

# A SHORT HISTORY OF THE 21st CENTURY

## FROM FRONT PAGE

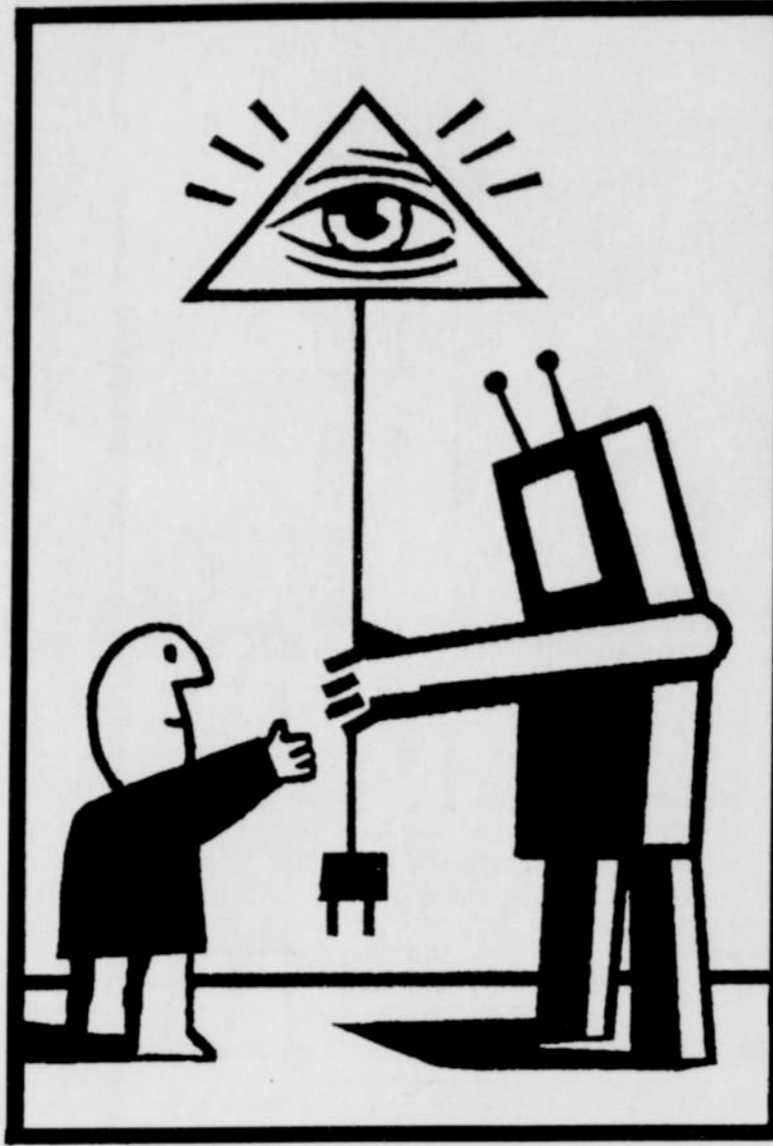
More placid possibilities than self-ruin are that we might reconfigure the planet's entire landmass into a stupendous megalopolis to habitate our exploding population (possibly ten billion by 2030 if the doomsday rock doesn't hit us two years earlier) and convert the oceans and large lakes into huge hydroponics farms as well as domesticate varieties of edible fish. We might also domesticate the solar system, if not actually capable of humanizing the planets for habitat, certainly mining them for essential minerals and fuels, and we will certainly initiate interplanetary tourism.

Electrical/mechanical transplants into the human neural system are being acclaimed as humanity's next great evolution — into a 'superhuman' ('suprahuman?') bio/automated organism, perhaps the first of its kind in all creation anywhere: the bionic creator purposely transforms itself out of the biological world. This concomitant with the completed draft of the human genome system, and the legal patenting of biological parts and full life-forms. Mutant sub-species of humans might very well be fabricated and mass-produced (as well as patented) for this *Brave New World* to do the menial work and drudgery increasingly shunned by 'natural' humanity.

A way might be found to keep the world's masses of poor people alive and healthy in exchange for body parts for rich folk. Herds of healthy poor can be made available for organs and limbs for affluent recipients, as well as an abundant food supply once the taboos and antibiotic problems of cannibalism are eradicated.

