



Civilizational Paradigm Change: The Modern/Industrial Case*

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Abstract

*The intent of this paper is to put a fundamental, if not yet urgent, question on the table for further exploration and discussion. We proceed by defining our use of three key concepts: **Paradigm, Culture and Form of Civilization**. Then the concept of paradigm is applied to the concept of a form of civilization. The question is asked, “**Is it plausible to think that we are in a truly rare time during which our dominant form of civilization (Modern/Industrial) is disintegrating and a truly new form of civilization is beginning to emerge?**” The significance of a positive answer is briefly considered for serious conversations about our actions intended to nudge us towards a transition to a new society are briefly considered.*

1. Introduction

I have long been convinced of the vital importance of the mental maps, images and metaphors through which we experience, make sense of and plan our lives as persons, groups, cultures and whole forms of civilization. The prime reason our sense-making matters is that, contrary to any form of realism, we are animals that construe our world and we live within and as a part of a reality that is itself construable. A second reason is that human persons only occur within cultures. This is important because all cultures not only construe reality in some ways and not others, but do in ways that are largely unseen by those who constitute the culture at a given time and place. It follows that all cultures are both a human construct and a cosmic bet that their grip on reality is sound and reliable enough for their grandchildren to cope with the emerging conditions of their time and place.

Sadly, we know that the widespread and deeply-held human assumption about the reliability of one’s culture’s grip on reality is not always warranted. In 2014, a small but growing minority are increasingly worried about the human future.^{1,2}

It follows, especially in turbulent times such as our own, that it is wise for every culture to make special efforts to become consciously aware of the cognitive content, emotional freighting and logic of the metaphors, images and mental maps by which it imagines, shapes and experiences its world and itself. Great danger lurks when we insist on continuing to construe life in unconsciously inherited ways. As Will Rogers put it, “*You can’t trust your eyes when your imagination is out of focus.*”

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The contribution I seek to make to the conversation about our journey to a new society has four parts. First, I shall offer my understanding of a *paradigm*. Second, I shall offer my understanding of a *form of civilization* and argue that this concept is now needed if we are to make reliable sense of the dynamics of the 21st Century, let alone human history. Third, I shall ask if there is any reasonable chance that ours is a time of *civilizational paradigm change*. Fourth, I shall offer my understanding of the core characteristics of our *Modern/Industrial form of civilization*. Such an understanding is needed if there is any reasonable chance that the dominant way we have come to construe life over the past 1,000 years is in long-term disintegration and decline. In such a situation, we must give up the illusion that a better version of the world we know will serve us well in a truly new future. We need to be able to assure ourselves that those things we take to exemplify a new civilizational paradigm, to be a sign that we are moving towards a new society, are not just freshly painted versions of yesterday.

2. Paradigm

The OED offers both ‘pattern’ and ‘exemplar’ in its definition of ‘paradigm.’³ This implies that both features – a pattern and an example of the pattern – are required for a complete understanding of a paradigm.

For example, being told by one’s mother that one must finish cutting the lawn before one can eat supper, may be seen, at least by the mother, as paradigmatic of the general and desirable pattern that one should finish what one starts before taking on another task.

As so many have noticed over the years, particularly Margaret Masterman, the concept of ‘paradigm’ is inherently fuzzy.⁴ Therefore, I shall note five things in order to be clear about how I use this term.

First, since they are not the same thing, it is necessary to distinguish patterns of the imagination from patterns of thought and both of these from patterns of action. All are patterns. Therefore, a paradigm – a pattern and an exemplar – can exist at each of these levels. But such paradigms would exist at quite different levels of generality. Typically, human imagination is seen as being at a higher, or more general, level of mind than human thought. This view is reflected and reinforced by the litany that “*as we see the world, so we will think it and think it through. As we think the world, so we will act within it. As we act in the world, so we set ourselves up for future success or failure.*”

The litany makes it clear that there is a hierarchy of what may be characterized as degrees of change or transformation. From the least to the most transformative the hierarchy runs like this:

- New actions that reflect and reinforce familiar patterns of thought and imagination.
- New actions combined with new patterns of thought that reflect and reinforce familiar patterns of the imagination.
- New actions combined both with new patterns of thought and new patterns of the imagination.

