

The Integration/Unification Trend in Human Societies

The Evidence and the Implications

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Introduction

Fundamentally there are in reality two opposing and alternating forces – joining together and tearing apart, or integration and dis-integration, or creation and destruction, or order and disorder, or aggregation [accumulation] and separation [dispersal]. Whether in shorter or longer time frames, all phenomena cycle through these phases. From the Multiverse, to our Universe, to galaxies, to solar systems, to planets, to plant and animal species, to cells, to atoms, to quarks, all participate in this overall dynamic. Depending on the timeframe and/or scope of our consideration, the forces for integration or the forces for disintegration may be more influential – even decidedly dominant. But overall, in the truly big picture these two forces seem to be mostly balanced. Moreover, at the most essential level, the elements that are freed in the destruction of one phenomenon become the seeds of creation for other phenomena.

Within the framework of these fundamental forces, what has been discovered about the material make-up of the Universe? Standard theory in physics posits that all material aspects of the Universe originate in the aftermath of the Big Bang and thereafter in the further processes of star creation and of supernova explosion. All of the 100+ billion galaxies, all of the average 200 billion+ solar systems in each of these galaxies, all of the trillions of planets and moons surrounding the star[s] in these solar systems, and all of the debris belts of asteroids and comets that surround and roam these planetary systems are composed of these common elements. So, the basic ingredients of the Earth are the shared ingredients of the Universe. Moreover, the water of life on Earth is now thought to have come to Earth as a result of huge numbers of collisions with water bearing asteroids and comets – especially in the last two thirds of Earth's four and a half billion year development. And we have discovered that at least the elements of organic life [amino acids] are present in asteroids and comets and that they can survive at least some of these planetary collisions, with the possibility that even DNA and its ilk may be common to the Universe as a whole. Helping us to release our assumption of our centrality and uniqueness in the universe, astrophysicists now estimate that in our Milky Way galaxy alone there are probably at least 500,000,000 rocky planets positioned in their solar systems similarly to Earth with the likelihood that they also have the ability to support life from the water dominated ecologies. This, not to mention what may be at least an equal number of habitable moons orbiting some of these planets.

More than 70% of what fills the universe is energy in various forms. And since energy is everywhere, all the time – just present in different concentrations, it constitutes an

immaterial web that permeates the whole and connects throughout to the point of all apparent “things” ultimately being one entity. In very many ways, physics, astrophysics and cosmology point to the fundamental ways in which all parts of the Universe, including its organic life forms, are connected and share in one integrated overall system. The forces of creation and destruction are the dynamic norm in this universe of essential material and energy based interconnectedness. Humans are not separate or unique; they are just part of the shared identity of the cosmos. We begin, exist, and end in this shared and fundamentally interconnected state.

In this overall dynamic, humans on Earth importantly exist in the period of our solar system’s evolution when overall greater order and integration have been favored and when conditions have greatly stabilized since the formative period of constant bombardment as the Earth and the rest of the planetary system coalesced. So, in spite of the substantial threats over the very long term that really do exist to this condition of relative order and stasis, humans on Earth exist within the larger trend toward greater solar system and planetary integration. It is within this context favoring order and integration that human societies have developed.

So, in the big picture, humans share both in the integration – disintegration dynamic and in their material make-up with all the rest of the Universe, and they have developed within a solar and planetary system that in recent geological time favors order and integration over disorder and disintegration. Now we can look to see if this overall surrounding planetary system trend corresponds to the dominant orientation in the development of human groups. Since humans exist in a vastly more limited time frame and a more specific ecology, what are minor changes in the planetary dynamic can have major consequences for humanity.

The Evidence for the Overall Trend Toward Human Social Integration

First, consider the situation for hominids in the period just prior to the emergence of modern humans [*Homo sapiens sapiens*] as a species. In the ebb and flow of glacial periods together with the effects of various and common geological upheavals, the archeological record in the time predating about 200,000 years ago indicates that human species of several varieties went through a period of great stress during which all varieties were severely reduced in both numbers and distribution – to the point where most hominids experienced complete extinction. Modern humans [together with Neanderthals] were the only survivors, and they were very small in number and very localized in east central Africa. Since that time, the Earth has entered a temperate period of extraordinary climatic and geological calm [stasis favoring integration] during which modern humans have flourished and spread globally – especially in the last 50,000 years. So, having been severely depleted previously, modern humans have enjoyed to the present a surrounding ecological and climatic condition that favors both proliferation and integration.

