

From my vantage, the three most pressing challenges affecting the future of humanity are educational access, democratic institutional process, and water management. All are fundamental and interdependent for our well being on the planet.

Enculturation is a process inclusive of all cultural beings. Indigenous cultures have acquired and maintained deep histories outlining their abilities to interconnect with one another and their biophysical settings. Western “developed” societies have evolved highly successful enculturation adaptations allowing them to co-opt “underdeveloped” societal institutions, many of which may be fundamental to the well being of those indigenous groups. As an archaeologist, I am most aware of the power of technology in the evolutionary pathways of ancient civilizations. However, the drive and intensity to “invent” new tools to exploit the environment as well as the labors of groups other than ones own has increased dramatically with time. The “light touch” of computer technology on the harvesting of the earth’s resources remains a highly Western domain, though grounded on the same structural principles of previous technologies. The chief difference between the past and the future will be the increasing number of difficulties a State or Nation has in further controlling it. Both the social structure underlying these technologies and the tools themselves have changed our current definitions of education. (Scientific method and process needs to be embraced by most aspects of human institutional development, not just unbridled technological development.) In this context, how does the world in the future teach our collective humanity the significance of past pathways embedded in buried ruins or kept by indigenous folk—pathways cultivated incrementally and based on complex human to environment interactions dependent on reflective and truly creative assessment? Can there be a way of elevating the appreciation of those less technology-driven, knowledge sets that might establish some degree of parity with “developed” views of the world? The solution may be embedded in our accelerating ordeals--the pressing need to reexamine our growing dependence on technological breakthroughs when they may prove inadequate on a planet with rapidly diminishing resources.

The democratic process is the stage necessary for the dialogue implied by a clear exchange of ideas and knowledge between all human stakeholders. Compassion, justice, and wisdom in decision-making are its goals. The United Nations needs to be further heightened as the forum—a role it has successfully played for decades. The global democratic process will need time to evolve away from tribal ethnic divisions and religious fanaticism. Although democratic access is markedly slowed by economic inequities, of course, it is affected strongly by inadequate “education,” again broadly defined. Knowledge of the environment and social acceptance are deeply embedded in most human institutions crossculturally. Respect for the “other” generally comes from close, frequent, and prolong exchange. And this is the potential for computer technology given its unbounded terrain outside any group or nation. If sustainable, it may link the world. Its principal drawbacks are its time byte limitations that prevent the kind of reflections that humans and their groups need to experience for good governing decisions. If electronic technology does not honor the kinds of long-term intellectual and spiritual investments from the past, it will acculturate a new humanity with a certain inhumanity.

Water is the most fundamental component for life. It is more primary than food. As a proxy for all our most primary of resources, how we treat it reveals our attitudes toward the planet and all those that occupy its habitats. We need to treat it better, and by doing so we will treat ourselves better. Water sharing has been a hallmark of all society though history. Water wars are what one learns from Western history, but cooperation is by far the principal outcome of its allocation and consumption. A closer evaluation of the social import of water sharing globally will make this resource more accessible, but it will also allow ways to assess how sustained human cooperation develops and functions. It is hoped by examining the flow of relationships around water management from past and present societal use, insights into how cooperative forms of governance might be revealed, established, and maintained crossculturally. Both democracy and education are parts of this real world material assessment via water management.