These levels of generality must be taken in account. It may be helpful if we learn to see, think and act routinely in these terms:

- PC_A stands for paradigm change solely at the level of human action.
- PC_T stands for paradigm change solely at the level of human thought.
- PC_I stands for paradigm change solely at the level of human imagination.
- PC_{TA} stands for paradigm change at both the levels of thought and action.
- PC_{IT} stands for paradigm change at both the levels of imagination and thought.
- PC_{ITA} stands for paradigm change at all three levels – imagination, thought and action.

I have argued elsewhere that in a time when change is occurring at all three levels, “thinking outside the box” will not get the job done because one’s new thinking will still reflect and reinforce one’s inherited imagination.⁵ In my view, this hierarchy does not imply that only changes of action, thought and imagination are to be valued. However, it is to say that until our faltering steps towards a new way of living reflect how we see, think and act, with reasonable consistency, the job of becoming a new society will not be complete. At the least, talking glibly about moving towards a new society as if we know what we are doing when only one level of human life is involved is inappropriate and unwise.

“The disintegration of the existing order is a prerequisite for a new order to emerge.”

Second, it should be noted that the dynamics of transformative paradigmatic change can work both from the inside-out and from the outside-in. To take the latter case, there are many stories of a new imagination emerging in ways that shatter the existing patterns of imagination, thought and action. “*She loves me*” and “*His character is not a biological function of his skin colour*,” are but two examples. In such cases, it is almost always inappropriate to ask of the person who has just had such an insight, “*What are you going to do now?*” Most often the person with the insight has no idea. It takes time to wrap one’s mind and heart around new realities and let them sink in to the point that one can begin to think through what new paths one must learn to travel.

Third, any culture that has even a reasonable chance of success has to be reasonably coherent in two ways. One way to measure coherence is the degree to which the key elements at any of the three levels are consistent with one another and mutually reinforcing. A second measure of coherence is the degree to which there is a coherent line of sight from the patterns of imagination, through those of thought, to those of physical action.

Fourth, any journey to a new society, provided the “new” is truly a new paradigm of human civilization, will experience a temporary and profound increase in the degree of incoherence not only in its society, but in all societies that are exemplars of its inherited form of civilization. The disintegration of the existing order is a prerequisite for a new order to emerge. Does this insight help us make sense of the largely unanticipated increase in disordered societies globally? Sadly, cultural disintegration does not entail the emergence of a new order. Sometimes societal death is the end of the road.

3. Forms of Civilization

I have come to distinguish between a culture and its current *form of civilization*. For me, this distinction is critical. By ‘*culture*’ I mean not *arts and culture*, but the totality of a

people's ways of being – their seeing, thinking and acting. However, for me, it is not sufficient to use the category of *culture* to capture the deepest and most profound transformations that are afoot within and among us today. Much as cultural differences are not to be overlooked or taken lightly, they do not capture the deepest dynamics of what is going on among humans in the 21st Century. To get at these deeper dynamics and changes I use the phrase '*form of civilization.*'

By 'form of civilization' I point to the deep and largely unconscious patterns and boundaries of the imagination, thought and practice that characterize a culture that is an exemplar of a particular form of civilization. In this sense a society in any given place and time is a paradigmatic exemplar of some form of civilization. This implies that *at any given time in human history, if we are to make reliable sense of what has gone on, is going on and may well go on, we must understand both the unique character of every culture and the wider, deeper and longer frame of reference each culture exemplifies, namely, its form of civilization.*

I note that a form of civilization is not bound by geography, but by time. Therefore, it is a mistake to define civilizational differences, at least as I use the term, as a function of geographic differences. Today's differences between East and West are real, but they hang on a time shift, not on different locations on the planet. More specifically, in 2014 there are real and noticeable differences between Eastern cultures and modern Western cultures, but the difference is not at root an East VS West difference. Rather, the difference has been created by the fact that over the last 1,000 years the West has experienced a civilizational paradigm change, while Eastern cultures, now generally committed to this transformation, are not yet far enough into it to understand how they themselves are changing.

I readily acknowledge that mine is a stipulated definition of '*civilization.*' It differs from the vast array of senses commonly given to this term. Since there is today no coherent and common sense of what is meant by '*civilization*' – rather its usage is a dog's breakfast – I feel free to stipulate how I shall use the term. I follow this path, of course, because, at the least it clarifies how I use the term. In addition, my usage allows me to make more sense of the past, present and future and do so more reliably than any other usage.

