On Becoming and Being a Futurist: An Interview with Wendell Bell

by

Levelhead 753*

Abstract

A transhuman robot interviews futurist Wendell Bell, asking him how and why he became a futurist. In answering, Bell explains his past research dealing with decision-making and leadership, including his studies in the former British colonies of the Caribbean during their transition to political independence. He describes how the new national leaders faced the tasks of making the decisions of nationhood that would shape the future character of their people, society, and culture. As a result of his research on the new states, Bell became interested in the principles of futures thinking, its epistemology, methods, and underlying ethical commitments, and began participating in the futurist community. Also, Bell points out why he has remained a futurist for more than forty years. It is because of his belief in the importance of the purposes of the futures field, especially the dedication to an innovative investigation of possible, probable, and preferable futures. Futurists, he says, contribute to creating a future world in which human society would be indefinitely sustainable, where all peoples peacefully would cooperate for the mutual benefit of all, and where the freedom and well-being of future generations of human beings would be assured.

Levelhead 753: *As you know, Professor Bell, for the World Digital Library's Oral Histories of the Social Sciences, we want to know how and why you became a futurist. But, first, let me thank you for granting me this interview*

Wendell Bell: [Squinting to see Levelhead's image on the screen in front of him.] It's my pleasure, Levelhead, but I admit I'm a bit uneasy. I've never been interviewed by a robot before.

L: *Relax, Professor. I am the new 753 model. I have more capacities than any other type of what you call "artificial intelligence." I even have simulated human empathy, so I'm "transhuman." Let's begin, Professor Bell....*

WB: Please call me "Wendell." I think you'll find that futurists generally are informal and egalitarian. We try to encourage exchanges of ideas and participation from everyone at all social levels. [Pause.] I don't see why intelligent robots shouldn't be included—at least that is what I keep hearing from the International Association for the Advancement of Transhuman Robots.

L: *Okay, Wendell. But please skip the bromides about futurists, because I'll bet some are—and some are not—informal and egalitarian... Now, if you have your crystal ball ready, let's begin.*

WB: Ugh! By that remark, Levelhead, I see that someone ignorant of futures studies has programmed you. The notion that futurists use "a crystal ball" drives us up the wall, because our primary purpose is *not* predicting the future. In fact, that kind of snide remark from know-nothing critics has led some futurists to the point of denying that prediction has anything to do with futures studies.

L: *Whoa, Wendell, I didn't mean to be snide. I simply assumed that prediction must have something to do with futures studies. I mean futurists do talk about the future, don't they? And they talk about it before it happens. It is simply logical to conclude that it must be "pre-" something.*

WB: Well, yes, of course. Prediction—or whatever euphemism a futurist may use, such as projection, forecast, foresight, prophecy, or *prospective*—necessarily enters into what a futurist does. In fact, it is one of the defining features of futures studies. In contemplating the future, we imagine alternative possible futures and we try to assess which futures would be most probable under a variety of conditions, including alternative actions that people might take. We try to answer the "what if" question. For example, what could or would happen *if* people did this, or that, or something else?

But—and this is important—we seldom predict a single future. Rather, we describe alternative futures. Moreover, the futures we construct are **contingent** on the different assumptions on which they are based; they are **corrigible** as new facts come to light and the consequences of present and future actions come into play, thus, they almost always need periodic revision; and they are more or less **uncertain** because the most probable thing may not happen and an unlikely outcome may occur. Even so, most—if not all—futurists would agree that prediction is not their primary purpose.

L: *Then, what is their primary purpose?*

WB: Levelhead, you ought to read a good summary of the field, such as Eleonora Barbieri Masini's *Why Futures Studies?* (1993), the earlier work by Edward Cornish and others, *The Study of the Future* (1977) or Cornish's more recent *Futuring* (2004). And you'd certainly learn from the articles in James A. Dator's edited volume, *Advancing Futures* (2002) and the many writings of Richard A. Slaughter, including his recent *Futures Beyond Dystopia* (2004). Also, take a look at Enric Bas's *Prospectiva* (1999) and Sohail Inayatullah's new reader on causal layered analysis (2005).

But I'll give you my view. The future is not out there already formed. Some particular future is not necessarily and inevitably going to be human destiny. The future, rather, is as yet unformed. It is open to our creative imagination, to our ability to innovate and to design new things, not only open to technological innovations but also to the invention of new human character, new ways of life, new social arrangements, and even new cultural values. To think of "predicting" the future is a passive reaction and in some sense wrong headed when applied to the big decisions of life, because the future depends on what we—or some—humans do. A more active and intelligent response is to think of "creating" the future. And such a response includes thinking the unthinkable, creatively exploring possibilities that have never existed before in human history. Such an active response necessarily invites innovation.

