

## **What is the West?**

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The answer to the question posed to me (what is the West?) is clear: The West is dead. It is time to stop beating a dead West. It is time to start grooming and riding new horses beyond even postnormality.

As a futurist, I take a long view—of both the past and the futures. Thus, in my understanding, “The West” began around 1500 following the invention of the printing press and the rapid diffusion of old and new ideas facilitated by it, on the one hand, and by the hardware, software, and orgware that enabled industrialization and global colonization, including the creation of the global nation-state system, by Europeans, on the other.

The zenith of The West was reached by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when physical and social technologies enabled European countries massively to export their surplus populations to the “empty lands” of North and South America and Oceania, while dominating the rest of the world militarily, economically, and culturally via direct and indirect colonial arrangements. As one consequence, the global population of “white people” for the first time in world history approached 50% at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century--a percentage that has been steadily declining subsequently as a result of substantially-reduced fertility among “whites”. Their numbers may be around only 5% by the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We may soon be organizing “Walks for Whitey” and “Take a White Person Home for Christmas” and the like to celebrate their passing.

The West ended almost exactly one hundred years ago, in July 1914 with the beginning of WWI, on the one hand, and the rise of electric and then electronic communications systems, and other weapons of mass destruction,

on the other. Everything The West has done since the end of WWI has just been spasms of rigor mortis following its death after a brief “Golden Era” when the idea of The West swayed the world, offering some people reason for hope for a permanently better future—in part by destroying that hope for many more.

Moreover, to the extent I am supposed to answer the question assigned to participants on this panel because I am, somehow, a westerner, then I cannot provide much insight. I am not a *bone fide* westerner and I am unable to understand the world through such strange geographical terms as north, south, east, and west.

I have lived in Hawaii for almost 50 years, so when I go to what you call the East—to Japan, Korea, China, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Thailand, which I do a lot-- I fly due west from Hawaii, while when I go to what Americans call the West Coast—to California for example--I fly east. It is a weird world indeed when one flies west to go East and east to go West.

But I have never been a westerner culturally. I have lived most of my life in the East—in Japan, Hawaii, Korea--not the West. I didn't even start out as a “real” westerner.

Even though I grew up in the American Old South—the bastion of the West at its worst—I did so without a father. This provided me with a great advantage over all “real” southerners for whom patriarchy, patrimony, and filial piety rules. Instead, I was fortunate enough to have been raised by three strong women who imbued me with no sense at all of my gender, my ethnicity, or of any family traditions I had to follow. How many people named “Dator” do you know? And what ethnicity do you think of when you hear my name? Nothing for sure. I know nothing about my paternity, and that is fine with me.

I also had the good luck of having been educated during the height of America's most triumphant, global, confident, brief, and yet also liberal—almost socialist—period, immediately after the end of WWII.

At that time, America had a truly progressive income tax—91% tax on the income of the top 1%. Racial desegregation, integration, and civil rights were in full flower. Women's liberation was blooming, with my grandmother, aunt, and mother living examples who demonstrated daily that

whatever trivial differences there might be between men and women, there was nothing “inferior” about women in any way.

The arc of history was clearly swinging towards equity, fairness, and peace, I believed. The so-called 60s (which really were from 1967-1974) were the pinnacle of my personal hope for a better future for all. Whatever you have heard about the 60s are true--though vastly understated. You really, REALLY had to have been there.

But peace, drugs, sex, and rock and roll proved to be just some more death throes of a culture that, along with God, was dead. That it was not the dawning of the Age of Aquarius after all soon became obvious.

On getting my PhD in political science, in 1959, I did everything in my power to go to Ethiopia. When that proved impossible, I grasped an opportunity to go Tokyo, Japan to teach in a newly-created college of law and politics in an old private university there called Rikkyo Daigaku.