Male humans might become extinct this century as a result of being biologically and socially irrelevant given *in vitro* fertilization as well as sperm and embryo storage, the rise of feminism and the obsolescence of hunting. The cold reality is that women can survive as the lone gender and continue to perpetuate the species (females) as well as do all the other busy work. Men are good for only one thing really and are genetically immaterial (except perhaps a few sired as playmates).

The USA might throw off its final facades of democracy and popular government and reemerge as a militant corporate theocracy (*'Praise the Lord & Pass the Poupon'*). The Christian evangelical movement will most likely utilize democratic grassroots techniques as well as a combination of corporate media advertising and pulpit propaganda to gain control of the government. The first act of the new theolitical state will obviously be to abolish the last vestiges of democracy which will include labor rights and racial equity. Freedom of religion would be the next casualty, all religions other than the (corporate)state religion liquidated. After that edicts banning feminism, homosexuality and



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miscegenation to preserve savagely paranoid white male heterosexual supremacy amidst increasing majorities of mixed races and the biological irrelevance of males.

Maybe China will rise as the superior world culture this new century or the next, and the century just passed — despite the World Wars, the rise and fall of Marxist/Leninism, the birth of the Nuclear Age and rise of Cyberworld — will be regarded as little more than a conduit toward China's future supremacy. If China reigns supreme it will write new histories which will most likely be as ethnocentric and parochial as classic Roman narratives, or as our own perfervid chronicle of the past hundred years as 'The American Century' — and perhaps also, in the words of Lafcadio Hearn, who predicted at the end of the 19th Century that Asia would eventually regain supremacy in world affairs and appropriate the best Western cultures offer and discard what is useless or of little merit, we who triumphed for more than half a millennium will be "missed as much as the Ichthyosaur."

The Chinese have long recognized the only immutable law is that everything changes. Henry Adams at the beginning of the 20th Century believed the wave of change was a manifestation of a universal law of acceleration — history was speeding up, which disputably makes morality as well as technology relativist; moral codes developed in one period are rigidly obstructionist in a succeeding era, and are usually diffused by the irresistible dynamics of humanity's swift evolution. The general procedure is periods of acceleration followed by slower periods of reflection and synergization which fuel newer epics of accelerated change. Adams thought the electric dynamo made history obsolete, that the experience gained by learning and manipulating the strength of animals, wind and water, was made irrelevant by the rising mechanical/electronics technology that transformed this new history into an era of energy that shows no sign of slowing down as our cyberbotic world recreates itself at speeds close to light.

Humanity eternally pushes at the edge of evolution, incessantly, impatiently and recklessly remaking the natural world into its own image. *Homo sapiens sapiens* races through spectrums of time we calculate and measure but little understand, propelled into every moment with impatience and hope, overturning nature as well as our own history, regarding each as irrelevant, and perhaps the only consistency to our history is our disdain of nature, regarding the natural world in which we have spent most of our history as an adversary to be overcome and altered to our design, whether it be domestication of grains and animals to cloning them and ourselves for future suzerainty over the entire planet. Probably nothing can stop or even detour the surge of our species except extinction either by ourselves or our inability to catch up with an expanding universe.



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Humanity's rise through complex genetic spiderwebs of primates and homonids, developing wit and organizational skills during the 98% of its span that has been spent hunting as a clever and rapacious carnivore, its subsequent civilizations based on agriculture, commerce and warfare, seems barely a breath in the life of Earth, yet its short reign has metamorphosed most of the above sea level world to its own taste and style.

Archeological evidence points to the possibility that Neolithic villages were more appreciative of peace rather than war. Villages generally cooperated with each other: shortages of one commodity would be alleviated by trade with another. Neolithic humanity at the dawn of civilization might have come closer to the ideal of peace and harmony through mutual needs and trade than any later community. The end of the Cold War has opened the prospect of a full circle of civilization, once more arrived at the realization that peaceful harmony and cooperation is preferable to incessant and reckless competition that most often leads to war.

*Communism* and *Socialism*, the failed creeds of the last century, are rooted in community and society; not so *Capitalism*, a word and concept as cold and brittle as a silver coin. The raw excesses of corporate capitalism in its quest to dominate world trade and commerce since the end of the Cold War are under siege by a rising turbulence caused by intense pressure from below, the bottom of the resources trickle-down, which is uniting the majority of overcrowded humanity that struggles for a decent living on the planet. This upheaval collates every previous civil rights and working class struggle. It might very well readjust the center of power and pioneer the first true universally human community in its long evolution.