Second, consider human genetics. Through the period of disintegration for hominid species, modern humans were reduced in numbers to a group of only a few thousand members. This very small and localized group constitutes the gene pool for all modern humans. Over the 200,000 years since that time [an extraordinarily short period in evolutionary terms], human groups have become minimally differentiated genetically into a few races, all of whom share at least 99.4% of their genetic make-up. Whatever their surface differences may be, at the genetic level humans are essentially identical – genetically interconnected. And in the modern world, humans from different groups across the globe relate and propagate mixing the genetic make up of humanity and further reducing any tendency to differentiation that occurred previously. The trend, then, starting from virtual genetic identity, is toward even greater human genetic integration.

Third, consider the nature of social development among human groups over the period of modern human existence. Human groups were initially limited to nomadic bands mostly made up of extended family members – clans. From very small groups of this kind, humans slowly came together first as tribes, then as chiefdoms, then as tribal confederations, then as settled city states, then as nations, then as empires, and now as international confederations that may unify further to actually become the “United Nations.” With each of these moves, human social organization has become more complex with relationships becoming more and more formalized and institutions arising to assure that security and social control are maintained [law, law enforcement, military, justice, taxation, regulation]. The benefits of increased complexity have brought humans the civilized condition with its allowance for specialization and technological development, which have themselves progressed geometrically.

Interestingly, in general, we can observe that there is a match between this integrative social trend in the direction of complexity and what we can refer to as the liberal human perspective, which supports greater inclusiveness [communal and cooperative values at the social and ecological levels]. By contrast, the trend to maintain and celebrate separateness [individual and competitive/exploitative values at the social and natural resource levels] corresponds to the conservative human perspective of exclusiveness [the force holding back or reversing further integration].

Of course in more limited timeframes and more immediate contexts, the overall trend toward increased human social integration may be less obvious with the pendulum seeming to swing more or less equally from liberal to conservative positions. But if we look long-term over the period of modern human florescence, we discover that the result of most oscillations – both large and small – has been a gradual but steady shift in the liberal, more integrative and socially inclusive direction.

Fourth, consider the primary need of mature humans to be secure in their efforts to acquire mates, to raise their offspring, and to engage in trade. To assure genetic diversity, mature humans must find mates outside of their own extended family groups – bands. This biological necessity is the primary driver in motivating relations among the simplest of human groups. Raiding is one such means to provide for this need, but it carries with it high risk for injury or loss of life. Arrangements/Understandings

among bands to allow for contact and the opportunity for potential mates to locate one another or to be selected is a safer option. So, humans adopted such arrangements as the norm, for the most part. Special occasions, often ones also involving opportunities for trade – another primary driver for connections across simple groups, became traditionalized, and the only way for these activities to occur was for all parties to agree to security for all participants.

Humans inherited from earlier primates the awareness that their best source of security lay in depending on the increased protection that the group could provide, rather than struggling to survive as individuals. The need for security beyond the domain of the band in order to allow for the lengthy raising of offspring is another essential motivation for human groups to seek secure relations – at least with contiguous groups – their “neighbors.” To serve three primary functions – locating mates, raising children, and engaging in trade, security was a necessity and neighboring human groups were encouraged thereby to cooperate. Of course, warfare was always a possibility if direct competition for immediate territorial resources arose. But if the mutual benefits from cooperation sustained, then the relations between groups could broaden and further integration could occur – the coalescing of bands into tribes. From this opening consolidation to tribes, confederations and alliances of all types follow, providing a secure context for interaction and the option for potential larger scale societal integration. As we have seen in the section above [#3], ever increasing social integration is exactly what has occurred in the development of complex societies – at least to the present.

Fifth, consider political developments as the trend toward social complexity has proceeded. In bands and tribes, roles are differentiated across the sexes and age groups, but equality among adult members prevails with decisions being made with respect for the input of all. As complexity increases further, the age of male domination and class distinctions arises first with chiefs and eventually with kings/priests and their ilk holding hereditary office while the rest of society is carved up into castes/classes of descending rights and privileges. During this period of social hierarchy, inequality reigned in complex society, and equality was sacrificed in behalf of the benefits of complexity.

In the modern period, equality has been returning led in the political realm by the slow spread of representative democracy across the complex societies of the world. Especially in the last 150 years slavery, the caste system, and much of the class system have been rejected by most societies. In addition, nearly all forms of discrimination – by race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, etc. have been discarded by most developed societies. While discrimination continues to exist in many less developed societies and while it can be perpetuated by some economic conditions [plutocracy under free enterprise], the overall trend toward equality among all people of all “types” is clear. The benefits of social complexity are now positioned to be shared by most citizens of the world, resulting in integration at a much greater scale of inclusiveness.

