

Can We Humanize the Future?

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The Quality of Human Life on the Threshold of the Year 2000"
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Your Majesties, Chairman Marias, Distinguished Guests.

I very much welcome the opportunity to address a few words to this important international meeting -- which is focused on the vexing and challenging question of how we might better equip and position the global society and each of its individual members for entry into the next century. In particular, I want to express my appreciation to His Majesty, King Juan Carlos, for his encouragement of this occasion. I am also delighted to be here with my colleagues from the world's leading cultural organizations. Together, I believe we can make this a most significant and worthwhile contribution to the cause of global understanding.

It is most appropriate, I believe, that we are gathered here in Spain, an ancient nation rich in history which is now seeking to build a democratic way of life for its people based on voluntary expression of cultural solidarity and unity of purpose. Spain's vision -- and that of His Majesty -- could serve as an important guidepost in our search here for the values that humanity should carry with it into the 21st century, values that recognize both the underlying oneness of humankind and its myriad and wondrous diversities.

We meet here essentially as thinking people. It is thus opportune to recall the words of Spain's great philosopher-statesman Ortega y Gasset that: "We do not live to think, but, on the contrary, we think in order that we may succeed in surviving." Survival is very much at the forefront of our agenda here -- and not so much our own survival as that of our children. We are confronted with one essential and haunting choice: Will our children's passage into the 21st century come in a new ascent of human spirit and creativity or will it be in the shadows of a darkening sky where, overwhelmed by the pathology of the arms race and the empty pursuit of crass materialism, all capacity for reason, love, compassion and respect for others slowly flickers and dies? Is it possible, in short, for us to humanize the future?

The answer to that question will depend very heavily on a number of choices we must make as this century's clock ticks out.

Will we continue to arm at the present insane rate, threatening humanity with nuclear extinction, or will we be able to learn to live with our fears and vulnerabilities and settle conflict with less resort to violence? Will the wealthy industrialized societies insist on pursuing the good life and diverting themselves by feeding, clothing, housing, transporting, and entertaining their populations in ways that deny the barest human essentials to others? Will we continue to plunder the environment at reckless pace or can we come finally to realize that we all must share the same thin layer of biosphere above the same thin skin of earth's crust?

Making the right choices would seem to me to rest very much on our ability to make science and technology serve more consistently

humanity's social and ethical purposes, freedom, justice and peace. Science and Technology are very necessary instruments for human progress and the equitable and just growth of the global community, but only if they can be firmly embedded in the human and cultural values of that community's many diverse societies. They can be tools that unlock man's imagination, ideals and dreams -- or agents of an Orwellian oppression of the human spirit. The choice is ours.

It is a choice vastly complicated, of course, by the explosion of knowledge. Like most explosions, it has pulverized things, and too many of our best intentions of helping humanity are beset by flying bits of fragmented and ill-connected information. And of all the fragmentation, perhaps the most tragic and consequential is the fragmentation of knowledge -- for it is ultimately a shattering of humankind's perception of its own humanity and of the transcendental significance of human life.

At the United Nations University, we have set ourselves the task of trying to see problems in the round, in bringing together knowledge from many cultures and disciplines in a mutually reinforcing manner. We have recently broadened our perspective, in an attempt to respond more flexibly and effectively to emerging global concerns and to reach out to the many scientists and humanists, like those gathered here, who share our conviction that knowledge must be indivisible if we are to live together in human solidarity on this culturally pluralistic planet.

I began these brief remarks with the wisdom of one son of Spain. Let me close with the vision that another son of this ancient land took

with him to the New World. George Santayana tells us that truth is only a dream -- unless that dream is true. Let us take that as affirmation that our dream -- a future where our children live in harmony, dignity and justice -- can also be true, if we but believe it together. Thank you very much.

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