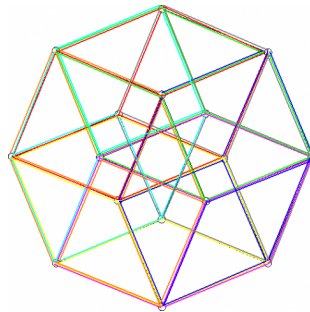


# Part 12 – The Shift from an Industrial to a Planetary Civilization— Conclusion: The United Nations

by William Irwin Thompson

***“We Irish think otherwise”* Bishop Berkeley**



\* I am indebted to Karen at Oddity Journal for this wonderful image of the tesseract.

The United Nations<sup>1</sup> was formed in the aftermath of World War II and was built upon ideas of national sovereignty<sup>2</sup> going back to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 that ended the seventeenth-century Thirty Years War<sup>3</sup>. Conceived<sup>4</sup> in San Francisco

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations: noun: an international organization of countries set up in 1945 in succession to the League of Nations, to promote international peace, security, and cooperation

<sup>2</sup> sovereignty: noun: supreme power or authority; the authority of a state to govern itself or another state

<sup>3</sup> Thirty Years War: noun: a European war of 1618-1648 which broke out between the Catholic Holy Roman emperor and some of his German Protestant states and developed into a struggle for continental hegemony with France, Sweden, Spain, and the Holy Roman Empire as the major protagonists. It was ended by the Treaty of Westphalia.

<sup>4</sup> conceived: verb: form or devise (a plan or idea) in the mind

and born in New York, the UN was also an expression of the post-war triumphalism<sup>5</sup> of the United States. (1)

Like the United States, the United Nations is a bicameral<sup>6</sup> political system with various departments of agency and administration called the Secretariat. But de jure is never de facto<sup>7</sup>, and in actuality the nations of the Permanent Five of the Security Council are there to insure that no World Federalist utopia<sup>8</sup> ever arises to challenge the supreme sovereignty of the nation-state. (One needs to remember that the members of the P-5 are the largest producers and dealers of arms in the world.) And the General Assembly is there to check the power of the Security Council to make certain that no empires ever rise again to rule the other nations of the world as their colonies. Given this system of checks and balances, it is not surprising that grid lock set in early and that the United Nations has never been able to develop into an effective means of eliminating war, genocide, famine, global pollution, the abuse of women and children, involuntary servitude and slavery, or even policing little dictatorships in protection of human rights. The United Nations is ineffective but absolutely essential as a world forum. We cannot scrap it and start all over again. (2)

The UN is a cultural process and not a perfected institution. Historians know that it took centuries for democratic republics<sup>9</sup> to evolve. From the time of the Magna Carta in 1215 when rights were granted by the monarch to the barons<sup>10</sup>, to 1688 when the definition of sovereignty was extended from the Sovereign to the

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<sup>5</sup> triumphalism: noun: excessive exultation over one's success or achievements (used especially in a political context)

<sup>6</sup> bicameral: noun: (of a legislative body) having two branches or chambers. For the U.N., the two branches of political representation are the Security Council which represents 15 nations and the General Assembly which represents 193 nations. The U.S.A., Great Britain, France, Russian Federation, and China are permanent members of the U.N Security Council.

<sup>7</sup> de jure...de facto: adverb/adjective: de jure literally means "of law." De facto literally means "of fact." Thompson is saying that by law, there is a U.N. However, factually, the U.N. is prevented from uniting all nations into a sovereign authority that is higher than an individual nation.

<sup>8</sup> utopia: noun: an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect. A "World Federalist utopia" would be a world that is ran by a government that has authority over individual nations. The five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council argue that a world government is a utopian fantasy. In other words, nothing can take the place of individual nations.

