

The Phases and Future of the Noosphere: Segment 6

John Arquilla: I prefer to see in the rise of civil society, of the efforts to build and sustain a global commons, and even in the system in which I inhabit many believe in the importance of the global commons and the need that the American role is in many ways to help build that, and to increase the practices of commoning throughout the world.

And I think that's a much better and more Noospheric type task than trying to spread democracy. I have to tell you that governance systems mean a lot less to me. What matters are the larger questions of the quality of human life and the protection of rights. And I think that even in a democracy like the United States, there are questions about human rights underway. George Floyd is a sort of avatar of that question and the movement to help resolve that question.

And so, I really think we have to live in a world as it is and respect that the currents of culture and history cannot and should not be altered by an armed force, and can only be better understood and dealt with on the basis of a Noopolitik approach that is designed to identify common—across regime types of governance—common interests of humanity. And we see this in areas like arms control, both structural nuclear and behavior based, chemical and biological. We see it in the worldwide revulsion toward terrorism.

We see it in many different ways with the rise of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. So let's consider those all poking holes in the darkness and creating more room for light. And again, it took 500 years for the nation-state to supplant the empire. I think it's probably going to take 500 years for the noospherically-oriented social networks, if not to supplant at least to transform the nature of governance under nation-state structures. But I think what we view as today's nation states will probably be much loosened as a form of governance in the coming centuries.

And if anything, what Teilhard leaves me with the most is the sense of having to see ourselves as individuals cells in an organism that's now comprised of seven billion of us. We are stewards. We have a responsibility to both the geosphere and the biosphere that we must undertake and we will be replaced by other cells. And hopefully, if not our genes, at least our memes, our ideas can be transmitted to those new cells in that living, thinking circuit, and will not only propagate, but will increase.

Robert Axelrod did a wonderful study many years ago called *The Evolution of Cooperation*. And indeed, he uses biology as a leading metaphor in his work. And what he found is that even small areas of cooperative behavior tended in an evolutionary sense, and he was able to do this through computer runs of simulated systems, even small areas of cooperation were able to crowd out the darker, more conflictual systems over time. And I think, we three are unlikely, and those living in the world now are unlikely to see the endpoint. But Teilhard was one who believed in the telos, the end of humanity, the purpose in it. And that great purpose is to avoid the patterns of extinction, and really to instantiate the pattern of transformation.

David Sloan Wilson: Well, John, that's a great note to end on. And as for my own ending, I'm a great believer in the concept of catalysis for rates of cultural change, in addition to rates of chemical change. And so, how long this will take in an optimistic stance need not take centuries. I think, actually, it could actually take place very substantially within our lifetimes if you really appreciate the concept of catalysis and apply it to rates of cultural evolution. But of course, time will tell.