True, there are some things that we humans have done and are doing that will have predictable consequences, such as, for example, global warming, *unless we change our ways of behaving.* But that "unless" is a giant opportunity for the intervention of human reason and

ingenuity to steer humanity toward a different future. And it is also true that people use predictive thinking, again contingently, as they take action based on their knowledge of causes and effects.

Thus, the most general purpose of futures studies is to add tools and knowledge that help people design and shape the future, to help them achieve good futures for themselves, and, most generally, for all humankind. Futurists want to know what alternative futures are really possible, what futures are most probable (contingent on different human actions), what futures are most desirable, and what people can do to create the most desirable future.

But there are other purposes of futures studies, too, such as increasing grass-roots participation in shaping the future, as Jim Dator (1983) and his colleagues did with their Honolulu Electronic Town Meeting, and formulating sweeping, idealistic images of the future that have the power to affect the course of entire societies or civilizations, as illustrated by Frederik L. Polak's two-volume work, *The Image of the Future* (1955).

L: *Wendell, speaking frankly, that sounds like do-goody future shlock to me, well-meaning maybe, but sanctimonious and certainly illogical.*

WB: Sanctimonious, perhaps, but illogical? Why?

L: *Well, how can you know what is possible and probable for the future, when you say that any statement about what the future might be is contingent, corrigible, and uncertain? To put it another way, how can you really know anything about the future when the future has not yet happened?*

WB: Good question, Levelhead, but open your eyes—or whatever. All "sane humans anticipate. All goal-directed behavior is by definition anticipatory in some sense" (Textor 2005). We humans have no choice but to try to make assessments of the future consequences of our acts— or of our failures to act—if we want to behave effectively.

Fortunately, there are many things that bear on the coming future that we can study objectively. For example, people's images of possible and probable futures; people's preferences for different futures; people's intentions to act in particular ways (e.g., how they intend to vote, to invest, and to buy); people's obligations to others (which tell us something about how we can

expect them to behave in particular future situations); people's history, traditions, and past decisions (which, using analogy and inference, give us clues as to what their future behavior might be when confronted with similar circumstances); and trends (which tell us about how the immediate future might be if people keep behaving as they have in the immediate past).

L: *Yes, but…*

WB: Wait a minute, Levelhead, I'm not finished. Futurists also have used available knowledge from many fields of learning and they have invented or adapted some methodological techniques distinctively aimed at the exploration of alternative futures. Included are methods such as the systematic extrapolation of time series data; cohort-component methods that are especially useful in making population projections; the Delphi method that Theodore J. Gordon and Olaf Helmer (1964), among others, developed at the RAND Corporation; simulation and modeling that the Club of Rome study by D. H. Meadows et al., *The Limits to Growth* (1972), brought to the public's attention; gaming that is similar to simulation but includes humans as players who influence future outcomes and that has been widely used, especially by the military; monitoring, including scanning, that has been popularized by John Naisbitt (1982); participatory futures praxis that includes the future workshops of the late Robert Jungk (1973) and his Everyman Project in which ordinary people are encouraged to take control of their own futures; and ethnographic futures research of Robert B. Textor that has been used for understanding and shaping the future of whole communities and even of whole countries (Textor et al. 1984).

Then, of course, there is the scenario, which is a—if not the—key futurist tool. A scenario can be generated from any of these methods, or it can be the product of speculative and imaginative thinking. Of course, there are other methods too.

L: *Enough already. While you were talking, I accessed the orbiting Satellite Universal Library and scanned "Methods, futures research/futures studies" and I reviewed some major works in futures studies too.*

Wendell, there is some really shoddy work out there, a good deal of baloney, and contradictory claims of coming utopias or future doom, sometimes with little use of your methods and scant empirical evidence to back them up.

WB: Well, okay, not all futures work is equally sound. But to some degree that is true of all fields. Surely, you found some good work there too, didn't you? Some futures research is based on careful, informed, disciplined, and systematic work, on clear logic, and on sound methods of data collection and analysis. Also, some of it is truly innovative and thought provoking.

Take a look at Clement Bezold's study of the changing environment for new drugs (1981*)*, Paul Boyer's historical study of prophecy belief in modern American culture (1992*),* Richard N. Cooper and Richard Layard's analysis of insights for the future from social science (2002*),* Richard J. Estes's analysis of the social progress of nations (1988), or Robert B. Textor and others' *Projected Sociocultural Effects of the Microelectronic Revolution* in Austria (1983). For an overview of the field, look, too, at Richard A. Slaughter's edited volumes on *The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies* (1996), and don't forget the futures-relevant work summarized by Michael Marien in his monthly periodical of abstracts, *Future Survey*.