<sup>9</sup> republic: noun: a state in which supreme power is held by the people and their elected representatives, and which has an elected or nominated president rather than a monarch

<sup>10</sup> baron: noun: a person who held lands or property from the king; a member of the lowest order of the British nobility. ...Barons are referred to as "Lord." (British Parliament is bicameral: House of Commons and House of Lords)

Parliament in the Glorious Revolution, to 1776 when the definition of sovereignty was extended from the Parliament to the people in the American Revolution, to the Great Reform Act of 1832 in Britain in which voting rights were no longer based on the ownership of property, democracy<sup>11</sup> has been a long work in progress. It took centuries of agitation and legislation before citizenship was no longer restricted in terms of class, race, or gender. Even in democratic Switzerland, women did not get the vote until 1971. (3)



United Nations General Assembly

In much the same way, it will take a century before the United Nations evolves into an effective instrument of global cooperation and coercion<sup>12</sup>. And like the founding conditions of World War II that ended with the exclamation point of atomic weapons, it will take environmental catastrophes and natural disasters to lessen the power of nation-states and bring forth effective transnational<sup>13</sup> associations. As in

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<sup>11</sup> democracy: noun: a system of government by the whole population; the practice or principles of social equality

<sup>12</sup> coercion: noun: the practice of persuading someone to do something by using force or threats

<sup>13</sup> transnational: adjective: extending or operating across national boundaries

the evolution of life, nations will need to become organelles<sup>14</sup> within the larger entity of a planetary eukaryotic<sup>15</sup> cell. (4)

And so we cannot scrap the United Nations and start over. We can only work to allow nations like the USA, Russia, and China to become like mitochondria<sup>16</sup> with their ancient DNA<sup>17</sup> and their ability to produce the ATP<sup>18</sup> cycle of energy needed for the larger planetary cell. The nation-state will always be needed, for no one wants New York or Geneva to tell Cairo, Egypt or Cairo, Illinois how to manage their daily affairs. (5)

Slowly, and in response to the atmospheric damage produced by the USA and China, the Security Council will need to transform itself into an Executive Council of the large nations on each continent: the USA, Brazil, China, India, Russia, and the European Union<sup>19</sup>. At the moment there is a cultural vacuum in Islamic Civilization<sup>20</sup>, and no intelligent partner for world governance has emerged. Ideally, Iran as a most ancient civilization should be a leader, if only it could throw off its reactionary theocracy<sup>21</sup> to liberalize and come forth to inspire Central Asia, as it did in ages

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<sup>14</sup> Organelle: noun: any of a number of organized or specialized structures within a living cell

<sup>15</sup> Eukaryotic: adjective: of or relating to an organism consisting of a cell or cells in which the genetic material is DNA in the form of chromosomes contained within a distinct nucleus. See [Appendix A](#)

<sup>16</sup> mitochondria: noun: an organelle found in large numbers in most cells, in which the biochemical processes of respiration and energy production occur. It has a double membrane, the inner layer being folded inward to form layers (cristae)

<sup>17</sup> DNA: noun: deoxyribonucleic acid, a self-replicating material which is present in nearly all living organisms as the main constituent of chromosomes. It is the carrier of genetic information. | The fundamental and distinctive characteristics or qualities of someone or something especially when regarded as unchangeable: *Power and terror are part of the Russia's DNA.*

<sup>18</sup> ATP: abbreviation: adenosine triphosphate: noun: a compound consisting of an adenosine molecule bonded to three phosphate groups, present in all living tissue. The breakage of one phosphate linkage (to form adenosine diphosphate, ADP) provides energy for physiological processes such as muscular contraction.

<sup>19</sup> European Union: noun: an economic and political association of European countries as a unit with internal free trade and common external tariffs. See: [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries_en) and on provided map identify members of European Union.