With the negative consequences and the rejection in the last century of attempts by individual nations to dominate all other nations [two World Wars and the

Cold War], it may be the case that nations are now ready to respect the diversity of one another [the ideal of the United Nations]. Political equality and respect across nations, in contrast to the pursuit of the exclusive self-interests of individual nations [the conservative view at the national level], are the prerequisites to support the cooperative and further integrative social process at the international level.

Sixth, consider economic developments within the trend toward ever-greater societal complexity. Trade among different human groups has existed from the time of bands and tribes. Initially such trade was relatively informal – a medium of occasional exchange to serve the mutual benefit of each party or group. As societies have become more complex and less self-sufficient, commercial exchange systems have been formalized with allied monetary and financial subsystems arising to facilitate commerce. We are now at the point where the international economy is one of the major drivers for further integration across nations.

The rules of the World Trade Organization now take precedence over the exclusionary commercial laws and regulations of individual nations. This is not to say that these rules are sufficiently qualified by other important social variables, but the effect of how these rules are positioned “forces” increased integration. At the regional level, consider the significance of the establishment of the European Union [EU] with its twenty seven member states [and still counting] and its reach deep into the nations of Eastern Europe. It is difficult to overstate the change in relationships that the EU represents since it draws together nations that have deep histories of grand, long, horrific conflicts, some of these very recent [WWI and WWII]. Interestingly, the recent Great Recession has highlighted the need for tighter, shared economic regulations within this union. While the EU is formed around sharing a single monetary system, it also has nascent judicial and political bodies that suggest the potential for future unification in other major institutions. What has been happening in Europe in the last twenty years demonstrates a clear trend in the direction of societal unification and suggests a similar direction for other possible regional consortiums. In spite of its competitive basis, over time regulated capitalism is promoting integration across nations and even serving to slowly bring about a leveling of the economic standard of living across nations.

Seventh, consider the development of transportation. From hunter-gatherers using animal paths, to human trails, to horse drawn wheeled cart roads, to dug out canoes and skin covered kayaks, to sail boats, to steam powered trains and ships, to highways for automobiles, to airplanes, to missiles probing space, the extent, speed and number of ways human groups are connected by means of transportation have expanded exponentially with the development of complex society and the scientific and technological pursuits it now supports. In the multiple means for connection that they facilitate, transportation systems are a very significant integrative force within and across human societies. Together with the effects of modern economics [above] and communication systems [below], humans are nearing the point where global is the new local!

Eighth, consider the development of communications and information systems. As language developed within human bands, oral tradition became the basis for exchanging information and providing continuity for knowledge about society and the natural world upon which humans depend. Not until complex society arose did written language emerge, culminating in a phonetically based alphabet, which made sharing information across written languages much simpler. Written language greatly facilitated all of the other moves toward increased complexity and integration cited in this list. Knowledge now could be vastly expanded and housed in manuscript libraries, which could serve multiple groups across generations. With the invention of the printing press, the basic process for accumulating information and for sharing it among all the people of a language group became possible. The more modern inventions of the telegraph, telephone, radio, film and television served to vastly expand information dissemination.

Sharing information contributes fundamentally to promoting integration across groups. And the most recent development of various electronic media – able to almost instantaneously disseminate information via the Internet – has once again exponentially increased audio-visual communication of information among individuals and across the nations of the world. With the advent of what is called “social” media [Facebook, Twitter, etc.], it is now possible for individuals worldwide to be in nearly constant audio-visual contact at the most basic level of their every step and thought. At the electronic, virtual level, it is almost as if the citizens of the world now have the option to create their own instantaneous and collective global diary.

Cell phones and the like with GPS capability can now make the location and contact information of their users available covering most of the population of the developed and developing world. Now, employing the Internet, scientists from across the globe can and do cooperate as teams in the investigation of key issues, vastly speeding up the progress that science is able to make in reaching results. And the exponential advance in the reporting of these scientific results makes progress in the practical application of this knowledge that much more rapid. Soon to be implemented nanotechnology, combined with micro implants and mini-drones, will have the ability to connect humans down to the cellular and even the genetic levels. When all of these means of information connection are assembled into one system, it becomes possible to envision for the first time a future for global humanity as a single organism. That condition would represent the ultimate potential stage in the integration of humankind.