L: *Okay, point made.*

WB: I think that the uneven quality of futures research is partly a sign of a relatively new field that is still emerging as a profession and still open to everyone. Qualifications and standards are not yet fully enunciated, much less widely accepted.

Also, a really *new* idea by its very nature is unfamiliar and may not seem to fit with currently dominant beliefs. Viewed from the perspective of conventional thinking, thus, new ideas often look wacky and wrong-headed, and some—perhaps most—new ideas may be. But some of those seemingly wacky ideas may become the brilliant breakthroughs and accepted truths of tomorrow.

L: [Whispering] *Is anybody around you listening, Wendell?*

WB: No. Why?

L: *Come closer, I do not want anyone else to hear this.* [Pause] *I have worked at a university, Wendell. Entre nous, I think that universities, except for computer science departments, are centers of rigor mortis of the brain.*

WB: Oh, I wouldn't agree with that, Levelhead. Some malcontented computer scientist must have programmed you.

Research universities, to the contrary, are centers of innovation. They honor creativity, once it is recognized as such. By the way, Levelhead, you wouldn't exist if it weren't for the inventive minds of human beings.

I would say, though, that many university departments could benefit from more futures thinking, especially the social sciences and all of the applied sciences from forestry and business schools to fields of medicine and social policy. It is probably still true, as Margaret Mead (2005) told her anthropological colleagues three decades ago, that too many social scientists "are wedded to past and provincial habits" and fail to apply social scientific "knowledge and wisdom effectively to the world's needs for future survival," and, I would add, for future thrival.

Yet universities are changing (Inayatullah and Gidley 2000), and a few, such as Tamkang University in Taiwan, have made a major commitment to researching and teaching the principles of futures thinking (Stevenson 2004).

L: *Time is running out and I have not asked you the most important questions about yourself. What led you to become a futurist?*

WB: That's a long story, Levelhead. The brief version is that I went to Jamaica in 1956 to do urban research, specifically intending to study the social areas of the city of Kingston to compare with work I had done earlier in metropolitan areas of the United States. At the time, Jamaica was in transition from being a British Crown Colony to becoming a politically independent state. The process was, of course, part of the post-World War II breakdown of the European and American empires and the formation of what have become more than 100 new states in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. Then, with the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union even more new states have been added. Most generally, it was another stage in the global spread of the democratic revolution that began in the latter part of the 18th century.

L: *How did that influence you to become a futurist?*

WB: Well, it was a heady time in Jamaica. Everyone was looking forward. All the talk was of coming independence, of what had to be done, and of what Jamaica would be like—and ought to be like—in the future, after independence.

A new constitution was being written. A new government was being shaped. The nature of the whole society was being made problematic. Jamaicans were becoming citizens and leaders of their own state and they faced making what I call "the decisions of nationhood." On the mundane level they were choosing their national flag, their national motto, their national anthem, their national bird, their national tree, and the other symbols of nationhood.

On a more fundamental level, they were re-inventing themselves and their societies. They were deciding what form of government their new state would have (e.g., most new nationalist leaders wanted a democratic form of government with free and fair elections and guaranteed public liberties for all citizens), what the new state's geographical boundaries should be (e.g., to go it alone or be part of a larger West Indian Federation?), how much of a role the government ought to play in the economy (e.g., some form of democratic socialism or not?), what kind of social structure the new Jamaica ought to have (e.g., how egalitarian and socially inclusive ought it to be?), what kind of people Jamaicans should strive to be (e.g., in selecting official national heroes they defined ideal standards and values that all future citizens of Jamaica ought to live up to), what Jamaica's cultural traditions ought to be (e.g., how much of a role the African origins and the slavery of many of their ancestors ought to play in the new national history and culture?), and what foreign policies the new state should have as it stepped onto the international stage (e.g., what alignments to make with other countries?).

Anyway, I got caught up in this history-in-the-making and I changed my research to focus on the decisions of nationhood. Over the next twenty-five years and with the help of both American and West Indian graduate students and colleagues, I studied leadership, decision-making, and images of the future in most of new states in the Caribbean, from Jamaica in the north to Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana in the south. Moreover, we compared our research results in the new Caribbean states with studies we did of the old Caribbean states, e.g., the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and of other territories that opted not for independent statehood but for continued

political association with their former colonial power, e.g., Guadeloupe and Martinique (Murch 1971).

