

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS : NO END TO LEARNING

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I feel greatly honored to have been invited to join the academic community of the University of Hawaii. I feel even more so because today I am sharing that honor with Mr. N. whose life-efforts remind us, in the hurly burly of everyday activities, how deeply many of our values are rooted in our perception of the transcendental meaning of life.

It is a very timely reminder, especially at this juncture of human history, when very rapid social change, outstripping the capacity of many of our institutions to adjust, force all and each of us to consider not only what is happening to us and to the world, but also to consider what we, as human beings are all about. For we live at a time when all of us, but especially, you who are graduating today, will have to adjust our values, our lifestyles, our expectations, to the very different conditions of tomorrow.

You have worked very hard in the past few years. I am sure that, apart from the time you had to devote to your studies, you also had some fun. But you will soon realize that the world you are entering now, the real world, is much more complex, much less orderly, much less comprehensible than the rigorous discipline and the neatly compartmentalised knowledge, that you have gained at the university have made you expect. Now more than before, the problems that we have to face, are increasingly to be found at the interface between academic disciplines and between

spheres of scientific inquiry, and you will, in the course of the years ahead of you, undoubtedly discover that you will have to continue to learn things that you were not taught before, and that you will have to learn very fast and continuously, if you want to find and maintain your own place in the very rapidly changing crowded and competitive world that we are now entering. In fact you will find that there is no end to learning.

The globalisation of national economies has internationalised financial markets, it has led to massive and rapid capital movements. It has deepened economic interdependence. No nation can now insulate itself from it. No businessman can hope to be successful if he only knows his competitors in his own country. He will have to know who his competitors are globally, and the resources they can mobilize. He will at the same time have to take into account the tendencies towards regional market integration. The US and Canada have been the pathbreakers here. In 1992 the European market will follow. And undoubtedly there will be more. Major often quite unsettling changes will take place inside these markets as corporations try to enhance their competitive strength. It is not unlikely that these regional blocs, certainly in their initial phase will be protectionist. It is uncertain that the open trading system that has brought unprecedented economic progress in many ways, can maintain itself. Individually, it will take flexibility, imagination and persistence to survive. The US has in a relatively short time, become the largest debtor country in the world, and leadership in international finance has

moved to Japan. In the meantime the 3d world, apart from the 4 little dragons, in this region of ours, is hemorrhaging. More capital is flowing from the 3d world to the industrial world. Their economies are stagnating, and the progress made in the past has largely been nullified. Continued stagnation in the 3d world also affects employment and the economies of the industrial countries, and it is likely that the situation will get worse, before a solution emerges.

No less important than these changes in the economic field are those in the area of international security and the global environment.

We have been for some time now confronted with the question whether we can avoid destroying ourselves, either quickly through a nuclear war, or slowly through the destruction of the global life support systems, through thoughtlessness, greed or through grinding poverty. The prospects of a nuclear war have now receded somewhat. We will have to learn to live with peace and in peace, with the risks this entails, and make the efforts to maintain this thrust, rather than with the prospect of selfdestructive war. We will have to learn to develop and live with the concept of common security rather than mutual assured destruction.

At the same time we should not forget that since the end of World War II more than 150 armed conflicts or wars have taken place, most ly in the 3d world.

We will also have to learn to live with the now inevitable warming of the earth's climate, and try to slow it down enough so that humankind can make the necessary adjustments.

We will have to learn to live with a much larger global population.

We will have to learn to live at close quarters with people who are different from ourselves, for as world population grows in

situations of profound economic and social disparity, people will move into more affluent

areas in search of work, better opportunities, more food and more security.

With contracting personal space, we will have to learn to develop our inner space, through the arts, reflexion, meditation and religion, or through a sense of humor and the capacity to laugh.

Interdependence in the fields of security, economics and ecology, makes that everyone will have to depend on everyone, for survival and well being. The fate of the affluent industrial countries North is inextractably interwoven with that of the 3d world, so is the East with the West. Borders have lost much of their significance. They have become permeable to missiles, to economic forces, environmental changes, fashions in musica, the arts, fashion, thought, information and diseases.

We will therefore have to learn to think globally even when we act locally.

We will have to enhance our capacity for empathy with others, and learn to expand our ethical and moral horizon so as to

encompass the whole of humankind across the globe and future generations as well.

In as much as our societies will very much be shaped by technology and the way we use it, it is going to be increasingly important that we chose our technologies bearing in mind the social and technological implications of our choices. With the rapid development of science and technology a number of new ethical issues have emerged, and old ones require new answers. We will therefore need scientists and engineers who are aware of the impact of their work on society and on the human person. By the same token we need humanists and philosophers who are technologically literate.

We will have to learn to live with rapid change without losing our sense of self and our capacity for moral reasoning.

We will have to learn to accept vulnerability as the inevitable companion of the complexity of modern life, without becoming prisoners of our fears.

Given our longer life expectancy, we will have to learn to think in terms of two or three different consecutive careers, and will have to adjust our educational institutions to such needs. I wouldn't be surprised if some of you would not find yourself back here at the University of Hawaii, in 20, 30 or 40 years time to take a refresher course or to study new fields of interest. I am sure that

by that time, this university, that has shown to have such great adaptive capacity, will by that time be able to serve those needs.

Humankind is in some sort of transition. We don't know to what; where we are going. In a sense, the choice is ours. Humankind for the first time in its geologically brief history, has become responsible for its own survival. It now has the power to destroy itself. But it is also possible that we are in a stage where we can take the next step in human evolution.

A great deal will depend on each of you, the quality of your mind and your heart, your talents, your skills, your sensitivity to others and your capacity to cooperate.

I wish you well.

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