By distinguishing between a culture and its form of civilization at any given time, we can identify cultural changes that occur within its current civilizational frame of reference and distinguish them from those changes that indicate that a culture is growing out of its inherited civilizational frame and possibly into another. *This distinction is vital because these two types of cultural change have very different dynamics and very different risks for truly tragic outcomes if mishandled. Therefore, very different strategies are required to handle each type of change successfully.* Sadly, this point is not well or widely understood. I am suggesting that we must not focus only on the evolution of different cultures as if this is the most important game in town. Such a focus systematically misses a good deal of the length, breadth, depth and drama of the challenges and opportunities we face in the 21st century. To ignore the larger

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An example may help.

Consider the statement made in a powerful Keynote address in 2009 in Essen, Germany at a conference on Climate Change as Cultural Change by my friend and colleague, Thomas Homer-Dixon: “*I have come to realize that the solutions to our climate-change crisis will ultimately reside at the level of culture.*”⁶ Most who hear this statement will hear it as Homer-Dixon intended it – as a call to include in our attention not merely the technology of climate change but also the much wider and more powerful level of the shape and evolution of the whole culture. While I wholly agree with this call and his use of ‘culture’, I would add to his statement, “*and the form of civilization it manifests.*” In my view, the changes he is pointing to and calling for not only entail a transformation of our *culture*, but the evolution of our commonly-shared Modern/Industrial form of civilization into a new *form of civilization*. It may be that our future hangs on understanding and operationalizing this difference. If it does, the distinction matters. Put bluntly, in my view we must sustain success not only as a culture, but as a truly new form of civilization. I note that the aspiration of consciously evolving our Modern/Industrial form of civilization into a new form of civilization is not yet on the agenda of any significant body on this planet.

As I consider our history as a species, I find it useful to distinguish five forms of civilization. I will list them in the order in which they emerged. Only the first four are now exemplified in actual human cultures and societies. First, Small-group Nomadic forms. I note that this was the only form for 95% of our life as a species. Then roughly 10,000 years ago Settled Regional forms of civilization emerged. These were followed in a few places by Settled Empires. Fourth, over the last 1000 years, the Modern/Industrial form has been developed. Fifth, we may now be in a long transition to the next form of civilization. I call it the Consciously Co-Creative form of civilization.

This understanding implies that any given *form of civilization* is not static and forever. If the conditions are right, a new form of civilization can emerge from an existing form. If this were not so, there would still only be one form of civilization on Earth. For good and ill, this is obviously not the case. Consider for example, that the French, among many other Europeans, have lived in the first four forms of civilization, although, of course, they did not know themselves as *French* 20,000 years ago. This evolution suggests that we may well find traces of prior civilizational forms in any culture that is no longer Small group Nomadic. I note that the Hebrew/ Christian tradition also runs through these four forms. The evolution is from “*A wandering Aramean was my father*” to “*We shall have a King like the others,*” through the Roman Catholic church of Settled Empire and on through the Reformation to Modern/Industrial main-line Protestant churches. Americans and Canadians, on the other hand, save for our aboriginal cousins, have lived our whole lives within the Modern/Industrial form of civilization. By 1500 the foundation was well laid and much of the edifice already designed, if not yet embodied. Does this account, in part, for our frequent misreading of and impatience with those who still know and live by earlier forms?

In any case, it is clear to me that the diversity we celebrate is diversity within the Modern/Industrial frame. Those who would challenge this frame are marginalized, not lionized.

In this perspective, what we call “development” can be seen as an attempt to move a given culture from its inherited form of civilization into the Modern/Industrial form. That this fact is not well understood, and even often denied, is a major source of confusion both for folks in “developing” countries and those of us in Modern/Industrial societies.

“Is it even plausible to imagine, think and act as if ours is one of the truly rare times in history during which a civilizational paradigm change is occurring?”

If I had time, I would argue that this perspective can re-frame our well-intended but almost wholly misbegotten ways of creating public policy about human security, social welfare, innovation, multiculturalism, Islam, globalization, the clash of civilizations, development and East/West differences. One policy implication is clear – we should stop promising persons in any existing culture, including our own, that they have the right to maintain their present form of civilization forever. Whatever our intentions, this is a promise we simply *cannot* keep. Given the actual dynamics of human life on this planet, no way of life as either a culture or a form of civilization is non-negotiable and forever. On this point, those who continue to claim otherwise are not only wrong, but wrong-headed.