<sup>20</sup> Islamic Civilization: See [Appendix B](#)

<sup>21</sup> theocracy: noun: a system of government in which priests rule in the name of God or a god | **(the Theocracy)** the commonwealth of Israel from the time of Moses until the election of Saul as king

past. But given the hostilities between Sunni<sup>22</sup> Pakistan, Shia<sup>23</sup> Iran, and Israel<sup>24</sup>, that cultural evolution seems unlikely without more wars and catastrophes. Since there is not a single unrepressive and progressive government in the Islamic World, for even secular<sup>25</sup> Turkey persecutes its writers for shaming the state and seeks to block the scientific teaching of evolution, the prospects are not inspiring. (6)

Were Iran to liberalize and aid in modernizing Afghanistan, then Iran would be the likely choice for the transformed Security Council. If Pakistan could end its slow motion civil war and assert state authority in the tribal regions to become a stable country and overcome its hostility to India, then Pakistan could become a needed global partner for the UN. At the moment, no such cultural evolution seems likely and what the global conflict of this moment of history is about is the role of Islam, and the role of religion in general in the evolution of a planetary civilization<sup>26</sup>. President Obama recognized this critical moment in his historic address this year in Cairo. The question of our time is whether or not the three Abrahamic religions<sup>27</sup> can grow beyond their out-dated forms to contribute to a new sacralization<sup>28</sup> of world culture in which art and science are equal partners? Instead the Islamic nations now seek to pass anti-blasphemy<sup>29</sup> laws to drag the world of science and art back into the Middle Ages. (7)

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<sup>22</sup> Sunni: noun: See [Appendix B](#) and [Appendix C](#)

<sup>23</sup> Shia: noun: See [Appendix B](#) and [Appendix C](#)

<sup>24</sup> Israel: noun: a country in the Middle East, on the Mediterranean Sea; population 8,100,000 (estimated 2015); capital (not recognized as such by the United Nations), Jerusalem; languages, Hebrew (official), English, and Arabic. The modern state of Israel was established as a Jewish homeland in 1948, on land that was at that time part of the British mandated territory of Palestine. Israel was immediately attacked by the surrounding Arab states, which it defeated. The continuing conflict with the neighbouring Arabs, mainly over the rights of the Palestinians displaced from their homes or living under Israeli rule, has caused continual tension and intermittent terrorist and military activity. Further wars occurred in 1956, 1967, and 1973, which resulted in Israeli occupation of eastern Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights. In 1993 Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed an agreement for limited Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but this proved unsuccessful in bringing about an end to conflict.

<sup>25</sup> secular: adjective: denoting attitudes, activities, or other things that have no religious or spiritual basis; contrasted with sacred

<sup>26</sup> Planetary civilization: noun: a civilization that belongs to the entire planet, rather than a region or nation-state.

<sup>27</sup> Abrahamic religions: noun: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all revere Abraham, the Biblical patriarch, and are known as the Abrahamic religions

<sup>28</sup> sacralization: noun: the act of treating something or someone as sacred

<sup>29</sup> blasphemy: noun: the act or offense of speaking against God or sacred thing

As the Security Council [of the United Nations] evolves into a more representative Executive Council, it would lessen the need for obstructionist<sup>30</sup> feelings in the General Assembly, but this body is always likely to be a labile<sup>31</sup>, if not volatile, liquid of melting and merging nations with short-lived histories in which a process of break-up into tribal identities is followed by a reintegration into larger and more practical economic unities. [In addition to nation-states becoming fragmented by tribal identities, and then re-absorbing the tribal states, nation-states also form economic organizations such as the European Union, the Commonwealth of Nations, the Organization of Islamic Countries, and the Pacific Islands Forum]. (8)

At the moment, science is the liberal force of planetary civilization and religion is the reactionary force, but the patron<sup>32</sup> of science is still the nation-state, and so we are locked into a contradiction—one that H. G. Wells<sup>33</sup> recognized after World War I, almost a century ago, when he imagined in an age of wars and catastrophes, that “a freemasonry of science” would emerge in the air above the war lords and rubble of the military-industrial nation-states. (9)

In the general psyche<sup>34</sup> of the moment in the mass media, the failure of the disaster movie 2012 indicates that in our general mood of global anxiety and Copenhagen Angst<sup>35</sup>, a vivid portrayal of The End is no longer a fun way to spend ten bucks and an evening. (10)

