

David Sloan Wilson: John, welcome. Thanks so much for talking with us.

John Arquilla: Pleasure to be with you.

DSW: Most people that are inspired by Teilhard de Chardin are spiritually oriented, and that might describe you as well. But you come from a very different world of statecraft, along with your co-author, David Ronfeldt. And so, I'd like you to begin by just telling us your story as to how you acquired the profession that you did, and then how you encountered Teilhard in this very different context of strategy and statecraft.

JA: I think I'll answer that in reverse order, because I was exposed to Teilhard before I went into the military and came down this path of international security affairs as a career. But what I remember, having gone to a Catholic high school, I remember one of the readings in my French class was an excerpt from Teilhard's *L'Apparition de L'Homme*, the appearance of men, or better translated as the emergence of men. And that's the first time I saw the term Noosphere. This was 1968. So it was a very tumultuous time and in the appearance of men.

Teilhard, who wrote this in the middle 1950s, was pointing out that humanity had a choice between extinction and transformation. And I thought that was just such a powerful, powerful point. And as we're all old enough here to remember 1968 as a very, very turbulent moment, not just in the United States, but in France and around the world.

It seemed to me that Teilhard offered a great hope for us and suggested that this third story that humankind brings to the world, the idea of a realm of the mind, succeeds the geosphere, the hot rock of the earth as it was formed, and the biosphere when life emerged. And now the true purpose of existence is manifested in the rise of humans who can create a thinking circuit around the world, this Noosphere, this third story of the world. And it offered the possibility of transformation and of creating something of great beauty and harmony, as opposed to what I remember in that same essay, he called mankind's open sore, which was the notion of constant conflict that somehow we lived in an anarchic world where people did what they would, the strong did what they would, and the weak suffered what they must.

And this always struck me as a very, very important alternative. Now, none of this stopped me from being interested in international security matters and wanting to serve my own country, but to serve in a broader sense. And so, my long path, to make it short, was eventually into business. And I began to hang out with executives who were interested in national security, but in a very hard headed way, not politically right or left, just trying to figure out right from wrong.

And so we came to believe in things like arms reductions, and ending the nuclear arms race. And so, I was instrumental. My first public writings and speaking and television appearances were in support of an initiative that in 1982, was put on the ballot in California to call for a nuclear freeze. It's not a pacifist doctrine, just the idea that both the Russians and the Americans had enough nuclear weapons, should stop building more, and then think about reducing them. And there was, at the time, a Marine Colonel, former Marine Colonel by name of Harold Willens, who kept looking over at me. I was in the bond business at the time.

And he kept looking over at me at meetings and he'd say, "Arquilla, why are you in business? You're more suited to this other area." And that led me down a path to eventually getting a doctoral fellowship, a full fellowship at Stanford. And my professor there said to me, as Willens said, "Arquilla, you're a different sort of fellow. You might not fit in well in a traditional university. Why don't you try the RAND Corporation?" The only thing I knew about RAND Corporation was from the Stanley Kubrick film of Dr. Strangelove, where they called it the Bland Corporation.

But as I found out more about RAND, I said, these are my kind of people. And so, I went there and I had the great good fortune to meet David Ronfeldt, who was thinking about the information revolution and how it would affect the way societies were organized. And I, of course, am thinking more about security. And I had been working, one of a small team of RAND analysts, who were sent to work with General Schwarzkopf during Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

And in the course of that work, I realized that the information advantage that we had over the Iraqis made for the possibility of a much less destructive kind of warfare, and something that could while disrupting, disarming the enemy, allow conflicts to be brought to very swift conclusion. So I come back from that, and I read a paper David has written about an organization called Cyberocracy. And as I thought about it, thought about it, I thought, my goodness, there's all kinds of applications for military and security affairs.

So I walked over to his office and stood at the door and said, "David, I just read your wonderful paper, and I just have one word for you, cyberwar." And so, we were off to the races and wrote an article almost 30 years ago, now called "Cyberwar is Coming". And the idea behind it is from the Greek root word, kubernan, to govern or to steer. It's not just about cyberspace, but it's about the use of information to gain advantage or deeper understanding. And it doesn't necessarily mean lots of shooting war. In fact, it can mean a lot less shooting, as we point out in our original article.

So that got me going, and that led us to look beyond simple matters of social organization and armed conflict to the larger question of how the world was going to evolve. And we both realized, David also did his doctoral work at Stanford, it led us both to reexamine and realize that classical notions of realpolitik, which enshrined the whole business of hard power and the use of force when it's in one's interest, were really leading mankind down a self-destructive path.

