34en.pdf>
2. Harlan Cleveland and Garry Jacobs, “Human Choice: The Genetic Code for Social Development,” *Futures* 31, no. 9, (1999): 959