I learned a great many things during my six years there, but my biggest revelation came when John Randolph, an old China Hand living in Japan, had me read a paper he had written titled, “The Senior Partner”. He used Oswald Spengler’s theory of historical cycles to suggest that Japan was 200 years ahead of the West. Ahead of the West, in 1963! How was that possible? Had we not just thoroughly demolished Japan in a bloody war? How could Japan possibly be ahead of us? Or of anyone in the West? Didn’t both Karl Marx and W. W. Rostow show that developing nations, like Japan, were striving to “catch-up” with the West by following the Stages of Economic Growth? How ridiculous!

I don’t know whether Randolph was right or wrong. But he made me wonder for the first time about the future of America and the West. He set me off on my career as a futurist, and from that point on, trying to understand “the future” and ideas about “the future” was the all-consuming passion of my life.

After a short, misbegotten three years at Virginia Tech (where I introduced what is said to be the first officially-approved university course on the future), buried among the foreboding mountains and hillbillies of Appalachia (speaking of culture shock after six years in Tokyo!!) I went to the University of Hawaii in 1969 to teach futures studies just as *Hawaii*

2000 was beginning—a 2 year-long citizen-based exercise in looking ahead thirty years, from 1970 to the year 2000. As an advisor to the *Hawaii 2000* process, I suddenly became deeply immersed in Hawaii's unique culture, interacting with all classes and ethnicities on all islands, and their diverse ideas about the futures.

Hawaii has no single dominant culture. Everyone is a minority. The largest single ethnic group then and now were Japanese-Americans, with many citizens also hailing from China, Korea, the Philippines, Portugal, and of course Hawaii itself and other Pacific Islands as well as the American mainland and elsewhere. In Hawaii, the custom is to “out marry”—to marry someone who is NOT of your ethnicity—as a consequence, creating a new local “island culture” of our own. Hawaii is most certainly not the West culturally. Nor is it the East.

I was also greatly influenced by the World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF), by its founding members who, in the late 1960s, asked, “if the West is so great, why did it cause two world wars and a great depression? Why did the leading western country, Germany, attempt to exterminate a religious group? Why did the major victor nation, America, in the last stages of that war, incinerate the residents of two Japanese cities with a new, vastly more powerful bomb? Why, after that war, did westerners build an Iron Curtain between them and prepare to exterminate the entire world many times over with new, evermore vastly powerful bombs? This cannot possibly be the best humanity can do! What might we learn from other cultures, and their visions of the future”, the founders of the WFSF wanted to know?

The first meetings of the WFSF were in Oslo, Kyoto, and Cairo. A meeting in New Delhi was planned, but Indira Gandhi censored the topic which was the futures of politics. We had regional meetings in Islamabad, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Bacolod City, Nagoya, and elsewhere.

We even convinced a weird and quarrelsome person from Pakistan who was living in London to serve as editor of the leading journal in the field, titled, *Futures*, since he promised to bring more nonwestern voices to the field, which he certainly did.

I was secretary general and then president of the WFSF during the 1980s and early 90s. As such, I visited almost every communist nation, including North

Korea, some many times. Unable to criticize the present safely, many of the leaders wanted to envision futures different from the one they saw currently lying ahead of them.

Tragically, I saw what happens when the future arrives too fast, as it did for the eastern European nations. I learned that the futurist's curse is "may your dreams come true". People got rid of what was called "communism" before they had any ideas about how to govern themselves better without it.

I have seen this happen many times: people protest for change, but when things do change, they have been so focused on protesting that they don't have a clue how to achieve a better life when the opportunity for it arrives.

That has happened over and over—most dramatically with the end of formal colonialism after WWII, and the fall of the wall in 1990.

I think we are in the midst of a similar period now. The corpse of the West is stiffening and yet here we are railing against the West as though it were still powerfully striding the globe. Instead, we should be preparing to rule ourselves peacefully and fairly once the corpse has rotted away and the stink is gone.

We say we are in postnormal times. OK, great. So what? What does that insight bring?

What's next? That's the question. Or, rather, what do we want to be next? That is what is important to know now, and we don't have a clue. We are still marveling at the postnormality of it all.