As complex societies have aggregated to the present, the entire history of the development of human communication systems has been one of humans becoming ever more connected through more and more immediately shared information. Like all other technological developments, the level of information and the degree of connection that results from it can be managed to the benefit or detriment of humankind. By the nature of their perspective, conservatives tend to be very reticent about where these information developments can lead humankind – government intrusion into individual privacy and excessive control over the lives of its citizens. On the other hand, from the liberal perspective, the more connected humans are, the more immediate can be the social benefits of their contributions, the greater can be their collective security, and the less they will be able to justify gross inequality and

self-serving aggressive activities, which lead to conflict and promote disintegration at all levels.

Ninth, consider the development of modern medical systems. All humans are concerned about their health and want to minimize the ill effects of health challenges. From traditional healers and herbal remedies, to midwives, to scientific medicine with its antibiotics, vaccines, and sophisticated surgical and imaging capabilities as practiced in the special environments of clinics and hospitals, medical understanding and treatment have made huge advances as human groups have become more complex. And whatever may be the differences among human groups, access to the means to sustain health and to treat illness and injury are universally appreciated and sought [e.g. Doctors Without Borders] So, the treatment options of modern medicine reach through the differences among human groups and both promote understanding and increase connections. Greater integration among groups is one of the inherent consequences.

Tenth, consider the development of universal public education with its requirement to meet the standards of an approved curriculum. Education was initially an informal process of learning the ways of one's parents and elders by watching and doing. As societies increased in complexity and roles became more specialized, apprenticeship systems emerged for the average person while the elite had access to more formal education in special schools, which evolved to become private and then public colleges and universities. It was not until the 19th century that formal education arose for the masses – public education in separate schools. And ever since, the period of time devoted to this separate formal education has increased to the point where professional educations now commonly extend into early mid-life.

Secular education at all levels stretches human awareness and understanding and hones the mental and social skills needed for humans to participate productively in modern socio-economic and political environments, which are changing at an ever increasing rate. Preparing not just for what currently exists but also for constantly expected changes means that humans have had to become more resilient and less inclined to regard the status quo as the way things ought to be. Forced to engage change as a positive constant, modern humans have to remain open-minded, always considering an ever broadening field of view – technologically, occupationally, geographically, and socially. Increased connectivity and integration among humans and across different groups are natural results of this process.

I have identified ten major areas where the history of human societal development reveals a clear trend in the direction of increasing integration. There no doubt are others. Individually the evidence in each of these areas is significant, but collectively, I suggest that it approaches "proof." And I have pointed to the conditions of the surrounding planetary, geological, ecological and climatic systems, which support this integrative societal trend. Now we can consider countervailing factors.

The Factors that Oppose the Trend Toward Increased Social Integration

In geological time frames, there are many events that have the potential to threaten the integrative societal trend of humankind. The following are three major examples:

First, a very large solar coronal mass ejection directed at Earth could severely disrupt the Earth's magnetic shield, altering fundamental conditions on Earth that support complex societies, even all of human life. Mass ejections directed toward Earth occur on average about every 500 years, and at a minimum our satellites and the electrical grid that we have come to depend upon over the last 150 years could be wiped out.

Second, a supervolcano could send the Earth into decades of darkness and glacial conditions that would so reduce habitable and arable land that the human population would be severely reduced and the basis for most, if not all, complex societies undermined. Considering its average 630,000 year cycle of eruption, the supervolcano in the Yellowstone basin is due and has been showing the signs of initial swelling for some time now!

Third, a large asteroid or comet could collide with Earth resulting in continental, or even global, conflagration followed in lesser cases by glacial winter. Depending on the magnitude of the impact, human societies could be severely reduced in numbers and complexity, even to the point of human extinction.

Humans cannot control these kinds of events, and they are rare, but they have occurred in the geological past, and they have the potential to so disrupt complex society that humans are greatly reduced in numbers and geographical spread to the point of returning to tribal conditions or even meeting with extinction. In the broadest sense, it is these kinds of planetary and interplanetary events that create the outer frame for the window of opportunity for humans as a species on Earth. 200,000 years of modern human development is a relatively short period in relation to the cycles that bring these kinds of events to impinge on Earth, but if humans expect to persist long-term on the planet, they will encounter events beyond their control with the significant threat levels of the kind just identified.