L: *I still do not see how...?*

WB: Just hold on. Think for a minute about what people do when they make a conscious decision. If they are at all conscientious about it, they consider the relevant facts about their present situation (e.g., the initial conditions) and they think about causation of the phenomena with which they are dealing (in order to choose effective strategies of action). Also, they assess the range of possible actions and choices that they actually have, estimate the future consequences of their contemplated present actions (a prediction problem), and evaluate various consequences in the light of their goals and values which themselves are made questionable and must be re-examined and decided upon (a value-judgmental problem).

L: Oh*, come now, Wendell, people are not that rational...*

W: Of course, you are right. Most people in their everyday lives don't consciously go through such a deliberate thinking process, although some come close to it for the "big" decisions in their lives, such as picking a college, buying a new home, or choosing a career. But the transition to political independence itself was a consciousness-raising event. It opened up real possibilities for social change that had been suppressed during colonialism. The coming of statehood led the new citizens to believe that the future was to some extent a matter for them to choose, thus, a matter for their discussion, debate, planning, and action.

Studying how the decisions of nationhood were being made in the new states of the Caribbean, I began to understand the general principles of futures thinking and the role they play in individual and collective decisions everywhere, in all settings and all situations, in both new and old states.

It is clear that people generally, like the West Indian leaders I studied, engage in futures thinking, make decisions to design their actions to shape the future, and, then try to carry out such actions. But, here's the point, Levelhead: ***they do so only more or less fully, only more or less explicitly, and only more or less rationally.***

Thus, an important purpose of the futures field is to create the intellectual tools and protocols that will allow people to make decisions and take actions that more effectively will achieve their desired goals. Futurists aim to make explicit and rigorous what is often implicit and heedless in everyday life.

L: *Okay, then. So what do you see as your major contributions to futures studies?*

WB: Well, first, my colleagues and I have produced empirical case studies, focused on how social conditions shape images of the future and on how images of the future, in turn, along with values and beliefs, influence decisions to act and, therefore, help shape the coming future itself.

For example, they deal, among other things, with what people were trying to achieve for their own future by moving to the city and then to the suburbs (Bell 1968); how social inequities produce despair or hope for the future (Meier and Bell 1959; Perkins and Bell 1980); and how West Indians envisioned their post-colonial future and what they did to try to attain the best possible future (Bell 1964, 1967; Bell and Oxaal 1964; Mau 1968; Moskos 1967). Particularly in the case of the new Caribbean states, we did follow-up studies years after our first interviews in order to evaluate how well the new national elites had achieved their earlier images of the future (Bell, 1977; Bell and Baldrich 1983; Bell and Robinson 1979; Stephens and Stephens 1986).

We also produced some summaries of relevant empirical social research done by others. For example, decision-making and social action require leadership and the exercise of power; thus, we did a critical analysis of the research on public leadership in the United States (Bell et al, 1961). The values people hold define the future good society toward which they strive; hence, we studied such values and reviewed the work of other researchers who did also (Bell 2000, 2002; Robinson and Bell 1978).

I could go on, Levelhead, but no doubt you've already electronically accessed this work.

L: *Yes, yes, I'm way ahead of you, Wendell.*

WB: Well, I have something more to say anyway. Second, in my later work, some of which is summarized in my two-volume *Foundations of Futures Studies* (1997), I try to...

L: *I wouldn't yawn, Wendell, even if I could, but we—or I should say you?—are running out of time.*

WB: I'll try to be brief, Levelhead. No person, obviously, can create a science or a field of inquiry all by him- or herself, so let's start with the humbling recognition of the fact that however futures studies will develop depends on the cooperative efforts of many people.

Although it depends on the distinctive contributions of individual futurists, to be sure, it depends also on the willingness of futurists to address some of the issues, results, and thinking of other futurists. It depends, in other words, on the efforts of different individuals and groups to find answers to similar research questions using overlapping conceptual frameworks and theoretical perspectives.

Thus, my biggest effort in recent years has been to read the works of other futurists—and also, I should add, the futures-relevant work of nonfuturists, especially social scientists—and to understand their common themes, their basic assumptions, their theories of human behavior and social change, the purposes that drive their futurist inquiries, their epistemological commitments, their specific methodologies, their honored exemplars of futures research, the values that they use as standards to define their conceptions of the good society, the various strategies they have for judging preferable futures, the dominant images of the future for our time that they identify, and, perhaps most important, what the best futures research concludes that we humans ought to do to ensure a good and long life for all living human beings now and in the future.