But we are no longer in postnormality. We have moved on to post-postnormality. That is, we are in the early stages of a new normal that we have the opportunity (and obligation) now to shape. And yet, we seem unable psychologically and structurally either to perceive the situation clearly or to guide it confidentially. All we seem able to do is to continue to bitch and complain about the West and the US with great heat and eloquence.

Get over it and get on with the work of constructing the new normality. If you don't, others will colonize your future for their advantage, as they have done before.

However, in all honesty, I must tell you that I have very little interest in that project myself. As some of you know I have been teaching at the International Space University, in Strasbourg, France, for 25 years. The faculty and students come from space industries and agencies all around the world. Our mission is to help humanity grow up, leave the cradle, Earth, and peacefully find its place among the other stars of the Universe.

I offer classes about living on Mars.

You see, truth be told, I not only am not a westerner, I am not even an Earthling. And I am very suspicious of any organization that states its number one value is focused on humanity. What a narrow vision of the future!

How about me? I want to be a Martian. My pudgy gut and warped, hardening back reveal that I am in the process of pre-adapting myself for life on Mars. I dream of becoming a winged turtle with a prehensile tail, scuttling among the rocks and rills of Mars or gliding blissfully in the thin atmosphere with its greatly-reduced gravity.

I clearly do not see myself as an American, certainly not a Hawaiian—I am fascinated by but utterly baffled by and totally uninterested in identity politics now wracking planet Earth. I have no cultural identity and I am proud of it.

Again, my name, Dator? “Dator” is Swedish for computer. It is true. I am a machine. I am a computer. I am a robot. An inferior beta test, to be sure, but at the time, all that was humanly possible.

I am not a human being.

I am a human becoming--a robot becoming a human becoming a Martian, perhaps--and then what's next?

So I have no idea at all of what the West is, or the East, or North, or South. And I don't care.

Here are my conclusions:

Postnormality is not a new normality. It is a prelude to a new normality.

Postnormality is not just a western, privileged disease. It is worldwide and spreading.

The period of postnormality is ending; a new normality is emerging, and it can be shaped in preferred directions if we will focus on its birth and emergence and stop beating the dead corpse of the West, as emotionally satisfying (and safe, since the corpse is dead) that may be.

Non-western countries like China or India do not at the present time have any image of the future that is fundamentally different from the old, defunct image of the West called progress, development, continued economic growth. They all cleave to the corrupted materialistic American dream. They just want it for themselves, their way.

China clearly for the past 25 years has aimed at nothing but becoming America on steroids. Recently, depressingly, India voted overwhelmingly for what appears to be its lethal combination of two fundamentalisms--neoliberal economics and nationalistic Hinduism--similar to those festering on the corpse of the US.

Those countries and all the other BRICS and BATS are similarly manifesting in their ways the same death throes of rigor mortis of the Western project. Nothing to see here. Move along.

And yet, continued economic growth is a thoroughly discredited unsustainable vision for the futures.

Therefore, China's rise before its fall is likely to be even shorter than was that of the US.

India's may be shorter still.

A process I call "The Unholy Trinity" is challenging all dominant ways of thinking and living, in the East, South, North and West. The "persons" of The Unholy Trinity are 1) the end of cheap and abundant energy; 2) the swift rise of environmental challenges beyond any hope of prevention; and 3) the grotesquely unfair and unsustainable global neoliberal economic

system. No government is able to address much less to manage or solve the challenges of this Unholy Trinity

What a great time to be alive and young! What a wonderful opportunity for creativity and hope lies before us!

The need for true, cooperative, and radical creativity has never been greater.

Models for—that is, examples of—such creativity are appearing, not in the centers of power and intellect today, but rather in the margins where people in Second Cities who have thought differently and creatively for a long time suddenly have the chance to help others to unleash their own creativity; people in places with unpopular names and diversely-colored skins. People who name their universities “East-West” even though they are in the middle of Nowhere, and who title their peripheries “Centers” of “Postnormality”. This is where hopes for the futures lie. Some bearers are in this room. Others lurk nearby. And some might yearn to be winged turtles with prehensile tails on Mars or Venus or....