There are other factors that humans exercise more control over that can counter the dominant trend toward greater human societal integration. The following are some of the more important:

First, consider the effects of climate change. There are many consequences of global warming that collectively can very negatively impact human societies. One example is sea level rise. The global human population is concentrated along the continental coasts, and a great many of these coastal areas are very vulnerable to ocean rise. If significant melting occurs of the world's mountain glaciers [most importantly of the Himalayas] and of the East and West Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets, some projections suggest that sea level rise could amount to as much as 163 feet by the

end of the 21st century. While most models suggest that this is an extreme projection, it is also true that most of our models have proven to be consistently far too conservative in their projections when judging the escalating rate of ice melting and sea level rise over even recent short time periods.

Climate change can displace billions of humans with potential catastrophic effects due to sea level rise. It can also greatly reduce the world food supply due to loss of productivity on land and in the oceans with devastating consequences. And it can even activate geological tectonic upheaval as the oceans rise and pressure from massive mile deep ice sheets is released. Clearly the multiple potential consequences of climate change can put humans under such strain that many complex societies could destabilize, disintegrate, and revert to feudal or tribal conditions.

Second, consider the effects of traditional warfare and potential nuclear catastrophe. From the time of human bands, humans have engaged in territorial conflicts over access to resources. As a result of these conflicts, humans in different groups have been pushed around and spread over the globe to the point where viable new territory to occupy no longer exists. When territory is limited or when groups refuse to be moved, conflicts become warfare and warfare itself can be ongoing, if most often periodic. Because human cultural memory is long lived, when groups attempt to dominate other groups and take over their resources and territory, the resentments and desire for liberation by the conquered tend to run deep and long. Over time, conquerors who act in a benign fashion toward the defeated can encourage assimilation, but in the much more traditional outcome of warfare, the defeated are demeaned and subjugated with the spoils belonging to the victors. Traditional warfare causes the resentments of the conquered to fester while they await the opportunity to rebel and reverse the group fortunes.

Forced consolidation of groups through warfare is a constant source of tension and potential social disintegration. For the most part, to be successful in the long term, consolidation of human groups at any scale must be voluntary with benefits flowing more or less equally to all parties. Agreements that allow for mutual benefit are the basis for bands and tribes becoming federations and eventually nations, and it is the mode that must apply if a true United Nations is to be achieved. Traditional warfare is the ultimate outcome of the conservative, self-interested, competitive perspective, and its overall effect is disintegrative.

In the modern era, with the potential spread of weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups, to countries with unstable governments, or to governments under the control of fundamentalist religious leaders with apocalyptic aspirations, attacks can occur that could rather easily escalate to involve multiple nuclear detonations. If these explosions rise to the level of about fifteen average hydrogen bombs, the following global devastation in the form of a radioactive nuclear winter could so decimate human societies that they devolve into whatever minimal states make it possible for some human groups to survive. Clearly, the technology of warfare has evolved to far surpass the ability of human societies to control their capacity for self-annihilating forms of aggressive behavior.

Third, consider the effects of competing major religions. The belief systems of our major religions appeal to supernatural causation to explain human existence and human destiny. And the fundamentalist faithful within these religions, who have grown in their influence in recent years, hold that their beliefs contain the exclusive and absolute truth with respect to these fundamental issues. For these people, many of the most essential discoveries of modern science constitute heresy, and scientists along with believers in any other religion are regarded as infidels or heretics and as appropriate targets for extermination. While religions support cooperative social behavior among their believers, to the extent that these same religions, whether fundamentalist or not, are by their very absolutist nature sources of intolerance, they threaten respect and limit connections among societies. As such they are a source that significantly restrains continued societal integration.

Fortunately, there is a way to avoid the negative influence of religions on further human integration. A spiritual option exists as an alternative. And this alternative honors the meaningfulness of the experience of unification at the core of all religions, allows for the importance of the subjective dimension of reality, and recognizes the intuitive mental capabilities of humans as the avenue to subjective awareness. The spiritual perspective allows for all of this without having to rely on any literalist/absolutist dogma, which is the source of the grave negative effects of religion. Whether humans, many of whom live with a cell phone in one hand and a 12th century worldview ensconced in their minds, will become enlightened enough to adopt this spiritual option is not at all clear.

Fourth, consider the potential effects of overpopulation. Some ecologists calculate that the maximum sustainable carrying capacity for humans on Earth is about one billion people. Greater than one billion humans threatens the integrity of the ecosystem and has the consequence of depleting the natural resources upon which humans and the other components of the system depend. With a world population now at seven billion and counting, clearly humans have reproduced to the point of greatly exceeding the proposed maximum – even if that number is too low. Some ecologists claim that especially during the 20th century we began to see the prelude to the eventual collapse of the existing global ecosystem. How humans use natural resources and the number of humans making demands on these resources are the root causes of these negative effects.