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<sup>30</sup> obstructionist: adjective: the act of deliberately delaying or standing in the way of legal, legislative, or other procedures

<sup>31</sup> labile: adjective: liable to change; easily altered; volatile: adjective: liable to change rapidly and unpredictable, especially for the worse

<sup>32</sup> patron: noun: a person (or in this case, nations) who gives financial or other support to a person, organization, cause, or activity

<sup>33</sup> H.G. Wells (1866-1946): noun: an English writer best remembered for his science fiction novels and often called the “father of science fiction.” In his lifetime he was most prominent as a forward-looking social critic who foresaw the advent of aircraft, tanks, space travel, nuclear weapons, satellite television and something resembling the World Wide Web. “Freemasonry of science” refers to the “instinctive sympathy or fellow feeling between people with something in common.” In this case, people across the world who share the belief that science can lead the world out of the disasters and chaos caused by the warring “military-industrial nation-states” of the USA, China, and Russia.

<sup>34</sup> psyche: noun: the human soul, mind, or spirit

<sup>35</sup> angst: noun: a feeling of deep anxiety or dread, typically an unfocused one about the human condition or the state of the world in general. Copenhagen Angst: a feeling of deep anxiety after the UN climate conference in Copenhagen, Denmark. See: <https://www.wri.org/blog/2010/04/angst-action-moving-forward-after-copenhagen>

Readers of this series of columns [“The Shift from an Industrial to a Planetary Civilization”] over the past few weeks will have noticed that what they all have in common—whether discussing American, Israeli-Palestinian, or global drug politics—is the utter impossibility of their suggestions. For a new planetary civilization to evolve, humanity would need to grow beyond nationalism<sup>36</sup> and religion<sup>37</sup>. Both patriotism and religion have more to do with identity than a theory of the state or a vision of God. Both are expressions of the “us and them” feelings that have been with us since the hominization<sup>38</sup> of the primates. Ideally, the state should lose its emotional charisma<sup>39</sup> to become, not a source of emotional identity, but simply a public service utility that creates infrastructure for the national economy and guarantees public health and security. Dying for one’s country should be as silly as dying for Con Ed [one of the largest investor-owned energy companies in the US]. (11)

Because of my Irish-American mother and my Irish grandmother, I grew up feeling drawn to Ireland. On my father’s side, the Thompsons were Northern Irish, so on either side of various borders I still felt Irish in the post-historic landscape of Los Angeles. However, when I went to live in Ireland and study Irish history, I discovered that “Ireland” was a mythic<sup>40</sup> construct<sup>41</sup>, from the *Book of Invasions* to Patrick Pearse. After the Ice Age when the glaciers uncovered the Emerald Isle, the island was subject to laminar<sup>42</sup> flows of various tribal peoples from continental Europe. In the days of the Irish Literary Renaissance, enthusiasts liked to speak of “the Irish race,” but this relic of nineteenth-century racist notions is utter nonsense.

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<sup>36</sup> nationalism: noun identification with one’s own nation and support for its interests, especially to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations; advocacy of or support for the political independence of a particular nation or people

<sup>37</sup> religion: noun: a belief system that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements

<sup>38</sup> hominization: adjective: the evolutionary process whereby there appears a primate of a family (Hominidae) that includes humans and their fossil ancestors and also (in recent systems) at least some of the great apes. Hominization for the author includes characteristics of humans that make humans different from all other primates: symbolization, agriculturalization, and the reproductive change in women from estrus to menses.

