

THE 4TH REVOLUTION

From my front porch

I offer you these passages below from Klaus Schwab's FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION because I hear and feel your frustration and powerlessness in the face of the avalanche of socio economic, political, and systemic assaults on our interlocking multiple individual and communal selves. He begins his discussion by reminding us as well as naming the unprecedented "changes and challenges which are fundamentally revolutionizing the way we live, work, and relate to one another in its scale and complexity what I consider to be the fourth industrial revolution is unlike anything humankind has experienced before." Schwab, Klaus, FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION, KINDLE p. 1.

Schwab posits that one of the fundamental challenges and changes is the disruption and expansion in our human connections. He looks at the question of human connection as a socio spiritual one which determines how we live with others, the destruction of our ability to feel for others as well as have access to our feelings.

In my estimation, alienation, intellectual decline and narrowing of perspectives, amorality and immorality, creative mediocrity, death of social justice movements, social death, growing economic oppression and tyranny, White militarized carceral surveillance, state and biological and genetic violations and manipulations, and accelerated genocide of Black, Brown and Indigenous communities explain the disturbing socio economic, spiritual, and political dynamics we are witnessing and developing in prime time.

These pages from Schwab help us find the language and context to name and define our growing feelings of unsteadiness, lack of inspiration, alienation, and loneliness. This portion of Dr. Klaus Schwab's book tackles the question of Human Connections in the FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION with the eyes of an insider and outside critic. They prod us to ask these questions: (1) What does it mean to follow Jesus in a 21st century fourth industrial revolution? (2) What does it mean to be church and community? (3) What is the good news? and (4) What language should we use to define ourselves and others?

Schwab reflects on and analyzes the vast "CHANGES ACROSS THE PHYSICAL DIGITAL AND BIOLOGICAL WORLDS" in the FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION. He tells us that "We are witnessing profound shifts across all industries, marked by the emergence of new business models, the disruption of incumbents and the reshaping of production, consumption, transportation and delivery systems. On the societal front, a paradigm shift is underway in how we work and communicate, as well as how we express, inform, and entertain ourselves. Equally, governments and institutions are

being reshaped, as are systems of education, healthcare, and transportation among many others. New ways of using technology to change behavior and our systems of production and consumption also offer the potential for supporting the regeneration and preservation of natural environments, rather than creating hidden costs in the form of externalities. The changes are historic in terms of their size, speed, and scope.”
KINDLE, p.1

SCHWAB'S DEFINITION AND SCOPE OF THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

“The fourth industrial revolution, however, is not only about smart and connected machines and systems. Its scope is much wider. Occurring simultaneously are waves of further breakthroughs in areas ranging from gene sequencing to nanotechnology, from renewables to quantum computing. It is the fusion of these technologies and their interaction across the physical, digital, and biological domains that make the fourth industrial revolution fundamentally different from previous revolutions. In this revolution, emerging technologies and broad-based innovation are diffusing much faster and more widely than in previous ones, which continue to unfold in some parts of the world. This second industrial revolution has yet to be fully experienced by 17% of world, as nearly 1.3 billion people still lack access to electricity. This is also true for the third industrial revolution, with more than half of the world's population, 4 billion people, most of whom live in the developing world, lacking internet access. The spindle (the hallmark of the first industrial revolution) took almost 120 years to spread outside of Europe. By contrast, the internet permeated across the globe in less than a decade. Still valid today is the lesson from the first industrial revolution—that the extent to which society embraces technological innovation is a major determinant of progress. The government and public institutions, as well as the private sector, need to do their part, but it is also essential that citizens see the long-term benefits.” KINDLE, p7.

HUMAN CONNECTIONS

“As the ethical questions raised above suggest, the more digital and high-tech the world becomes, the greater the need to still feel the human touch, nurtured by close relationships and social connections. There are growing concerns that, as the fourth industrial revolution deepens our individual and collective relationships with technology, it may negatively affect our social skills and ability to empathize. We see this already happening. A 2010 study by a research team at the University of Michigan found a 40% decline in empathy among college students today (as compared with their counterparts 20 or 30 years ago), with most of this decline coming after 2000. According to MIT's Sherry Turkle, 44% of teenagers never unplug, even while playing sports or having a meal with family or friends. With face-to-face conversations crowded out by online interactions, there are fears that an entire generation of young people consumed by social media is struggling to listen, make eye contact or read body language. Our relationship with our mobile technologies is a case in point.”

“The fact that we are always connected may deprive us of one of our most important assets: the time to pause, reflect and engage in a substantive conversation neither

aided by technology nor intermediated by social media. Turkle refers to studies showing that, when two people are talking, the mere presence of a phone on the table between them or in their peripheral vision changes both what they talk about and their degree of connectedness. This does not mean we give up our phones but rather that we use them 'with greater intention. Other experts express related concerns. Technology and culture writer Nicholas Carr states that the more time we spend immersed in digital waters, the shallower our cognitive capabilities become due to the fact that we cease exercising control over our attention: 'The Net is by design an interruption system, a machine geared for dividing attention. Frequent interruptions scatter our thoughts, weaken our memory, and make us tense and anxious.' "

"The more complex the train of thought we're involved in, the greater the impairment the distractions cause. Back in 1971, Herbert Simon, who won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1978, warned that 'a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention.' This is much worse today, in particular for decision makers who tend to be overloaded with too much 'stuff'—overwhelmed and on overdrive, in a state of constant stress.' 'In an age of acceleration, nothing can be more exhilarating than going slow,' writes the travel essayist Pico Iyer. 'And in an age of distraction, nothing is so luxurious as paying attention. And in an age of constant movement, nothing is so urgent as sitting still.' Our brain, engaged by all the digital instruments that connect us on a 24-hour basis, risks becoming a perpetual-motion machine that puts us in an unremitting frenzy. It is not unusual for me to talk to leaders who say that they no longer have time to pause and reflect, let alone enjoy the 'luxury' of reading even a short article all the way through. Decision makers from all parts of global society seem to be in a state of ever-increasing exhaustion, so deluged by multiple competing demands that they turn from frustration to resignation and sometimes despair. In our new digital age, it is indeed difficult to step back, though not impossible."