Humans can be too successful in reproducing and in living lengthy lives, and like rodents the human boom can lead to over utilization of resources as well as increased species density, which invite disease pandemics with species bust as a probable result. In the case of humanity, the social disintegration of our complex societies is likely to be a consequence of such a “bust.”

Fifth, consider the effects of allowing a separate adolescent subculture to arise in modern complex societies and then promoting violent fantasies as a pervasive element within this subculture. Humans have lived in simple societies for 95% of their history, and in these cultures young adults are closely supervised by adults as they

make the final moves rather quickly to physical and social maturity. Even in most complex cultures up to the 19th century young adults oriented to adults as they learned the skills necessary to survive as mature adults. With the advent of universal education, children and young adults were separated from parents and from the world of adults for the purposes of society providing a “general” education. The concept of childhood and adolescence as separate periods in human development rose to prominence during this time. In the last century, this period of separation for the purposes of preparation has grown in magnitude to the point now where a professional level education may not end until early mid-life. Even a basic public education has expanded from the sixth grade to tenth grade to the twelfth grade – from 12 to 18 year olds.

As the adolescent period emerged and especially as it has grown to include high school and college age young adults, a separate adolescent subculture has arisen, a subculture over which parents and adults have mostly taken a permissive stance. In limbo as to their social status, these adolescents have been allowed to define their own world with its own dress, arts and activities often in direct protest of adult social norms and standards. The result is that for long periods many adolescents are being acculturated away from rather than toward and into adult society. While our separate educational setting is intended to produce young adults with the knowledge and skills to enter adult society, its lengthy separateness has encouraged the growth of a counter [or at least conflicted] culture of youth. This situation is sociologically dysfunctional, and it runs counter both to the need to integrate young adults into adult society in any human group and to the larger integration trend among human societies.

Within the relatively recent emergence of an adolescent subculture – counter culture, one of the outstanding features has been the growth of the involvement of adolescents in violent fantasies. Some would claim that fictional violence is an effective way to release stress and negative thoughts and emotions so these feelings are not played out in real life [catharsis]. To a point this may be a legitimate idea. It is all a matter of degree. But what we have seen over the last century in particular is the emergence of an entire dimension of the corporate media [music, film and video and computer games] arising to make billions of dollars by feeding the rebellious inclinations of adolescents.

Unfortunately, adolescents are impressionable with minds that we now know do not fully mature until humans are in their mid-twenties. A constant stream of gratuitous violence served up to these adolescents in ever more extreme and vivid forms goes way beyond any release function. In the main such fantasies model violent behavior as the way to “successfully” address and resolve challenges among humans. At one time, violence in myth and story required the imagination of the audience to fill in the scene, and narrative violence was rarely graphic in its description. Now, violence is at the center of a fully filled audio-visual encounter with a virtual reality. It is way beyond just graphic; it is all consuming, participatory, and non-stop. To be declared the “winner,” the “player” must enter the game fantasy as a participant with the goal of decimating all iterations of the opponent that appear. And these opponents are very often “other” humans. Guns and their ilk are the only tools

available, and violent actions are the only choice, not the choice of last resort. And many adolescents now play these kinds of violent fantasy games for hours every day!

As adolescents have been exposed for longer and longer periods to ever more intensely violent and vivid fantasies, what we see is an evolution in the same direction in adult entertainments. In a previous era, the sport of boxing was the most violent of sports with staged “professional” wrestling simulating more violent interactions, but these sports have morphed in the present to become extreme cage fighting where injury is common. It seems that as the level of fantasy violence escalates in adolescence, it seeps over into the increase in the violence of adult sports and entertainments [consider raves, adult “action” films and the lyrics of much hip-hop music!]. When we make guns the “answer” in pervasive adolescent fantasies, it should come as no surprise that when adults with this foundational background find themselves under emotional stress and duress, they resort to guns as the violent means to express their rage.

Violence among modern humans in all of its forms represents a failure to communicate, investigate, negotiate, and compromise in behalf of reaching a solution to a real life challenge. This fact of life is entirely bypassed in the violent fantasies served up by the corporate media to adolescents and now to adults. And in their more and more separate culture, many of our adolescents are spending years devouring these extreme fantasies. The development of this major fantasy trend runs entirely counter to all of the ingredients necessary to support adult human social integration, and ironically this development has arisen most dramatically in exactly the same time frame that the rate of societal integration itself has increased. Adult humans must decide whether they will allow a separate and rogue adolescent culture fed by these violent fantasies to persist and pose a disintegrative effect on adult complex societies.

