

Toward An Epistemology of Peace

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| | GROUP | INDIVIDUAL | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------|
| INFORMATION BASED (plenty) | Hunters and Gatherers | ??? | PEACE |
| MATERIAL BASED (scarcity) | Iran, USSR, Asia, Eastern Europe | U.S.A. and Western Europe | WAR |
| | OPPRESSION OF THE INDIVIDUAL | INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM | |

In the giant board game of world survival we need to understand the perceptual space of each of the players.

Right now, the United States and Western Europe is in the lower right hand box of the matrix. Iran, Somalia, Serbia, Bosnia, most of the former USSR and Asia are in the lower left hand box of the matrix. The few remaining groups of hunter/gatherers are in the upper left hand box of the matrix. And no one has gotten to the upper right hand corner.

We move from one box to another, through shifts in our perceptions, of how the world works. Each box represents a different perceptual world.

We, as a species, started in the upper left hand box as Hunter/Gatherers.

Hunter/Gatherers live in an information based economy. They make their living by knowing when and where a resource will be ready to use, rather than by owning it. Food and other material goods are shared by all in the group. An exceptionally good hunter or story teller may be listened to, but he or she doesn't get anything more, materially, than any other person. Material goods are more important as information markers, for maintaining social relationships, than as things to keep. Amongst the Bushmen of Africa's Kalahari desert - the !Kung San - if someone gives a gift it won't be kept for more than three weeks before it is given away again. For most hunter/gatherers the word for the group is also the word for human. This reflects a world view where, not only is the group more important than the individual but members of the group are, in some sense, more human, or more important, or worthy than those outside the group. However, this does not lead to war because there is nothing to fight over.

The movement from hunting/gathering to agriculture followed the extinctions of the large herd herbivores at the end of the last ice age. The extinctions must have caused massive famines and disease amongst the hunters who relied on these animals. I suggest that this shifted peoples' perception from a world of plenty to a world of scarcity. It suddenly became important to have food which could be kept and stored. It wasn't enough to know where something grew or where animals would pass, it became necessary to own, to control, resources. The perception of the survivors was that the world had gone from a world of plenty to a world of scarcity. Eden was no more. They moved from the upper left hand box to the lower right hand box.

The shift from information based to material goods based economies was a consequence of a change in man's relation to material reality.

If you live in the world represented by the lower left hand box you have the perception that members of your group are somehow more human, or more worthy, or more important, than those outside your group. You take the meaning in your life from your place in your group, and you base your security on material goods. It then becomes a good strategy for one group to fight to take the material goods away from other groups. In this kind of world information is important to acquire more material goods. In this kind of world it makes sense to keep information secret for material reasons, just as in the hunter/gatherer economy it made sense to share material goods for informational (social) reasons.

In both the left hand boxes the group is more important than the individual and survival is based on group membership. Also, in both left hand boxes, those who have the best information tend to lead the group in dividing up resources and tasks. However in the upper box, because there is little emphasis on material goods, the resources and the tasks are only a small part of life. In the lower box, because there is a great deal of emphasis on material goods, the leader becomes a ruler.

We can see that this fits Iraq today. We can also see that the Sadaam using chemical weapons against the Kurds makes sense, in this world, since the Kurds are **not** his people and are, therefore, less important, less worthy than the members of his group. This is also the perception of the peoples of the USSR, and Eastern Europe, where being a member of an ethnic group, or, in the immediate past, a member of the communist party, has been more important in determining your economic and social welfare, than your ability to innovate or to produce.

Most people, since the invention of agriculture, have thought like people in Serbia or Iraq today. They were in the lower left hand box.

How, then, did Western Europe manage to get from the lower left to the lower right hand box? Or, how does a individual world view emerge from a group world view? I said above that the shift from an information based economy to material based economy was a consequence of a change in peoples' relation to material reality.

The shift from group value, to individual value was a consequence of a change in the control of information access.

In the lower left hand box information is a means of control and a way to obtain material goods. This is a reason to keep information private. The invention of writing (the first information technology) made information into a material good, a "thing" which could be stored and used by the elites of the society to extend their control of lower classes.