Of course, where I found gaps in the futurist program, I have tried to supply in *Foundations* what is needed to fill them, especially by creating links to the relevant canons of other fields, including both the philosophy of science and moral philosophy. Creating such links, obviously, invites rapprochement between futures studies and the mainstream academic disciplines. Also, doing so recognizes the possible universal foundations underlying all fields of knowledge and the process of inquiry itself.

Synthesizing and codifying the futures field is a task that I started in the late 1960s. Finally, in 1997 I published the results in *Foundations of Futures Studies*.

L: *That is a lot of work, Wendell, at least for a mere human. What makes futures studies worth three decades of your life?*

W: After your earlier remarks about my sounding "do-goody" and "sanctimonious," I answer your question with some trepidation.

Although it may sound corny, I believe that futures studies can help individual people lead fuller, more satisfying lives. It gives them intellectual perspectives with which they can break the chains of the past, transcend the limitations of the present, and create their most desirable future.

Moreover, the futurist program aims to raise the level of human consciousness about the oneness of humanity. People today are part of a global society and, whether they like it or not, they share a common fate. Thus, people ought to be concerned, not only about themselves and their loved ones but also about the well-being of other people, both those now living and those of future generations to come. They ought to be more caring about—and more nurturing toward—the life-sustaining capacities of the Earth, since human life depends on them.

L: *How can anything as sweeping as that be implemented?*

W: Well, most important, we can increase our foresight, including our knowledge of the consequences of individual and collective actions, as a basis for worldwide critical discourse about sustaining life on Earth.

We can support and expand the United Nations and its many agencies as places of such discourse and consensus building. We can encourage the thousands of Non Governmental Organizations that aim to solve specific human problems, and, of course, we can continue topical meetings between individual groups of states. We can have more world conferences focused on specific issues, such as the human rights reaffirmation in Vienna in 1993 and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 (where 191 governments were represented), and others dealing with topics such as trade, health, human values, poverty, the status of women, arms reduction, and international law. We can include international corporations, inviting them to look farther into the future and to make their behavior more responsible and ethical, perhaps adopting programs of integrity such as Motorola, Inc. established (Moorthy 1998).

The futurist program aims for mutual understanding among peoples on a global level through free exchange of ideas, learning, futures thinking, and peaceful compromise and cooperation.

L: *The "United Nations," Wendell? Many people, especially in the United States, think of the United Nations not as a solution but as a problem. Some even describe it as an evil institution. How can the United Nations help settle conflicts when it is the center of dispute itself?*

W: Where in the world did you get such a wrong-headed idea about the United Nations?

L: *From many sources, including fundamentalist, evangelical Christian beliefs. Surely, you know the thirteen novels of the* Left Behind *series (LaHaye and Jenkins 1995). Together with their children's versions more than 70 million copies have been sold. These authors portray the United Nations as an instrument of the Antichrist. These people do not believe that they have a future here on Earth, much less a better one. They believe that the end of the world is near, that a period of trials and tribulations is coming, that most of you humans will be destroyed, and that not even everyone who accepts Jesus Christ will be saved.*

W: I don't know what led you to these eschatological and messianic religions, Levelhead, but, yes, I know about them. They—and other fundamentalist religions too—disturb me. They arrogantly assume an attitude of religious superiority, including beliefs that their religion is the only true religion and that their God is the only true God. Personally, I can't believe that God—if there were a God—would prescribe only one faith, or, for that matter, one form of government or one style of life. Certainly, such beliefs are not part of the modern futures movement.

L: *I see that, but don't you have to deal with these contrary beliefs?*

W: Yes, of course we do. They are a threat to the kind of future I'm talking about. They are extremist and intolerant. In the United States, for example, some evangelical Christians have religious beliefs that include "fanaticism, superstition and obscurantism." Many such people believe "in personal (and self-serving) miracles," are ignorant "of basic science and history," demonize popular culture, try to censor textbooks, and display their separatist leanings by home-schooling their children (Lilla 2005).

L: *Well, what's the solution?*

W: We clearly need to engage such people and their ideas. I would recommend that we cooperate with those religious groups that are already working for the harmonious co-existence of "good citizenship, good morals, and rational belief" (Lilla 2005). They include ecumenical groups, such as the Parliament of World's Religions that met in Chicago in September 1993. The participants in the Parliament found many common values in the moral principles of all religions and issued a joint declaration, "Towards a Global Ethic," to which all people can subscribe, no matter what their religions are, or even if they have none at all.

Such efforts tend to move religions from believing in "a faith-based reality" to believing in "a reality-based faith" (Lilla 2005).