4. The Question We Must Learn to Ask and Answer

We are now in a position to ask and briefly explore what may well be the most important questions for humanity in the 21st Century: *“Is it even plausible to imagine, think and act as if ours is one of the truly rare times in history during which a civilizational paradigm change is occurring?” “When we talk of a ‘transition to a new society’ must we also learn to see, explore, understand and respond to a transition to a new form of civilization?” “Are those who worry about the long decline of our Modern/Industrial world essentially right in what they assert, even if, by and large, they are still largely blind to the signs of emergence of the next form of civilization?”*^{7,8}

This short piece is not the place to respond to these questions. However, I note three things.

First, this question has been at the centre of my life as a futures-oriented societal researcher, policy wonk and activist for five decades. My own response to the above questions is, “Yes.”

Second, these questions are not yet securely in our minds or on our lips. As far as I know, no significant organization or research centre in any sector is dedicated to raising and exploring the above questions. At best, only half of the view advocated here – that our Modern/Industrial form of civilization has no long-term future – is hesitantly recognized. Even the boldest of political parties or business associations are wholly unwilling to gently suggest more than the view that *while we may have trouble, long-term, sustaining our Modern/Industrial way of living is the only way to frame our situation in the early 21st Century*. Sadly, even the vast bulk of the sustainability conversation has been captured by those who presume

that if we apply enough capital and science-based technological innovation within a Modern/Industrial frame, our future is secure.

Third, the frame of civilizational paradigm change changes almost everything. It makes sense of the fact that our normal patterns of sense-making no longer enable us to make reliable sense of our world. It allows us to face, rather than deny, the facts of the long-term disintegration of the world as we have known it. It also allows us to come to terms with the increasing disorder caused by the intensification of our own efforts to impose order by the means that are consistent with our Modern/Industrial mindset. Most important, it changes the story we are in from one of either outright denial or the embrace of never-ending decay to one of facing a challenge that no other humans have had to consciously embrace – their conscious and active participation as agents in the emergence of a new form of civilization. This understanding provides a firm basis for a call to active service that is the psychological equivalent of a call to arms. Yes, the odds are long. One may be pessimistic about the chances we have. But hope is warranted.

Hope is also conditional. It is justified only if we are willing to pay the price of learning to see our situation and our role within it for what they are and then respond to what we are coming to know. This will take degrees of courage, insight and love that are truly rare. Yet we know that to call us to any other response is a betrayal of all that we hold dear.

5. The Modern/Industrial Form of Civilization

My next task is to sketch my understanding of the core character of our modern/Industrial form of civilization. Having an adequate grasp of who we have been and mostly still are is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for a successful transition to a truly new society that exemplifies a new paradigm of civilization. The reason, as noted above, is that, openly and consciously, we must come to be able to distinguish between those new things that are truly new and those that merely reinforce our existing habits, if with greater subtlety. Reflexive consciousness is required because as we have learned from every liberation movement *imaginations we do not know we have, have us*.

It is useful to remember that the modern/Industrial form of civilization grew out of pre-Industrial forms of settled civilization, namely Regional Empires and Regional Settlements. Assuming that the modern/Industrial form did not break in every respect with what went before, it is useful to ask, *“Which defining characteristics of the earlier forms of civilization were inherited by the modern/Industrial form and which were developed as truly novel?”*

My response is that one of the two deepest defining characteristics of Modern/Industrial civilization is a continuation from the past. I refer to the deeply-held sense that ultimate reality is timeless and changeless; that truth, if reliably known, is the same for all persons in all places in all times; that the logic of contradiction and contrariety both hold; and that certainty is a mark of true knowledge. It follows that in a classic modern/Industrial culture life will be organized, both inside and out, hierarchically. The practical reason is that for large scale purposes someone must be in charge. The ultimate reason, of course, is that in order to get organized as humans we must assure ourselves that we have reliable access to eternal truth, even if only through a great chain of being, with a god-king as the key link between heaven and earth.

This hierarchical sense can be seen in Ken Boulding's doggerel, "*In every organization from root to crown, ideas flow up and vetoes flow down.*" Command and control based on one's role and place in the hierarchy are of the essence. It follows that the whole point of human life is to learn to live on earth in the ways that best reflect and reinforce our knowledge of the unchanging eternal. *As above, so below.* Obedience to the eternal is also built in. As Pope Paul IV, the first Pope to visit the USA, reminded Americans as he flew out of Detroit, even if one disagrees with him, to be Roman Catholic is to understand the requirement that to be faithful to Christ is to obey him as Pope. Given the presupposition of static reality and timeless truth, this claim is reasonable and to be expected. Finally, I note that a sense of hierarchy is not Western or Eastern. It shows up in every culture that exemplifies the Regional Empire, Regional Settled or modern/ Industrial forms of civilization. Thousands of years ago, once the logic of a settled life took hold of our ancestors, truth has always been found higher up the hierarchy – beyond one's pay grade.