Sixth, consider the recent rise of worldwide plutocracy. Throughout human history, there have been periods when wealth has been commandeered by a few at the top. In the long period of early civilizations, plutocracy was common in elite dominated dukedoms, kingships, empires, and the like. Revolution has tended to level the economic playing field as it did in the eighteenth century in Europe and America. And in the modern era, democratic government has often suppressed the split between the haves and have-nots through the instruments of progressive taxation and of trust busting. The Gilded Age of industrial plutocracy in the West in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was halted by these government-based actions to redistribute wealth and limit power. And worldwide, the Great Depression was also a great economic leveler.

In all human societies, a moderate degree of economic inequality is a reasonable reflection of differences in responsibility, intelligence, persistence, and competitive excellence – for which reward is justified at the individual [or corporate] level. A moderate differential has been proposed as executive pay being up to fifteen times that of a skilled worker in the same field. Consider that it is not unusual today for executive compensation – combining income, stock options and bonuses – to be one thousand times the pay of that skilled factory worker. A truly moderate degree of economic inequality can reasonably encourage the average person or business to

develop the same capabilities as the more successful and aspire to improve their position in the group – while still contributing to the advancement and viability of the group as a whole. But extreme inequality in all of its forms and at all levels works against social integration by fostering exclusiveness rather than inclusiveness. And it creates such a degree of separation between the haves and have-nots that there is no basis for aspiration on the part of the have-nots. Moreover, in these extreme conditions of plutocracy, the haves acquire so much economic power that they can have the ability to exert undue influence in the affairs of the government, democratic or not, and as a consequence arrange for self-serving laws to be enacted that help to protect and perpetuate their position of privilege. This amounts to the first step in resurrecting oligarchy as the social structure in a hierarchical, class based society.

Currently, in spite of the Great Recession, we are in another surge toward plutocracy brought about by the advent of the world economy and the success of conservative forces to reduce the tax obligations of the wealthy. With the rich enjoying much reduced maximum income and inheritance tax rates, with the ability of the haves to focus the bulk of their wealth in investments where an even lower tax rate applies [capital gains], and with the good fortune of the rich to be able to move their capital around to benefit maximally from the opportunities that arise in the world economy, the haves have prospered enormously while the economic position of the average citizen and of the middle class in general has mostly stagnated. As Chrystia Freeland indicates in her book, Plutocrats [2012], in 2005 the wealth of just two individuals [Bill Gates and Warren Buffett] was equal to the total wealth of the bottom 40% of the American population – 120 million people!

The question currently before the 98+%, who are not of plutocratic status, is whether they will once again require their government to develop and implement the policies necessary to level the economic playing field. Both sustaining the existing level of social integration in western societies and achieving further integration among nations depend upon this occurring.

Seventh, consider the effects of the conservative socio-economic and political perspective. This perspective is ever present in human societies, and it is needed to restrain what can be the excessive effects of the liberal perspective. It is in the dynamic interchange between the conservative and liberal perspectives that humans remain creative and adaptive. When the input of these two perspectives are properly balanced, humans are able to appreciate the past and the important contribution individuals and individual values make to human success [essentials of the conservative view], while humans are also able to look to a better future and respect the need to support cooperation, mutual benefit and communal values [essentials of the liberal view].

As noted earlier, the overall history of modern humans is one that has favored the liberal perspective, a fact that corresponds to the gradual increase in social integration among human groups. I have also noted that this trend is favored by a period of relatively benign surrounding planetary ecology and geology. And to the extent that humans can in the shorter term expect these surrounding conditions to

persist [short term likely being the next few thousand years], support for this overall liberal trend and increased societal integration/unification is justified.

Conservative forces at all times work against this trend and restrain and reverse it when their influence is sufficient. If the surrounding ecological, geological or cosmological context becomes more challenging, the conservative perspective favoring competition, individual self-interest and biological survival may need to dominate. As we have seen, when it comes to human induced climate change and overpopulation, humans may themselves so negatively affect their climate and ecology that they negate the benign ecological conditions that currently favor the liberal integrative perspective.

Humankind must decide whether its window of species opportunity is wide enough to accommodate the current strength of the conservative viewpoint and the fact that this perspective is responsible in large measure for slowing progress in the integrative social direction.

Above, I have identified ten major sources or potential sources that restrain social integration. There no doubt are more. But in spite of all these countervailing forces, the overall trend is still clear – social integration has dominated and continues to dominate, even if it is at risk for a lengthy future.