L: *For your sake, Wendell, I hope such ecumenical movements continue. But getting back to **your** "reality-based faith" in science tell me more about the futurist program and futurist solutions to other problems.*

W: I am not suggesting that futurists have all the right solutions. But they have been asking the right questions. For example: What can we humans do to create societies that will be sustainable into the far future? What are the conditions under which all people everywhere can have sufficient water and food, modern sanitation, good health, freedom, personal security, and community support?

How can we reduce the human use of nonrenewable resources? What must we do to stop poisoning the environment and stop human-induced deleterious climate change? How can we prevent the destruction of forests and the extinction of plants and animals? How can we transform our economies to guarantee recycling of scarce materials?

Moreover, there are other questions, too, of social injustice, both within and between countries, questions of aggression and hatred, war and genocide, torture and rape, the oppression of women, deadly clashes of ethnic and religious groups, personal greed and selfishness, lies and deceit, and senseless violence and destruction. How can we rid the Earth of these scourges?

How, some futurists have asked, can the coming global society be transformed into a world moral community? How can we humans learn to think holistically, to see that we all are in this together? How can we learn to cooperate peacefully on a world scale? How can we create a future in which each individual counts as a person of worth, in which respect for others and human dignity are equally and fully shared? How can we construct a win-win world, as Hazel Henderson (1996) has asked, and avoid the vicious, lose-lose circle of economic warfare, poverty, and despair or endless cycles of retribution and violence?

L: *Okay, okay, I learned most of that from Allen Tough's* Crucial Questions about the Future *(1991). But people will be more interested in the answers.*

WB: Some answers come from the futurist program of investigating the facts of the past and the present and, based on them, making speculative and imaginative, but presumptively true, assertions about possible and probable futures. Answers come, too, from judging these futures by some scale of values, and assessing their relative desirability. They come also from communication among people about these assessments of the desirability of alternative futures and letting people's voices be heard by decision-makers.

Answers come, as I said before, from gaining foresight into the true consequences of our actions. They come, also, from understanding that all people ought to be included in our community of concern, realizing that our own beliefs may be wrong, and showing tolerance toward the beliefs of others. And they come from learning self-restraint and resolving not to harm others, from establishing international laws and systems of justice, and from creating a global police force to enforce such laws and to maintain global order (Bell 2000, 2002).

In a nutshell, Levelhead, I'm a futurist because the futurist program offers hope for humanity and I want to contribute, even in some small way, to the realization of that hope.

L: *Well, Wendell, that whole futurist program is a huge agenda, but it sounds both pious and impractical.*

WB: Maybe it is, but it is a much-needed program, not to mention an intellectually challenging one. Perhaps in today's cynical world anything that is earnestly felt and genuinely worthy would sound pious and impractical to some people.

But, Levelhead, what are the alternatives? Despair and resignation? Doing nothing? Drowning ourselves in alcohol or temporarily altering our minds with hallucinatory drugs while we and our world rot? Trying to destroy everybody with whom we disagree? No, I don't think so.

Shall we sit back and watch corrupt corporate capitalists subvert governments and the democratic process in individual states to the point where we will face authoritarian global domination by international corporations—a 21st century version of fascism (LaPalombara 2004)? Are we going to sit back and watch the illegal and reckless use of aggression and violence, such as the attacks of "terrorists" and also the invasion of Iraq by the United States, to continue? No, I don't think so.

We humans are an experiment. On the long, old road of human development, we have had many setbacks and made many wrong turns. Many of us throughout history have failed to achieve the humanity, compassion, peaceful relations, mutual respect for all peoples, social justice, forgiveness for ourselves and others, and sustainable living on the planet that we seek.

Today, our perception is clouded by clashes **between** groups that dominate the newspaper headlines, the television news programs, and our Internet blogs. There is another, less visible struggle going on **within** groups that is equally—perhaps more—important. It continues within states, ethnic groups, religions, races, social classes, political parties, and other groups.

No matter how locked in antagonistic conflict with other groups their own group may be, there are people everywhere who urge members of their own group to use diplomacy, negotiation, and compromise in dealing with others rather than force and violence. Such people speak for peace and mutual survival rather than war and mutual destruction. They speak for treating members of other groups with fairness and reconciliation rather than with retribution and enmity. They are kind and understanding toward members of other groups rather than brutal and cruel.

Such people exist among Palestinians and among Israelis, among Greeks and Turks, among Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, among Americans and Iraqis, among Sunnis and Shiites and Kurds, among Protestants and Catholics, among Muslims and Jews, among mainland Chinese and Taiwanese—they exist in nearly every group everywhere.

Such people speak against demonizing others, they speak against hate, they speak against destruction, and they speak against a philosophy of death. They are the voices of reason and humanity. They are the forces working for life and hope for a better future for all peoples.