"In what our culture produces, whether it is art, philosophy, military strategy or political and economic development, there are no accidents; everything a culture produces is equally a symbol of that culture." – Northrop Frye

But to the last several Popes' consternation, the West did not remain wholly faithful to the Regional Empire form of civilization into which the church was born. We developed a powerful new insight that came to deeply define the modern/Industrial West. While we kept the sense of static reality and the hierarchy that goes with it, over the last 1,000 years the West has cut a new swath in history. We in the West moved slowly and incoherently from our pre-modern/Industrial default sensibility of a deep holistic grasp on reality to the sense we now still largely take for granted, at least for most public and private purposes: *whole systems and entities are made of pieces, that are themselves made of pieces. It is pieces all the way down. Further, the pieces are ultimately more real than the wholes they, when taken together, constitute.*

In sum, the holistic grasp on reality that marks all forms of civilization prior to the Modern/Industrial age was fragmented by the Modern/Industrial into stand-alone pieces. The roots of this journey run very deep. It can be seen in 11th Century architecture. By the thirteenth century time was fragmented enough to demand mechanical clocks; reality was fragmented by Aquinas who authorized us to think about the earth apart from God. I know that Aquinas is not normally thought to be a father of our Modern/Industrial world, but he is. Once on the path of fragmentation, we soon learned to think of physics without philosophy or even the history of physics, fact without value, the secular apart from the sacred, commerce without ethics, nations as sovereign entities, and solipsistic individuals as sufficiently primordial to require a social contract in order to have any relationships with or obligations to each other or to a common societal authority.

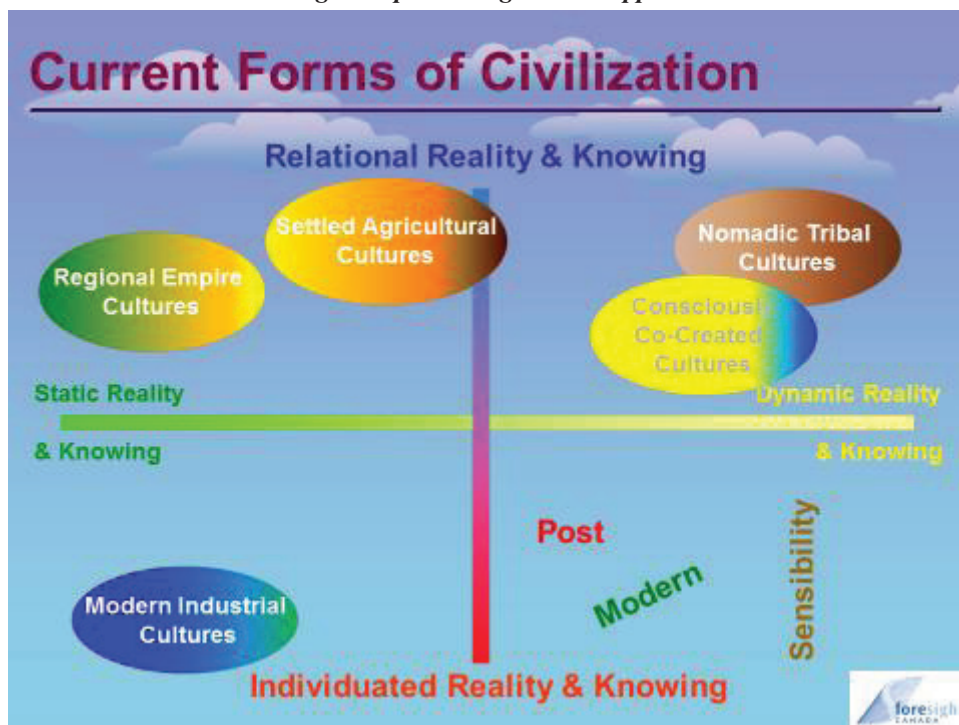
I note in passing that all of these developments, at best, are puzzling, if not offensive, to those with a pre-modern/Industrial sensibility. Most would pay it no heed if we did not have

more money and better weapons as an outcome of our sensibility. We would be well-served to reconsider the rebellion of some parts of Islam against the West in these terms. We would learn things about ourselves and our situation that we need to know.