Summary and Conclusion

Integration and disintegration are the fundamental dynamic forces of the universe. Among human groups these two forces are reflected in two opposing social viewpoints – the liberal perspective favoring greater commonality, inclusiveness, cooperation, and integration and the conservative perspective favoring greater individuality, exclusiveness, competition, and separation. These two perspectives are both essential in human societies, and they exist in dynamic tension at all levels from individuals to communities to nations. One or the other of these perspectives is favored or not depending on the nature of the cultural situation as well as the surrounding ecological, geological, and cosmological conditions. Presently – meaning the last 200,000 years and especially the last 10,000 years, the evidence points to the fact that these surrounding “natural” conditions have favored increased integration among human groups – support for the liberal perspective. Developments in genetics, transportation, communication, medical treatment, education, and especially in social, political, and economic institutions all testify to the pervasive integrative trend among human groups as well as to the fact that the overall rate of this trend has been rising – especially in the last 200 years.

The surrounding natural conditions, which have been supportive of integration, can change, though the probability of such change when left to the planetary system itself is relatively low. But humans have now reached the point where in multiple ways they have impacted, and have the ability to further impact, the planetary system itself – especially the ecological and climatic domains – to such a degree that that system

ceases to support integration and reverses to favor complex societal disintegration. If these changes occur and humans find themselves in a more challenging planetary context, then the conservative perspective, which is allied with this dis-integrative orientation [e.g. in extreme forms – militias and survivalists] may appropriately come to dominate. There are some significant implications for the fate of humanity if this situation arises.

Like the dinosaurs and all other species on Earth – especially complex species, humans have a limited window of opportunity in the overall evolutionary context. As a very complex, but very young, species, modern humans have been favored to flourish and to develop into ever more complex and interconnected societies – now looking at the option to achieve global social unification. For the most part humans now control their own open window. But if they fail to address the ecological impacts of their own success as well as the restraining influence of the conservative perspective – and the other major dis-integrative influences that it supports, their window may well close.

We know that eventually humans will face the severe disintegrative effects of supervolcanos, glaciation, and the like, and that the planetary calm, which has opened the window for humans to propagate and develop social complexity, will end. And in the very long term, we know that conditions on Earth will change dramatically – to the point where Earth will no longer support humans, or most other current life forms [as Earth trends toward Mars like conditions]. Given these circumstances, the only option for long-term human survival as a species is for humankind to unify globally while the conditions still favor it. It is only in the context of such overall social unification that humans can then collectively commit to the global scale actions that are required to achieve two critical goals: first, to reverse the effects of the negative ecological and climatic impacts that humans have themselves created; and second, to curtail the multiple restraining effects of the conservative perspective and thereby eliminate the option for inter-societal conflict due to socio-political and religious differences. If humans can achieve these two consequences under unification, then they can set the stage to address other major negative influences – overpopulation, pandemics, weapons of mass destruction, adolescent separation and violent fantasies, etc. If humans can sustain these stable conditions under this social unification umbrella for the long term, then they may have the opportunity to escape the confines of Earth and establish a presence on other habitable planets and moons before conditions on Earth will no longer support either complex society or the species itself.

Without global societal unification, the greatest likelihood is that the window of human species opportunity will close as humans continue to squabble as nations over limited resources until they have so dirtied their own “nest” that the consequences bring conservative forces to the fore and return humanity to feudal or tribal conditions. Driven back to simpler societies, it is doubtful that humans would have the opportunity for a second chance at development before their elimination as a result of some inevitable catastrophic planetary or cosmological event.

So, humanity has reached a true crossroads, a tipping point in its development. At this juncture, the fate of humankind may well be in the balance. Humans are the only species to be able to both recognize the critical nature of the situation that they are in and to address it before they lose the opportunity. The Choice is before humankind. And a decision as to how to proceed probably must be made by the end of the 21st century, if not sooner. Given the fact that the great majority of humans still share a 12th century worldview and are not even aware of the choice, or of the basis for it, or of the need to make a relatively prompt decision with respect to it, it is a tall order to think that humanity will achieve the position of being the only species on Earth to really do what it takes to secure a truly long-term destiny for itself. Short of humans being motivated in the direction of global social unification by fear of a threatening, alien species, it seems most likely that the distant archeological record of the cosmos will read that humans became aware that they had the option, but that they were so mired down in their competitive, self-serving earthly affairs that they were not developed enough to take it – until it was too late or until they lost sight of it entirely.