<sup>39</sup> charisma: noun: a divinely conferred power or talent

<sup>40</sup> mythic: adjective: of or relating to myth, in the sense of a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people; or a widely held but false belief or idea

<sup>41</sup> construct: noun: an idea or theory containing various conceptual elements, typically on considered to be subjective and not based on empirical evidence

<sup>42</sup> laminar: adjective: taking place along constant streamlines; not tubulent

Heart-breaking as it must seem to the millions of us, there is no such thing as “Irish,” for we are genetically as much Iberian and Scandinavian as Celtic. (12)

And in a similar way, recent genetic research is beginning to show that there is no such thing as “the Jewish people.” Jews are as diploid<sup>43</sup> and exogamous<sup>44</sup> as the rest of humanity, and the religion has grown through conversion of gentiles as much as endogamous<sup>45</sup> propagation. I married a Jew and my half Danish nephew converted from Lutheranism to Judaism. Two other nephews married Koreans. So the Thompsons are now your typical new “American” family. For all human families, identity is a process and not a place. (13)

Israel, like Ireland, is a mythic construct. In biblical times, there was no such thing as a nation, and the eastern shore of the Mediterranean was peppered with tiny kingdoms and transhumance<sup>46</sup> nomads. From post-catastrophic Sea Peoples and Egyptian slave refugees, Phoenician and Babylonian Semites, to wandering goat-herding nomads, the Middle East also was a complex fluid of laminar flows. (14)

Blut und Boden [Blood and Soil] never works to fashion a true identity but merely creates a regress ad infinitum [to infinity] from nation to tribe to clan to sect in the search for cultural meaning and personal identity. (I embed three different languages in one sentence here to reinforce my point that history is a flooded plain filled with the silt of distant mountains.) That said, there is no question in my mind that the present Republic of Ireland is better off as an independent nation within the European Union than it was as a suppressed colony within the British Empire. And there is no questions that the Jews are better off in an Israeli homeland than in the stadtlis [small towns] of Central and Eastern Europe. But there are many questions in my mind about the manner in which the United Nations served as an inexperienced midwife in 1948 to the birth of the twins Israel and Palestine<sup>47</sup>. And I

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<sup>43</sup> diploid: adjective: (of a cell or nucleus) containing two complete sets of chromosomes, one from each parent

<sup>44</sup> exogamous: adjective: of or relating to the custom of marrying outside a community, clan, or tribe

<sup>45</sup> endogamous: adjective: of or relating to the custom of marrying only within the limits of a local community, clan, or tribe

<sup>46</sup> transhumance: noun: the action or practice of moving livestock from one grazing ground to another in a seasonal cycle, typically to lowlands in winter and highlands in summer

<sup>47</sup> Palestine: noun: a territory in the Middle East on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. In biblical times Palestine comprised the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The land was controlled at various times by the Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, and Roman empires before being conquered by the Arabs in ad634. It was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1516 to 1918. The name Palestine was used as the official political title for the land west of the Jordan mandated to Britain in 1920; in 1948, the state of Israel was established in what was



have just as many questions about the manner in which the Israelis have constructed the myth of the Jewish state and disinherited its twin. Americans, of course, are in no position to point a guilty finger at Israel, for the Israelis are simply repeating our history of Manifest Destiny and using the army to displace the indigenous peoples. (15)

Given the ignorant and smug<sup>48</sup> imperialistic<sup>49</sup> behavior of the British in drawing imaginary lines in Ireland, Africa, the Middle East, Afghanistan, and India, it is little wonder that we are now having unending wars over fictional constructs called nations where nations never existed. No agency but the UN can fix these problems. To help establish a global approach to religious tolerance, the UN needs to make Old Jerusalem its first World City policed by its blue helmets. East and West Jerusalem should remain Palestinian and Israeli twin cities. (16)

Creating such a global space for religious tolerance would give humanity a breather for the normal process of cultural evolution to continue and for a post-religious spirituality to emerge. Organized religion with its sacred texts and priests could slowly lose its medieval character and its sanctification of violence to be replaced by a personal immersion in the Cosmic Mind through meditation<sup>50</sup> at home—no more temples, churches, and mosques needed. Contemplative spirituality would then be as natural as breathing. In one form of respiration, we would take in the planetary atmosphere, in the other, the Cosmic Mind. If people need to socialize in groups, they can simply create new interest groups and not need to turn churches into social clubs. But, of course, the chances for such a cultural transformation with its planetary awareness and post-religious spirituality approach zero. Cultural evolution takes millennia and not decades. (17)