This evolution from wholeness to fragments can also be seen in Western art, architecture, weaponry and philosophy. As Northrop Frye observed, *“In what our culture produces, whether it is art, philosophy, military strategy or political and economic development, there are no accidents; everything a culture produces is equally a symbol of that culture.”*⁹ Again, I would add, *“and its form of civilization.”*

If you wish to take the time, I invite you to work with a few others and answer this question, *“What are the major features of a culture that assumes and exemplifies a sensibility that is the product of the tension between these two deeply defining ontological/epistemological assumptions about reality: One, that reality is static, not dynamic. Two, that reality is made up of and can be known by individual persons as separate pieces – pieces which then can be added together to result in some form of wholeness?”*. This space can be seen in the bottom left quadrant of Figure 1.

Figure 1: Forms of Civilization as Determined by Ontological/Epistemological Presuppositions



I have facilitated this exercise for over 30 years. It is my experience that a variety of possible cultures, all of which embody and reinforce the Modern/Industrial form of civilization, can be inferred from the tension and interaction between these two fundamental ontological and epistemological assumptions. I note that no well-trained Jesuit would be surprised or

bothered by this assertion. I note further, that the resulting diverse cultures are all isomorphic with our Modern/Industrial form of civilization.

One way to experience the sensibility that has come to define our Modern/Industrial form of civilization is to walk through any art gallery with a decent collection of European art from roughly 1200 to today. You will see the slow transformation that marks our journey as a form of civilization along the left hand side of the above figure, from top to bottom.

I shall offer, then, my understanding of some of the core elements of the mythology that have come to dominate and shape the Modern/Industrial form of civilization, and therefore, all Modern/Industrial cultures. For me this is not a random list. Rather the following features are entailed in the interaction of the two deep assumptions that underlie our way of being in the world. Given variations in time, geography or among cultures these features will not all show up to the same degree or in the same ways. In this sense some Modern/Industrial cultures can be said to be more or less Modern/Industrial than others. But these features are present as defining features of all cultures that can be characterized as developed Modern/Industrial cultures.

- A Modern/Industrial culture will have a reductionist/materialist bias – physical realities will be seen as not merely more obvious, but as more real than subtle realities that touch us gently. In the *Rock, Paper, Scissors* game of such societies, numbers always trump metaphors and anecdotes. On this point, every Chamber of Commerce agrees with Karl Marx.
- In human terms, individual persons are seen as the primary units of reality and each individual is complete in him or herself.
- Nation states are spaces where persons who are culturally similar live together. Each nation state is a sovereign unit unto itself and must not be intruded on by those external to it, not even by the UN's recently declared "*responsibility to protect*."
- Within the culture, life is divided into public and private realms – matters that are shared and common to all (the public realm) are divided from those that are unique to each individual (the private realm).

In the public realm, the same rules must apply to all without discrimination. The price that must be paid for each of us legitimately to have an idiosyncratic private life is that our subjectivity cannot be taken into public space as if it belongs there. In public space, we are functions, not persons. *Don't bring it to the office*. For example, in Canada's largest province you cannot know anything about my private persona for public purposes. If you want to hire me it is illegal to ask me what schools I attended. The reason is that I may have gone to St. Michael's and then you might think I am Roman Catholic – a private matter that by law you may not know for public purposes.

- Public, *common to us all*, space is itself divided into self-contained sectors in some way or other. One type of division is the now common Triple Bottom Line with its economic, environmental and social sub-sectors.
- Institutions in every public sector are organized hierarchically. Those few that have merged recently that are not organized this way are seen to be paradigm breakers.

- Economic matters trump all others. Their primary function is to increase material wealth. They do this primarily by increasing the scope and efficiency of material throughput. Within economics, money dominates all other economic considerations. Efficiency, therefore, trumps effectiveness and relevance.
- Human life is seen as a production/consumption function. The good life is defined and measured by one's "*command over goods and services.*" Education is valued because a well-educated person has better access to a job, without which one has no access to goods and services. A well-functioning economy is a consumer-based economy. Social policy is primarily about how much access to goods and services the poor and those with special needs should have.
- The bias to reductionism results in a bias to reify human affairs into separate and self-contained realms, e.g. politics, commerce, science, religion, art. Non-overlapping magisteria (NOMA) between these sectors is an expected and widely-held perspective.
- The bias to experience and treat reality in pieces is legitimized by a host of boundaries. One outcome is that all matters beyond the boundaries of our present concerns and purposes are defined as 'externalities' that we can safely afford to ignore for the purposes at hand.
- Critical-mindedness is required in public life. Deep reflexivity is restricted to private life. Even there it is optional.

