



A Monthly e-Newsletter From:

 Institute for Alternative Futures

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Forward Perspectives

The Evolution of Societies

By [Eric Meade](#), Futurist and V.P. for Business Development

In "[Thank God America Isn't Like Europe – Yet](#)" (The Washington Post, Sunday, March 22, 2009), Charles Murray from the American Enterprise Institute admirably defends American exceptionalism, criticizing the European model for enfeebling the institutions of family, community, vocation and faith. Mr. Murray's strident defense of these four institutions reflects a commonly-held discomfort with the evolutionary shift from conventional to post-conventional that may now be taking place in Europe.

The work of psychologists Jean Piaget, Abraham Maslow, Clare Graves, Robert Kegan, Jenny Wade and others suggests that psychological development continues through stages beyond adolescence and throughout adulthood. Some categorize these stages as pre-conventional, conventional, or post-conventional, depending on the importance during that stage of externally generated conventions, such as social mores, religious dogma, and national identity. At one point in development, acceptance of these behavioral guides supports integration into a well functioning society. At a later point, these conventions give way to a search for one's own authentic identity and rules for interaction with others.

Psychological development of the individual recapitulates human evolution, which likewise has passed through these stages. We know, for example, of pre-conventional times when humans followed the dictates of their tribal leaders without subjecting those dictates to a widely held standard. The past couple millennia, on the other hand, have seen the emergence of laws, political order, complex religions and other trappings of a conventional society. But we are only now beginning to see the emergence of post-conventional society, in which the individual's pursuit of authenticity trumps adherence to convention. We are seeing it most clearly in Europe.

Mr. Murray suggests “a tidal change in our scientific understanding of what makes humans tick.” In fact, the evolutionary psychology described above has only recently been understood. And yet the implications for social policy are enormous. For example, Mr. Murray’s desire that boys who grow up without fathers be socialized to norms of behavior that will keep them out of prison is well founded. In the pre-conventional stage of development, socialization to a commonly held set of values that extends beyond the individual’s immediate desires is a precondition for growth. A social policy that supports that aim will reduce incarcerations and develop productive members of society.

At a later stage of development, however, this same socialization to convention may be regressive. At some point, the path of an individual’s psychological growth will lead him or her beyond the realm of convention on a quest for individual authenticity. Because each stage transcends and includes the stages that came before, we need not worry about the collapse of society, nor should we fear that we will lose what is meaningful about our lives. This is not to say that Americans should follow the European model – what is authentic for Europe may not be authentic for America. But evolution in the American context may yield a new exceptionalism based on commonly held values that transcend the conventions that have supported us thus far.

News & Events

IAF Issues Call for Interns

IAF is now seeking candidates for its summer internship program. Interns will learn about the futures field and gain experience working in a consulting environment while contributing to IAF’s ongoing research.

Interns will work individually and in teams with other interns and IAF staff to research and write on a wide variety of issues related to the future. IAF senior futurists will be paired with interns to act as mentors throughout the internship and will lead periodic discussions of futures topics and methodologies.

The internship program is open to current university students (undergrad or graduate programs) as well as those with a few years of work experience. This program is an excellent introduction to the field of futures and will likely prove valuable and useful to the interns in their subsequent careers, no matter their ultimate career choice. If you know of someone who would be a good candidate for this internship program, please have them contact Jerusha Haasenritter at jhaasenritter@altfutures.com.

IAF Senior Associate Jay Herson Publishes a New Book on Clinical Trials

Jay Herson works with IAF on the future of pharmaceutical clinical trials and other significant changes for the pharmaceutical and healthcare industry. In this work he brings a deep knowledge of Bayesian and other cutting-edge statistical methods. In [Data and Safety Monitoring Committees in Clinical Trials](#), Jay Herson applies his years of experience serving on and providing statistical support to data monitoring committees (DMCs).

In the world of drug development, clinical issues and statistical issues cannot be separated. All are scientific and all use applied logic. However, safety monitoring in pharmaceutical industry clinical trials through DMCs is both an art and a science, requiring the use of sound judgment as well as sound scientific method. Providing a perspective that few can match, Dr. Herson

fully explains the types of decisions DMCs are called upon to make as well as the environment in which they are made, taking into consideration the cultural, political, and clinical issues that require the use of good sense along with good science.

The book is part of a volume in the Chapman & Hall/CRC Biostatistics Series and can be [ordered here](#). You can also contact the author at jay.herson@earthlink.net.

Upcoming Events

Wiser Futures Workshop, [WorldFuture 2009: Innovation and Creativity in a Complex World](#), IAF Futurists Clem Bezold, Craig Bettles and Eric Meade, July 17th, Chicago, IL.

Health For All and a Health Care System Worth Creating, [WorldFuture 2009: Innovation and Creativity in a Complex World](#), IAF Futurists Clem Bezold and Craig Bettles, July 18th-19th, Chicago, IL.

The Futures of China, [WorldFuture 2009: Innovation and Creativity in a Complex World](#), IAF Futurist Eric Meade and Social Technologies Futurist John Cashman, July 18th-19th, Chicago, IL.

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