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Forward Perspectives



On Our Way to 2050 with Stephan A. Schwartz, Senior Samueli Fellow for Brain, Mind and Healing

by Jonathan Peck, IAF President

This article is the third in a series of conversations that began in February 2010 with "[Reflections on Brain, Mind and Healing Conference](#)" and continued in May 2010 with "[A Conversation with Dean Radin](#)." In August, I spoke with Stephan A. Schwartz, Senior Fellow for Brain, Mind, and Healing at the Samueli Institute. I had read many of his papers available on his [website](#), and found it fascinating that he not only connects with those who go outside the mainstream of the neurosciences, but also has explored futures over many years from a perspective that mindfulness plays a vital role in determining our future.

Stephan Schwartz has developed an image -- a "scenario in process" -- that has emerged from visualizations of the year 2050. The process is an adaptation of a laboratory protocol Stephan developed both independently and in conjunction with physicists Hal Puthoff, Russell Targ, and Ed May, and artist and earlier remote viewer Ingo Swann. Beginning in 1978, Stephan began taking people through a session in which they were asked to go forward in time and to describe the world as they see it in 2050. Several thousand sessions have been conducted and analyzed using a consensus analysis technique somewhat akin to the Delphi process used in business planning. To his surprise, Stephan has found strikingly similar descriptions of what life looks like in America 40 years from now.

According to his session data, an energy transformation has let people spread out across the country "moving into places more pleasant and nurturing." Public transportation is more personalized, and people use boxes of different sizes that store or create energy according to the amount needed. People seem happy in 2050 and life is much more locally oriented. There is locally grown organic food, and participants describe a future of smaller communities with cities being abandoned or turned back into collections of small communities based on shared interests. Some are rigid, some are bohemian; there are religious as well as secular communities. People live more communally in cultures with a new worldview.

People taking part in the scenario process also describe 2050 as a time when 20th century systems we are used to today have changed. For example, people do not physically travel much since they use virtual reality equipment with full sensory feedback that lets them travel in virtual space. (Stephan notes that a team of British academics from York and Warwick Universities are currently working on a virtual reality helmet that provides an experience so convincingly real that they call it "Real Virtuality.") Mass manufacturing has disappeared and has been replaced by customized nanotechnology. Furthermore most financial exchanges are accounted by electronic linkages triggered by your thumbprint or iris, and people may also choose to purchase goods and services through a kind of electronic barter system.

The images Stephan shared in our call reminded me of the "Global Mind Change Scenario" that IAF worked on with leaders in military medicine back in the 1990s. The insight one officer had from that scenario is that we can't get to that future from the

present without passing through a crisis. Thinking that this is a possibility into which my Baby Boomer Generation may be leading our children, I asked Stephan about how people prepare for the period of change he anticipates. He noted that there appears to be a collective presentiment that a very great schism is dividing the past and present from the future. Some fear the coming future and want to go back to the past. Others see the possibility of a better life ahead.

I asked Stephan whether he thinks we are on the way to a 2050 as his participants describe. In short, he does not think so. There are several challenges we will need to address in order to "get on track," so to speak. For starters, looking at the years ahead Stephan recognizes many of the problems IAF described in a 2008 newsletter as "[The Unholy Trinity Scenario](#)." He is also concerned about the rise of multi-national corporations or, as Stephan calls them, "corporate virtual states." According to Stephan, the problem is that these new economic behemoths represent a geopolitical reality that few understand or even realize and that their economic muscle has profound implications for a healthy democracy. "What many people do not see is that our Congress now belongs to corporate virtual states," he noted. "And as the recent oil spill in the Gulf made glaringly obvious, BP is essentially a non-geographical nation that makes its decisions based on profits, not locality."

This last statement reminded me of a conversation I had with a multi-national CEO almost twenty years ago over a beer in Germany. I asked if any of his decisions were influenced by the fact that he was German and his company was headquartered in that country. He told me no; if he made any decisions on that basis he would be replaced by his board.

Stephan is also concerned about the vast and growing disparity in wealth and the negative effect it is having on the American middle class. "While we have seen more millionaires created than ever we are also seeing poverty going up like a rocket," he noted. He thinks that multinational corporations are, at least in part, responsible for this growing gap because "when one's allegiance is to a virtual state and not a geographical one, the middle class is at best a consumer bloc and, at worst, a political nuisance."

