

This paper is one of a series of individual essays written within the conceptual constraints provided by "Forms for a Future." The collection of essays will become the individual episodes of the podcast.

'... Forums for A Future...'

Podcast (#7) The Introduction to Part III: Lesson from Modern History
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Prelude

Part I of the series contained a brief 2-minute promotional and a conceptual foundation for thinking about change as the convergence of economic, political, social and personal perspectives. Part II was a set of four podcasts that provided a philosophy for the 21st century. Today, in Podcast # 7, I will introduce Part III, which contains three lessons from modern history for informing the present, and for deriving their prescriptive implications for the future.

Key Concept

The key concept is the triangle formed by the inter-connections of Power, Wealth and Belief.

Introduction

In this part of the podcast series -- Part III -- I will develop the notion that finding new ways of thinking -- what I called "Constructive Alternativism" in Podcast #5 -- is often facilitated by looking for common ground between what, on the surface, seems like different ideas. I want to integrate the three substantive pillars -- the economic as developed by Thomas Friedman, the political as presented by Gwynn Dyer, and the social through the work of Jared Diamond-- into one element. I would like to combine them much like metals can be melted together to form an alloy, or threads woven together to form a fabric. The result is a unique perspective that, while it contains each of the three elements, none are conspicuously distinct even though all are present.

To do this, I would like for you to imagine a triangle in which each of the three points are labeled respectively: Economic/Wealth, Political/Power, and Social/Beliefs. The mental-set, represented by the triangle as a graphic, is that each of the three concepts can only be understood in terms of the other two. Thus, the result is a closed system composed of three interdependent elements. This is a circular arrangement in which every element is one of two essential components of the other elements.

Part of the challenge of Constructive Alternativism, as a philosophy for the 21st Century, as I discussed in podcast #5, is to think in new ways in order to escape from dilemmas of our own conceptual making. Often this means exploring the possibility that a better alternative may be something entirely different, or even the exact opposite, from what we currently think. The

discovery of new alternatives is precisely what is required when things are going badly. But, paradoxically, when things are going badly, Constructive Alternativism is one of the very hardest things to do.

Conceptual rigidity when under stress is part of the psychological nature of ourselves. When we do not have a grip on what is going on around us, we feel threatened. When we feel threatened we feel a need to gain control and have a sense of certainty. At these times people often hold onto their core beliefs and values, and try, sometimes desperately, to make them be true. Dogged persistence in the face of evidence to the contrary can be an admirable trait, but most often it is a prelude to a deep disappointment. If we understand this human paradox, we can teach ourselves to deliberately put aside what we would like to believe during times of uncertainty -- what we want to believe -- and explicitly consider other alternatives in the hope that we will be able to discover what we actually NEED to believe. This is the dilemma we face a human beings. It is the dilemma of knowing when persistence is a true virtue, and when it is pure stupidity with neither virtue nor reason on its side. This takes personal courage, but it is what creative people do when innovation is needed to avoid the fate of misplaced dogged persistence.

Now is one of those times.

All three authors of the books listed as suggested reading have forcefully argued that every person now faces a significant challenge to their core beliefs and values, carried forward from the end of Modern Era to the present, due to the economic, political, and social forces that now define our future.

Psychologically, this is very hard to do simply because of our own human nature. It is hard for any person, at any time to conclude, quoting Pogo that:, "We have met the enemy, and them is us." As a nation, the United States has the greatest capacity to resolve the issues facing the world today. With that capacity, our country also has the greatest responsibility. Unfortunately, because of our present courses of action, we, ourselves, are the principal source of danger to our own future. I know that this will be a hard lesson for Americans to come to grips with, or even to consider, but until we do so, we are all in great danger.

In the next three podcast I will first describe in a historical context how each of the three elements must be seen in light of the other two, and then apply the lesson from the past to explain the present and to be prescriptive for the future.

The three systemic pillars of wealth, power and beliefs (i.e., the economic, political, and social) are all impersonal. The personal element, which is the psychological pillar, is our role as human beings to use our brain to impose meeting, coherence and self-direction on these forces. The human element of the triangle is our responsibility to see ourselves as both the author, as well as the recipients, of our own future.

The next podcast, #8, will deal with the Beliefs of Power and Wealth; #9 the Wealth of Power and Beliefs; and, #10 the Power of Beliefs and Wealth. The purpose is to melt the three elements into a single alloy.