And so, we came back to Teilhard's ideas. David was familiar with Teilhard as well, and went with this idea of the Noosphere as a foundation for what we came then to call Noopolitik, which is something based on this notion of mankind as a thinking circuit uniting the world and creating alternatives to classic power politics, which Teilhard thought, and we think is really the path to extinction rather than transformation.

So that's really the path that has led both of us for many years, and most recently in our study "Whose Story Wins", where we realize that it is the narrative, the story about any situation—whether armed conflict or diplomatic dispute or commercial interaction—it is the story about that interaction that matters as much as anything else. And the purest essence of information is contained in that narrative. And so, it seems to us the way ahead, moving from power politics to a Noopolitik is very much driven by the sense of what is our story about ourselves and the world. And I think that's one of the reasons the United States has been having so much trouble since the end of the Cold War. We lost our story.

The Cold War was a story about containment of aggression and deterrence of nuclear war. And now, we don't quite know. President Biden just recently talked about the spread of democracy. Well, that's hard. It's a certainly laudable goal, but it's hard to be consistent in its pursuit. And we're certainly not asking for a democracy in Saudi Arabia or Egypt or other places. And so, instead of worrying about things like economic structures and political regimes, to look to the larger glimpses that humanity has given of this thinking circuit in such things as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Helsinki Accords on human rights reached in 1975.

Things like the anti-personnel landmine campaign, for which a nongovernmental organization won a Nobel Prize. For groups like Greenpeace, stopping nuclear testing, even in the face of French covert operatives, blowing up their vessel in the South Pacific when they went out to protest atmospheric nuclear testing. So we hold on to those things. And at the same time, while we try to take a very positive

view of this path toward transformation, we also take a fairly critical view of the dominant ideas about the world today.

The first dominant idea is that Adam Smith's notions of the laissez-faire economic market system is the ultimate evolution of economics. We don't think so. And in part, it's because if you look at problems like the environment, clearly, the market is not going to solve that. The self-interested profit motive is simply going to lead to more and more environmental degradation to the point that the planet is greatly at risk. We had a colleague at RAND in those days who later became head of the State Department policy planning staff, Francis Fukuyama.

And Frank wrote a wonderful book called *The End of History and the Last Man*. It was all about free markets and free peoples. And we felt that, actually, if you were looking at an end of history caused by those things, it was probably going to be more like extinction than transformation.

DSW: Yet he's more or less retracted that, I believe, and gone beyond his own book, in terms in his subsequent work, don't you agree?

JA: I think that if transformation is the right word, certainly, Frank has undergone a transformation in his views that I think is, in many ways, very consistent with what David and I have been arguing for. That's a very positive thing, but it seems that whether he has been converted, his ideas remain dominant among the many in decision making and policymaking. And so, we have been swimming against the stream in the 20 plus years since we advanced the idea of Noopolitik, and find that while there is certainly an institute for Noopolitik over in Russia today, of all places, and these ideas have spread among intellectuals in a number of places, in Latin America and Western Europe as well.

In the United States, we remain very, very much devoted to this older paradigm of the—certainly the free market is something. They use the notion of socialism as a branding. We're going to put this terrible brand on you as a socialist. And Noopolitik does not call for any particular economic system. What it calls for is something that's sustainable, regenerative, and equitable. The biggest problem with market economics is inequity in the world, and Noopolitik approach is very much more moving in the direction of equity.

Also, the basic ideas about the importance of story, if you understand the other story, it's going to be a lot easier to avoid getting into conflict with that other party. Too often, we have absolutist views of our opponents as purely aggressive looking for "world domination." And so, an absolutist looks at China's One Belt One Road initiative and sees a plan for global domination. Whereas someone steeped in Noopolitik looks at it and says, "ah, this is another way to knit the world together."

And as a strategist, by the way, I say, well, look, it makes no sense for China to want to try to conquer vast areas because this Belt and Road Initiative is actually highly vulnerable to disruption at great economic costs to China. So it doesn't make sense to be suspicious of it as an engine of world conquest. The point being that Noopolitik allows you to see the world through a different lens in a different way and to a different purpose.

And if David and I have contributed over the years in any meaningful way, and I think we have with the concepts of cyberwar and the notion of social swarms that can lead to revolutions, like the color revolutions or the Arab Spring, et cetera, big social movements. I think all of it can be knitted together under the rubric of an emerging Noopolitik. But this has the opposition of all the old ways of thinking, the habits of mind and institutional interests of those who hold power in many places in the world.

And so, the movement forward with Noosphere building and the crafting of Noopolitik as a form of diplomacy in the world is something that's probably going to arise and be sustained more by mass publics and non-governmental organizations and the occasional forward-looking country.