The reality of attaining an equitable world civilization will obviously be much more rough and tumble than the vision, given the dyspepsia of our ill-tempered species. Yet universal amalgamation might provide the basis for human diaspora beyond its own planet, a friendly migration into the cosmos by a truly civilized species that recognizes itself as a single species — that none are subspecies to any other; that there are no 'mongrel races' among us.

It seems likely that women were the real pioneers of the cultivation of grains and domestication of animals that led to the agricultural revolution that produced civilization. The focal priority of this century is to complete the social and personal equality of women. This transcends most other needs because it is the most basic correction for humanity to make as well as the most potent force to successfully fulfill the myriad other needs.

"Star measurer, deviser of great systems," humanity is still a floundering creature, Loren Eiseley wrote halfway through the past century. "Deeply written in (our bodies) is the old world of the ice, the tiger and the cave. We have been steeped and ripened in ages of ice and rain," and like most of nature's great innovations, "there is an orphan's obscurity" about us as we yearn "for the lost safety of the old instinctive world" we abandoned in our relentless assault on the future.

Sir Thomas Browne said the created world is only a "small parenthesis in eternity." In that sense we are little more than cartoon dogs laying on roofs of doghouses staring up at the stars. Perhaps as Astoria artist Paul Evalt conjectures, from a theorem revealed to him in a dream vision, all reality is really only 9E<sup>2</sup> X.

*Gravity nails our flesh to earth yet spins our blood for balance through the spheres of our brains on a perpetual edge of the present. Instants swarm at us like particles and protons; or like locusts flailing at us, wearing us away. We bring to each instant a baggage of tradition and experience, and a worry about death. We grasp the passing moment, impose our past upon it and reel into the next. Every moment is new, like waves from an immense ocean, each second an uncertainty unexplored and doubtful and as instantly history, irretrievable except in memory and myth.*

## STARDUST

We burst out of our egg into a history infinitely larger than our own, flung out among rocks and stars that hurtle from the center of a cataclysm at speeds greater than light. Our Earth is a mote from that moment of creation, if indeed that is how the universe began, and it continues to be thrown back to God knows where. We might never know but we will exhaust the rest of our history attempting to find out. It is doubtful we will more than scratch a few score of the billion stars in our single galaxy before evolution discards us for something else or we quicken the process by our own perverse ingenuity.

We pursue the exploration of space in much the manner our western European ancestors forced themselves upon the larger world in fierce competition as merchants, seamen and soldiers from separate nations in perpetual conflict. We are a species of insatiable plunderers, though of course we tell ourselves we are not, that we seek only knowledge, but our great hunger is for wealth and for what is useful to us. Unless we experience a mass epiphany overnight, we will most likely behave beyond the ozone the same as our predecessors beyond the oceans. We will pillage planets and hammer space matter until it is functional. We have virtually sucked Earth dry and our vision of the universe is of one huge orchard of riches.

We cover our own single planet like maggots on a peach. Our prospects are the stuff of cheap science fiction: our only hope might be to send seedlings off the home planet so that a few might germinate someplace else, if in all the vast cosmos there is any place else for us.

We repeat the old errors. We leave Earth as relentless exploiters. If it was absurd for Europeans to spread across the Earth's oceans and claim foreign lands for kings and countries never heard of by inhabitants of the far shores, how much more so spacesuited humans to plant flags on barren worlds and say that they belong in perpetuity to a far distant particle of rock indistinguishable if even visible among the lights of space.

We ought to consider the United Nations as a central agency for space exploration. It would avoid wasteful duplication of resources and money consumed by ruthless competition between nations and multinational corporations and make them as well as the bounties of outer space available for the millions of Earthlings who are in need of useful and sustainable work, food, housing, health/medical care and education. If the idea seems outworldly, it might be useful to remember that UN medical teams eradicated smallpox.

Efficiency must give way to poetry. No machine or computer can view Earth with the same personal response as a human. Earth is, after all, our neighborhood, our nest. It will not be our technology that saves us but our distinct human perceptions.

The efforts to go off planet seem to have little to do with the rest of day to day humanity, yet our era makes the first babysteps of an adventure that will occupy humanity the rest of its time in the cosmos. We might be the last generations of humanity to be a single planet species. 'One World' history and philosophy will be mere prelude to the immense galactic story that awaits our bumbling erratic first paragraph. An age is superseding an earlier one right under our feet, or more truthfully, over our heads.

And perhaps it might be worth remembering that it is not our divine right to eat the Milky Way.

~MICHAEL McCUSKER

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