The invention of the printing press (the second major information technology) made information free in the same way as PC's have made computing free in comparison to the world of mainframes. It ended elite control of information access and allowed individuals to use information to increase their material wealth through innovation in the material sphere (science, agriculture, and engineering), and innovation in the social sphere (the organization and administration of government, business, education and religious institutions).

In this perceptual world, in the lower right hand box, our world, information is seen as a "thing", as major way of increasing material wealth, and is still seen as a thing to be kept private, to control. But, the release of information from elite to general control, allowed each individual the possibility of becoming a controlling entity rather than a controlled entity. Therefore, it encouraged the perception that each individual could find a way to increase his or her likelihood of survival through **individual** efforts rather than through reliance on the group.

The astute reader may observe that the press was invented in China before it was invented in Europe and it didn't have the same effect.

In most cultures, throughout history, including China, the political arm is in charge of taxation, and military protection, the religious is in charge of administration, information and education. The development of hierarchical structure of all the functions of governance - political, military and religious - occurs in parallel. There is a balance between them and an alliance to remain in power, and in control of the people. In this context it makes sense to restrict information access to those who are in power. When the press was invented in China it was used to benefit the existing elites and was controlled by them.

In Europe, after the fall of Rome, the Christian Church and the political structure of Europe were not allied. The barbarians who conquered Rome did not have a tradition of administration and centralization. They were charismatic military leaders not administrators.

The Church still had the form developed under Rome - a highly efficient hierarchical administration. It was economically independent because it supported itself through direct taxation (tithes). And, it was the only institution capable of controlling information.

Because there were no competing religions, and because it did not need the political arm for taxation, the Church benefitted from the wealth of the people. The pre-reformation, European, Church encouraged innovation, education, science and technology.

Evidence of the Church's attitude toward information is that Saints are pictured in religious paintings of the period holding technological inventions. Churchmen like Fra Luca Paccioli (aka. Fibonacci) invented double entry book keeping and acted as tutors to merchants. Monasteries functioned the way Agricultural Extension Services do today.

The Church in the west did not control information access. The press, with moveable type, was invented in this context.

With the Protestant reformation the Church lost its monopoly position. It no longer automatically benefitted from the wealth of the laity. Churchmen suddenly realized, free information access favored a literate population, who judged things for themselves - including religion. The Church responded by banning and burning books, threatening and torturing intellectuals, printers and dissenters - the Spanish Inquisition being the most infamous. But, by then it was too late. Information access had become "fast, cheap and out of control". The evolution of the individual had begun.

The epistemology which values the group over the individual is inherently economically and socially static. This is because membership is the highest value. Membership is based on birth. This validates the view that class distinction is of value because one is born into a class - god wanted you to be where you are. The only exception is based on religion - god wanted you elsewhere.

The shift, from valuing the group over the individual, to valuing the individual over the group, is an evolutionary process, which is not complete even in the west. We still judge on the basis of gender, race and religion but this is becoming less and less acceptable.

The shift occurs when individuals can control their economic destiny through freedom of information access. In today's world that means freedom of all kinds of information technology, such as press, telephone, copiers, computers, and fax, because they are the technologies necessary for the circulation of information and the generation of wealth.

The value of the individual is the first step in the evolution of an epistemology of peace, because it prompts the questioning of any war - Is this war worth my life, or the life of my son, daughter, husband, or wife.

A world view which values the group over the individual can only ask if a war can be won, and if it will benefit the group, nation, ethnic group, race, or class, and is based on the tacit assumption that those on the other side are less worthy, or less important, or somehow less than human. They are gooks, slope heads, devils, or animals. It is what allows us to kill them, rape them, or take their goods.

If we want to make a start on ending war, forever, we have to bring the rest of the world into the lower right hand box.

This can be done by making it possible for individuals to perceive themselves as **individuals**. Individuals who are socially and economically mobile, and more valuable as individuals than as group members. This can only occur as we establish a world where individuals are capable of acting better their own condition through their own efforts and defined by their own perceptions of "better". This has occurred in the west through the production of a world of plenty. The world of plenty is based on the freedom of information access through the freedom of information technology.

It has taken the west 550 years to begin to develop an epistemology of individuality, and we don't yet know what it would be like in the upper right hand box, let us speed up the process enough to assure the world's survival.

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