6. Conclusion

I will conclude by dealing with a matter that may be arising within you. I have said that we need to learn to see, explore, think through, understand and factor into our commitments and decisions the fact that in 2014 there are now four main forms of civilization exemplified on the planet – Small-group Nomadic form, Settled Regional form, Settled Empire form, and our Modern/Industrial form. I have also said that we in the West exemplify the Modern/Industrial form. And I have defined the Modern/Industrial form on the basis of two deep ontological/epistemological assumptions – static and piecemeal reality. Yet, you may have noticed that today's world is also marked by dynamic systems and complexity, not static pieces. In what sense, then, are we in the West still truly Modern/Industrial?

This is a good and important question. My reading of the data suggests the following sketch of a response.

First, I wholly agree that in 2014 there are many emerging features of our lives and societies, including for example, the category of emergence, that are incompatible with our still being seen as a classic and pure form of a Modern/ Industrial culture and form of civilization. Apparently, there is evidence that we are already growing, at least to some degree, into something that is not just a new culture, but a new form of civilization. This, of course, is one of the possibilities to which I want to point. That this notion should come to play a major role in our public policy is an aspiration I wish to mindfully and heartily endorse.

Second, there is evidence that a culture does not shift from one form of civilization suddenly and completely, but slowly, unconsciously and incoherently. This implies that at any

given time in history we have to ask of any given culture, “*To what extent is it deeply coherent?*” By ‘coherent’ I mean that the cognitive contents of the fundamental structures and patterns of its physical artifacts, thought patterns and imagination are essentially aligned and isomorphic; that they reflect and reinforce the same dominant mythic form of civilization. I raise the question of coherence because there are limits to how incoherent a culture can become and still be a well-functioning culture. Since the core of globalization is in fact Modern/Industrial Westernization, much of the societal disorder now readily seen around the world can be read in this light. There is a clash of civilizations going on around the world, but it is not the one that we have commonly taken it to be. See, for example, Samuel Huntington.¹⁰

Third, regarding any given society at any given time we need to learn to distinguish between two profoundly different types of diversity and incoherence. The first type of diversity arises because a society encounters artifacts, thoughts and mythic structures that, while different from its own, are from cultures that also exemplify the same form of civilization. Up until roughly 10,000 years ago, this type of diversity was the only type experienced by our species. Today, I think of encounters between the Mohawk and the Cree, or the modern Greeks and modern Germans.

The other type of diversity arises from encounters with cultures that exemplify a form of civilization different from one’s own. I note again that we now have four forms of civilization encountering one another. I think of encounters today between Americans and Chinese or European-rooted Canadians and Canadian Aboriginals. By and large these types of encounter do not go well. In large part this is because, while each can see that the other has a quite different culture, as yet, neither has the capacity to understand, much less grasp the significance of, the differences in their forms of civilization. Therefore, those engaged in such encounters are prone to systematically misconstrue the other and therefore the encounter with the other.

Finally, I must reinforce the fact that one can misunderstand one’s own experiences of cultural change without leaving home; without encountering others from cultures that exemplify a different form of civilization. The reason, of course, is that inappropriate conduct will almost certainly be an outcome when one is unable to discern which changes in one’s self and one’s culture are within the paradigm of one’s inherited form of civilization and which are paradigm bursting at the level of our form of civilization.[†]

Any serious journey that bills itself as a *transition to a new society* must keep these things in mind.

Or so it seems to me.

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Notes

1. Rachael Beddoe, et al: “Overcoming systemic roadblocks to sustainability: The evolutionary redesign of worldviews, institutions, and technologies.” *Proceeding of the National Academy of Science* (USA) vol. 106, no. 8, February 24, 2009.

[†] For an application of this thought to our modern understanding of recreation see Ruben Nelson: “New Maps for New Times: A Fresh Look at Persons and Community.” A paper prepared for the 2012 National Recreation Summit, Lake Louise Alberta <http://lin.ca/resources/new-maps-new-times-fresh-look-persons-and-communities-de-nouvelles-cartes-pour-une>

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