Futurists are members of a community dedicated to continuing the human experiment and to making progress on the road toward a better future and they work to empower such people. They work, as do others, for a future world "society of conscience," where people will pursue "material as well as spiritual satisfaction, with an awareness of others' welfare" and where "commitment to a conscious evolution process becomes a major theme of all forms of education" (Chen 2001).

They work to contribute to a future world in which human society will be indefinitely sustainable, where people peacefully cooperate for the mutual benefit of all, and where the freedom and well-being of future generations will be assured.

L: Okay, Wendell. I've heard such platitudes before. Yet, because I hear your earnest belief in them, I'll suppress my cynicism—except to say that I don't believe your desirable future will occur any time soon. There are too many people in the world who either act impulsively or who find excuses to become xenophobic, punishing, retributive, intolerant, demonizing, hate-filled, selfish, and violent toward other people.

Thank my Creator I'm not human. We robots don't have so much pain and suffering. Anyway, thank you for talking to me. Time is up. I have to go.

WB: Levelhead, don't forget that we humans feel joy and love too. Don't forget that there are many people of goodwill in the world working for peace and understanding. And certainly don't forget that no matter what terrible things may happen, as long as humans continue to exist, hope crushed to earth will rise again.

L: Well, good luck, Wendell. You humans will need it… Hello Digital, this is Levelhead 753. I'm coming home. Over and out. [Levelhead fades from the screen.]

_____

Bibliography

Bas, E. (1999): *Prospectiva: Herramientas para la Gestión Estratégica del Cambio*. Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, S.A.

Bell, W. (1964): *Jamaican Leaders: Political Attitudes in a New Nation*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

_____. (ed.) (1967): *The Democratic Revolution in the West Indies: Studies in Nationalism, Leadership, and the Belief in Progress*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.

_____ (1968): "The city, the suburb, and a theory of social choice," pp. 132-68 in S. Greer et al. (eds.), *The New Urbanization*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

_____ (1977): "Inequality in independent Jamaica: a preliminary appraisal of elite performance," *Revista/Review Interamericana* 7 (Summer):294-308.

_____ (1997): *Foundations of Futures Studies,* Vols. I and II. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction. (Paperback editions, 2004, 2005)

_____ (2000): "New futures and the eternal struggle between good and evil," *Journal of Futures Studies* 5(2):1-20.

_____ (2002): "The clash of civilizations and universal human values," *Journal of Futures Studies* 6(3):1-20.

Bell, W. and J.J. Baldrich (1983): "Elites, economic ideologies, and democracy in Jamaica," pp. 150-87 in M.M. Czudnowski (ed.), *Political Elites and Social Change*. De Kalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press.

Bell, W. and I. Oxaal (1964): *Decisions of Nationhood: Political and Social Development in the British Caribbean*. Denver, CO: Social Science Foundation, University of Denver.

Bell, W. and R.V. Robinson (1979): "European melody, African rhythm, or West Indian harmony? Changing cultural identity among leaders in a new state," *Social Forces* 58 (September): 249-79.

Bell, W., R.J. Hill, and C.R. Wright (1961): *Public Leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Chandler.

Bezold, C. (1981): *The Future of Pharmaceuticals: The Changing Environment for New Drugs*.

New York: a Wiley Medical Publication.

Boyer, P. (1992): *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*. Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Chen, K.H. (2001): "Critical factors," p. 29 in *Humanity 3000, Symposium No. 1 Proceedings,* Vol. I. Bellevue, WA: Foundation for the Future.

Cooper, R.N. and R. Layard (2002): *What the Future Holds: Insights from Social Science*. Cambridge, MA and London: the MIT Press.

Cornish, E.S. with the members of staff of the World Future Society (1977): *The Study of the Future*. Washington, DC: World Future Society.

____ (2004): *Futuring: The Exploration of the Future*. Bethesda, MD: World Future Society.

Dator, J. (1983): "The 1982 Honolulu electronic town meeting," pp. 211-20 in W. Page (ed.), *The Future of Politics*. London: Frances Pinter in association with the World Futures Studies Federation.

Dator, J.A. (ed.) (2002: *Advancing Futures: Futures Studies in Higher Education*. Westport, CT and London: Praeger Studies on the 21st Century.

Estes, R.J. (1988): *Trends in World Social Development*. New York: Praeger.

Gordon, T. and O. Helmer (1964): *Report on a Long-Range Forecasting Study*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND paper P-2982.

Henderson, H. (1996): *Building a Win-Win World: Life Beyond Global Economic Warfare*. San Francisco, CA: Koehler.