Our increasing ability to create what he calls "Homo Superiorus" is yet another issue that has Stephan worried about the future. The unintended consequence he anticipates is more about opportunity rather than the capability itself. He explained it to me this way: "Disparate developments in genetics and medicine are almost unnoticed as an overall trend. We can create a new human sub-species of genetically manipulated individuals who will pass their improvements on to their progeny and are not vulnerable to chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes." He points to the report of a girl born in Britain last year who has been genetically altered so that she will never succumb to genetically based breast cancer. Stephan told me, "I predict that within 50 years it will be possible to order up a child with the I.Q. of an Einstein, the athletic prowess of a Michael Jordan, and the good looks of... name your favorite movie star." However, "naturals" of less affluent countries may not have access to genetic manipulation technologies and, over time, their realities and opportunities would be very different.

So how can we guide decision-making related to these issues? What can we do to get on a path to the kind of 2050 as described by Stephan's research?

He believes that the key to the future we want is mindfulness. This is also the key we have to put in the hands of our children so they can open their minds to the changing world. "If it were in my power to do anything I would teach every child psycho-physical self regulation beginning at the age of six. There would be a mindfulness period for these children every day, because it strengthens the immune system, and improves learning and performance." He offers mindfulness techniques for modern minds at [Crisis Conduct](#). He concludes, "we aren't going to make it until we realize that all life is interconnected and interdependent and that the function of all societies is to make decisions that are compassionate and life affirming."

News & Events

IAF Futurist Addresses Bureau of Prisons Futures Group

On September 29, IAF vice president and senior futurist Eric Meade addressed a group of approximately 80 staff from the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The speech was part of a 3-day training for the Bureau's Forward Thinking program. Attendees will go on to serve on teams throughout the Bureau that will work on critical issues and review policy recommendations to ensure that they are consistent with the trends the Bureau sees in its external environment.

Mr. Meade provided a framework for understanding how corrections and prisons have evolved over thousands of years and how they may evolve in the years to come. He cited a growing concern that our prison system, which incarcerates more people than any other system in the world, is failing its inmates, their communities, and society in general, as well as examples of success at the micro level and in other countries. With these examples in mind, Mr. Meade encouraged audience members to incorporate into their futures work not just the objective trends regarding technology, demographics, etc., but also the subjective aspirations that they and others bring to the future of our corrections system.

Decision-Making

The UK Government does considerable foresight within and across its agencies. The Foresight Program is located in the Office of the Government Chief Scientific Adviser, and "advises government about how to ensure today's decisions are robust to an uncertain future; where important developments might come over the horizon; and how to address future strategic issues facing the UK, particularly where science has an important role to play." The Program does major reports (e.g. on future flooding, infectious diseases, obesity, mental capital and wellbeing, food and farming, migration, and climate change), advises UK agencies on foresight, fosters a futures analysts network, and provides foresight training.

The Foresight Program's annual review highlights their activities and how their work is used by the UK government. In its 2009 review of national and international impact, the Program noted that its report on the future of flooding has influenced the development of the UK Government's 20 year strategy for managing flood risk in England, and informed the government's decision to increase spending by 300 million pounds per year to address increased flooding and coastal erosion. Also, the Program's report on obesity led to an additional investment of nearly 400 million pounds to promote healthy weight over a four year period.

Learn more about the Foresight Program at www.foresight.gov.uk, and access their 2009 annual report [here](#).

IAF Welcomes New Intern, Jeremy Weissman

IAF is pleased to welcome Jeremy Weissman as an intern for the Fall 2010 semester. Jeremy is a recent graduate of the master's program in Philosophy and Social Policy at The George Washington University. He received his undergraduate degree in Philosophy from Washington University in St. Louis in 2005. Over the last year he completed internships at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and Public Citizen. He has strong interests in the future of technology and its ethical, legal and social implications as well as general social justice issues.

Upcoming Events

"Preserving the Planet: A Human Challenge," panelist at [MEXICO ENCOUNTER 2010: Building the Future](#). Clem Bezold. October 20, 2010, at 11:30 a.m. in Mexico City. Program information in English and Spanish is available [here](#).

The Institute for Alternative Futures is a 501(c)3 non-profit research and education organization based in Alexandria, VA. IAF was founded in 1977 by Clem Bezold, Alvin Toffler, and James Dator. IAF has a long track record of using forecasts, scenarios, visioning, and other futures tools to help leading organizations understand the likely, challenging, and visionary developments that may take place in their environments, and to develop robust and visionary strategies that account for the inherent uncertainty of the future. IAF's past clients include the World Health Organization, AARP, American Cancer Society, and Rockefeller Foundation, as well as a wide range of multinational corporations through its for-profit subsidiary, Alternative Futures Associates. To learn more about what we can do for your organization, call us at (703) 684-5880 or write to futurist@altfutures.org.

We'd like to know what you think. Please send us your comments, questions, and things you would like to see included in future issues to futurist@altfutures.org.

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Institute for Alternative Futures, 100 North Pitt Street, Suite 235, Alexandria, Virginia 22314
T: 703.684.5880 F: 703.684.0640 [Map to IAF](#)
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