As for nationalism, well, you watch TV and read the newspapers, so you know what is going on there as well as I do. Israel is about to have at it with Iran, and Michael

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traditionally Palestine, but the name continued to be used in the context of the struggle for territory and political rights of displaced Palestinian Arabs. In 1993, an agreement was signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization giving some autonomy to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and setting up the Palestine National Authority and a police force, but this proved unsuccessful in bringing the conflict to a resolution.tic

<sup>48</sup> smug: adjective: having or showing an excessive pride in oneself or one's achievement

<sup>49</sup> Imperialistic: adjective: of or relating to a policy of extending a country's power and influence through diplomacy or military force

<sup>50</sup> meditation: noun: the act of thinking deeply or focusing one's mind for a period of time, in silence or with the aid of chanting, for religious or spiritual purposes or as a method of relaxation; the act of thinking deeply or carefully about something

Ledeen<sup>51</sup> and the other Neocons that misled us into Iraq are cheering us on again, urging us to believe in Evil, see the new enemy, and get ready for a great big war again. (18)

But now the bad guys are on all sides of every conflict, so there is no McCain "Victory" to be found in the Middle East and Central Asia. It looks much more likely that the U.S. is about to be overwhelmed by the emotional and economic costs of the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen. (19)

Since World War II and the founding of the UN, America has felt that it is omnipotent and can beat anybody and fix anything in the GI manner in which "the greatest generation" fixed world fascism in the forties and communism in the eighties. (20)

I remember World War II and the death of my uncle on Omaha Beach, and I remember my Dad talking about his service in World War I, and my older brother talking about his time on the cruiser Los Angeles in the navy in the Korean War. I was the generation scheduled to fight in the Viet Nam War, had I not as a child already been a casualty of the open air testing of atomic bombs and had to have my thyroid removed. My nephew fought as a Marine in the Gulf War. Every generation in America has had a war to fight, because America cannot function without the economy of war [us] and the psychology of an enemy [them]. And now we have become very, very good at making enemies. (21)

It will not be my generation that solves the problems I have enumerated, and it looks more likely that humans simply may not be wise and intelligent enough to solve their problems of planetary pollution, cultural conflicts, and personal problems like addiction. And I am enough of a Celtic Animist—or what Whitehead called a panpsychist—to believe that it may take the Elementals to clean up our mess in a rather elemental way, as once they did before when the volcanoes put an end to Snowball Earth with the out-gassing of the magma over the ice that created the oceans and the subsequent origins of cellular life. (22)

To die on Earth is easy: just become a zealot<sup>52</sup>; but if you want to live on Earth, then you need to think big. So this column of "Thinking Otherwise" has been an old