Inayatullah, S. (ed.) (2005): *The Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) Reader: Theory and Case Studies of an Integrative and Transformative Methodology*. Taipei: Tamkang University Press.

Inayatullah, S. and J. Gidley (eds.) (2000): *The University in Transformation: Global Perspectives on the Futures of the University*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Jungk, R. [1973] (1976): *The Everyman Project*. New York: Liveright.

LaHaye, T. and J.B. Jenkins (1995): *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Lilla, M. (2005): "Church meets state," *The New York Times Book Review*, May 15: 39.

LaPalombara, J. (2004): "Corporate corruption and other pathologies," *Journal of Futures Studies* 8(4): 61-74.

Masini, E.B. (1993): *Why Futures Studies?* London: Grey Seal.

Mau, J.A. (1968): *Social Change and Images of the Future: A Study of the Pursuit of Progress in Jamaica*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.

Mead, M. (2005): *The World Ahead: An Anthropologist Anticipates the Future*, Vol. 6 of the Study of Contemporary Western Cultures series. Edited, with an introduction and commentaries, by R.B. Textor. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Meadows, D. H., D. L. Meadows, J. Randers, and W.W. Behrens III (1972): *The Limits to Growth*. New York: Universe.

Meier, D.L. and W. Bell (1959): "Anomia and differential access to the achievement of life goals," *American Sociological Review* 24 (April): 189-202.

Moorthy, R.S. et al. (1998): *Uncompromising Integrity: Motorola's Global Challenge*. Schaumburg, IL: Motorola University Press.

Moskos, C.C., Jr. (1967): *The Sociology of Political Independence*: *A Study of Nationalist Attitudes among West Indian Leaders*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.

Murch, A. (1971): *Black Frenchmen: The Political Integration of the French Antilles*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.

Naisbitt, J. [1982] (1984): *Megatrends: The New Directions Transforming Our Lives*. New York: Warner books.

Perkins, H.W. and W. Bell (1980): "Alienation and social justice in England and the United States: the polity and economy," pp. 71-101 in R.F. Tomasson (ed.), *Comparative Social Research*, Vol. 3. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Polak, F.L. [1955] (1961): *The Image of the Future: Enlightening the Past, Orientating the Present, Forecasting the Future*, Vols. I and II. New York: Oceana.

Robinson, R.V. and W. Bell (1978): "Equality, success, and social justice in England and the United States," *American Sociological Review* 43(2):125-43.

Slaughter, R.A. (ed.). (1996): *The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies*, Vols. 1-3. Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia: DDM Media.

_____. (2004): *Futures Beyond Dystopia: Creating Social Foresight*. London and New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Stephens, E.H. and J.D. Stephens (1986): *Democratic Socialism in Jamaica: The Political*

Movement and Social Transformation in Dependent Capitalism. Princeton, NJ: Princeton
University Press.

Stevenson, T. (2004): "Clement C.P. Chang: bringing foresight to Taiwan," *Futures* 36(8): 921-31.

Textor, R.B. (2005): "Introduction," pp. 1-34 in M. Mead, *The World Ahead: An Anthropologist
Anticipates the Future*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Textor, R.B. et al. (1983): *Austria 2005: Projected Sociocultural Effects of the Microelectronic
Revolution*. Vienna: Orac Pietsch.

Textor, R.B., M.L.B. Ladavalya, and S. Prabudhanitisarn (1984): *Alternative Sociocultural Futures
for Thailand*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Chiang Mai University.

Tough, A. (1991): *Crucial Questions about the Future*. Lanham, MD: University Press of
America.

Bio

Wendell Bell is Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Yale University. He came to Yale in 1963, served as Chair of the Department of Sociology, helped to found the Yale Department of African American Studies, and directed the Yale Comparative Sociology Training Program. Before that, he was on the faculties of Stanford University where he directed the Survey Research Facility, Northwestern University, and then the University of California, Los Angeles, where he directed the West Indies Study Program. During World War II, he was a naval aviator and did a tour of duty in the Philippines. He received his Ph.D. degree in sociology from UCLA in 1952 and did research on the social areas of American cities, focusing on social class, race, family life, and segregation. Later, he studied elites, nationalism, and social change in the new states of the Caribbean as well as inequality in England and the United States.

He has been a futurist for more than four decades, focusing his work on the nature of futures studies and comparative social change; human values, the nature of evil; and images of a future good society. He has published more than 200 articles and is the author or co-author of nine books including ***The Sociology of the Future*** and the two volume ***Foundations of Futures Studies***. In 2005, he received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the World Futures Studies Federation.