



# WHAT'S NEXT: 2020 ONWARDS

P E T E R J D W Y E R

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## Introduction

The title of this short book is *What's Next?*, and the short answer is Who Knows? This is despite the mounting evidence that our current worldwide problems are leading people to reassess their priorities for the future and insist on the need for change.

There is a sharp contrast between what we have inherited as the priorities of the traditional state, namely “defense, public order, the prevention of epidemics and the aversion of mass discontent” (Judt, *Ill Fares the Land*, p. 78) and the emerging priorities revealed in a recent UN survey about “the world we want to create” which showed the global public’s priorities were “protecting the environment, protecting human rights, less conflict, equal access to basic services, and zero discrimination.” This kind of contrast has led one recent commentator to claim that, “a lot of people can’t place the rapidly oscillating feelings they have right now: a rollercoaster mix of fear, sadness, boredom, tension and flatness.”

The purpose of the book is to take this contrast seriously, and not only to accept the task of seeing what is at stake as we enter upon

a new future, but also to face up to the challenge flowing from what this reveals: *Can We Do It?*

Obviously, the impact of the current global pandemic of Covid 19 has had a significant impact on the text. It consists of twelve chapters, beginning with what I see as *Unfinished Business* in chapter 1, the main elements of *The Virus Response* in chapter 2, and what this reveals to us about what I have called *The Haunting Past* in chapter 3. I then move on to possible solutions, asking *Whose Responses?* in chapter 4, which examines the ways in which leadership becomes distorted as it becomes identified with dominance and the ambition of some to join the 'great men of history'. Looking *Beyond Platitudes* becomes the theme in chapter 5, then the difficult question of *Can We Do It?* is faced in chapter 6, before bringing it all home to the immediate worldwide concern of *Is There A Post-Viral Recovery?* in chapter 7.

I hope that what emerges from all the evidence uncovered is some kind of viable future pathway that can help all peoples and their current leaders move on as genuine custodians of a safer and more sustainable planet for us all. Achieving this will depend

greatly on the extent to which those who feel marginalised in our current world are included in the shaping of the future of us all, which is the main focus of the theme of *Active Voice* in chapter 8. Daring to take such an issue seriously forces us to go a few steps further. So, chapter 9 dares to confront the hidden challenge of *The Population Problem* and all it carries with it, before a further reflection on *Avoiding New Myths* in chapter 10 faces up to the myths about social change we always tend to carry with us into the future. The impact of all this on young people is the theme of chapter 11, titled *The New Adulthood*. The persistence of patriarchal dominance throughout the world provokes a final chapter, titled *Manpower*, but then the book tries to end on a positive note by turning to some poetry, even though it still cannot ignore the scope of the challenges confronting us at such a crucial time in the history of our species.





# 1. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

2020 was forecast by many pundits to be a year of recovery. Others seemed to be more preoccupied with what had become an on-going dilemma of human civilisation: are we making any genuine progress or are we just going around in circles? There appeared to be so much unfinished business, and even the very positive results of the UN 2020 survey for “the world we want to create” (protecting the environment, protecting human rights, less conflict, equal access to basic services, and zero discrimination) suggested the pundits were likely to be proved wrong, and then the possibilities of a shared concern for genuine change came from the mixed global responses to the corona virus, coupled with the death of George Floyd and the on-going racist problems related to Black Lives Matter.

With regard to the latter it should not surprise us to recall that the whole tradition of slavery coincides in human history with the formation of supposedly ‘civilised societies’, perhaps even as

far back as 3500 BC in Mesopotamia. Later records from that Sumerian society identify a Code of Hammurabi related to slavery. It was common also in Roman society, and throughout the Middle Ages in European countries, followed by the Atlantic slave trade in the 1600s. Despite the American Civil War and the efforts of people like William Wilberforce in the UK, which led to the supposed abolition of slavery, forms of human trafficking still exist, affecting as many as 25-40 million people, mainly in Asia.

What recent events in the US highlight is the link between racism and official law enforcement attitudes and practices linked to notions of white supremacy associated with European colonialism of former times. For many protestors the statues tell it all! So, while we at least still honour the non-white male figures from the past (eg. Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandella and Martin Luther King) who carried out actions for recognition and equality, the causes they promoted remain as part of our living history - or the circle of fate.



In fact, the circle of fate is highlighted by the profound implications of the George Floyd incident for American society. It reminds me of this reworking of a Time magazine cover I recently saw which draws a direct link between 1968 and 2015.

A mere 5 years later in 2020 we are once again reliving history and its circle of fate. Fortunately, this time fatalism is not the most popular response to our unfinished business, even though there are still accompanying outbreaks of extremism, like the despoiling of statues, that may lead some people to begin losing hope, and may even return us all to the age-old dualism of “us-v-them”. For many of the protestors - and their critics - the statues tell it all!

The linking of statues and history brings me to the point at which I feel forced to repeat myself and start arguing about the meaning of Time, and what even “time-honoured” ancient statues and images can tell us. In the Introduction to my recent booklet *Facing 2030* I was led to say

if we are to act, before it is 'too late', we need to think both backwards and forwards at the same time. Thinking of the past (history) should always inform attempts to predict the future (forecasting). This avoids the mistake of dealing with Time in a more linear fashion – as a kind of trajectory, like a Spatial journey from point A to point B, which tends to reduce Progress to a process of 'leaving the past behind'. Our climate and population problems are clearly directly connected with this dominant 'linear mindset'.

There is a further major insight here. It is that a Janus-like experience of Time helps people to be happy to live with and work towards a comprehensive resolution of unresolved dilemmas, whereas a more linear approach leads to resolutions of dilemmas by seeing them as an either/or challenge (*Facing 2030*, pp.3-4).

What this means is that even the statues, and what they represent to different people, are caught up in the mystery of it all. But there is also a lesson in that.