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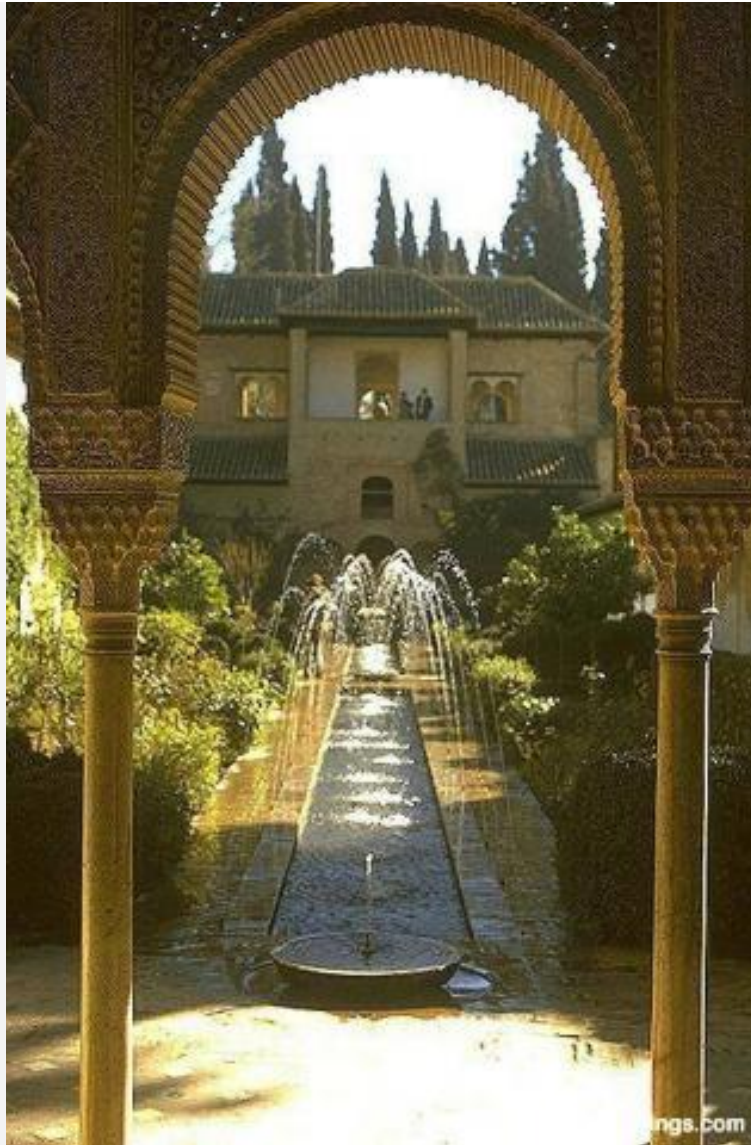
<sup>51</sup> Michael Ledeen: noun: an American historian and an advocate to invade Iraq because he believed that Iran, Iraq, and Syria are Evil

<sup>52</sup> zealot: noun: 1) a person who is fanatical and uncompromising in pursuit of their religious, political, or other ideals. 2) a member of an ancient Jewish sect that aimed at a world Jewish theocracy and resisted the Romans until A.D. 70

man's distancing of himself from the common mentality in a thinking outside of time, outside of the short cycles of political history in the longer cycles of cultural evolution. (23)

Cultural change is rarely voluntary. Can you imagine a Church Council of the College of Cardinals coming together to create the scientific renaissance? It would be like the dinosaurs coming together to vote for a new age of mammals. And so it is that most transformations of cultural structures are characterized by a Dark Age transition in which a catastrophe shatters the crystallizations of the old order. The thirteenth century was a brilliant period of cultural renaissance, then came the Black Death and the Inquisition. (24)

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Al Hambra – 14th Century – Granada, Spain

Whatever societal forms survive our environmental challenges, one will need to be a new vessel in which science and spirituality have been miniaturized; otherwise we will end up with only collapsed states and dark age war lords. For those few millions living in our secular scientific-artistic civilization, the dynamical systems of the new sciences of complexity teach us that initial conditions can precipitate a new cascade, and that our consciousness of the system is part of the system itself. (25)

The feedback of consciousness on the system can influence its behavior and outcome. A complex dynamical system is completely unpredictable, so no Nostradamus, Edgar Cayce or Maya Calendar can predict how it all is going to turn

out. The universe is not a machine programmed by God, and if the human species ever grows up to take mature membership through conscious participation in the Cosmic Mind, or what the Buddhists prefer to call Buddha Mind, and Sri Aurobindo called "the Mind of Light," then what Whitehead described as novelty and the creative advance of the universe can become possibilities of enlightened surprise and delight. (26)

But if we cannot create our destiny, then like the characters in a tragedy, who suffer a mindless doom only because they insist on holding to their impassioned mindlessness, our fate will descend upon us. It is the work of the artist, philosopher, and scientist of our new planetary culture to get us to snap out of it.

Appendix A