"First, I feel that the required levels of leadership and understanding of the changes under way, across all sectors, are low when contrasted with the need to rethink our economic, social and political systems to respond to the fourth industrial revolution. As a result, both at the national and global levels, the requisite institutional framework to govern the diffusion of innovation and mitigate the disruption is inadequate at best and, at worst, absent altogether. Second, the world lacks a narrative that outlines the opportunities and challenges of the fourth industrial revolution, a narrative that is essential if we are to empower a diverse set of individuals and communities and avoid a popular backlash against the fundamental changes under way." KINDLE, pp. 101-102.

SOCIETY in THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

"Society Scientific advancement, commercialization and the diffusion of innovation are social processes that unfold as people develop and exchange ideas, values, interests and social norms in a variety of contexts. This makes it hard to discern the full societal impact of new technological systems: there are many intertwined components that

comprise our societies and many innovations that are in some way coproduced by them.”

“The big challenge for most societies will be how to absorb and accommodate the new modernity while still embracing the nourishing aspects of our traditional value systems. The fourth industrial revolution, which tests so many of our fundamental assumptions, may exacerbate the tensions that exist between deeply religious societies defending their fundamental values and those whose beliefs are shaped by a more secular worldview. The greatest danger to global cooperation and stability may come from radical groups fighting progress with extreme, ideologically motivated violence. As sociologist Manuel Castells, professor of communication technology and society at the Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California, has noted: ‘In all moments of major technological change, people, companies, and institutions feel the depth of the change, but they are often overwhelmed by it, out of sheer ignorance of its effects.’ Being overwhelmed due to ignorance is precisely what we should avoid, particularly when it comes to how the many diverse communities that comprise modern society form, develop and relate to one another.” KINDLE, pp. 90-91

CLASS

“Today, the world is very unequal indeed. According to Credit Suisse’s Global Wealth Report 2015, half of all assets around the world are now controlled by the richest 1% of the global population, while ‘the lower half of the global population collectively own less than 1% of global wealth.’ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that the average income of the richest 10% of the population in OECD countries is approximately nine times that of the poorest 10%. Further, inequality within most countries is rising, even in those that have experienced income groups and dramatic drops in the number of people living in poverty. China’s Gini index, for example, rose from approximately 30 in the 1980s to over 45 by 2010. Rising inequality is more than an economic phenomenon of some concern—it is a major challenge for societies.”

“In their book *THE SPIRIT LEVEL: WHY GREATER EQUALITY MAKES SOCIETIES STRONGER*, British epidemiologists Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett put forward data indicating that unequal societies tend to be more violent, have higher numbers of people in prison, experience greater levels of mental illness and obesity, and have lower life expectancies and lower levels of trust. The corollary, they found, is that, after controlling for average incomes, more-equal societies have higher levels of child well-being, lower levels of stress and drug use, and lower infant mortality. Other researchers have found that higher levels of inequality increase segregation and reduce educational outcomes for children and young adults.”

“Today, a middle-class job no longer guarantees a middle-class lifestyle, and over the past 20 years, the four traditional attributes of middle-class status (education, health,

pensions and house ownership) have performed worse than inflation. In the US and the UK, education is now priced as a luxury. A winner-takes-all market economy, to which the middle-class has increasingly limited access, may percolate into democratic malaise and dereliction, which compound social challenges.” KINDLE, pp. 91-84

COMMUNITY

“From a broad societal standpoint, one of the greatest (and most observable) effects of digitization is the emergence of the ‘me-centered’ society—a process of individuation and emergence of new forms of belonging and community. Contrary to the past, the notion of belonging to a community today is more defined by personal projects and individual values and interests rather than by space (the local community), work and family. New forms of digital media, which form a core component of the fourth industrial revolution, are increasingly driving our individual and collective framing of society and community. As the Forum explores in its *Digital Media and Society Report*, digital media is connecting people one-to-one and one-to-many in entirely new ways, enabling users to maintain friendships across time and distance, creating new interest groups and enabling those who are socially or physically isolated to connect with like-minded people. The high availability, low costs and geographically neutral aspects of digital media also enable greater interaction across social, economic, cultural, political, religious, and ideological boundaries.”

“Unfortunately, while the fourth industrial revolution empowers citizens, it can also be used to act against their interests. The Forum’s *Global Risks Report 2016* describes the phenomenon of the ‘(dis)empowered citizen,’ whereby individuals and communities are simultaneously empowered and excluded by the use of emerging technologies by governments, companies and interest groups.”

“The democratic power of digital media means it can also be used by non-state actors, particularly communities with harmful intentions to spread propaganda and to mobilize followers in favor of extremist causes, as has been seen recently with the rise of Da’esh and other social-media-savvy terrorist organizations. There is the danger that the dynamics of sharing that typifies social media use can skew decision making and pose risks to civil society. Counterintuitively, the fact that there is so much media available through digital channels can mean that an individual’s news sources become narrowed and polarized into what MIT clinical psychologist Sherry Turkle, a professor of the social studies of science and technology, calls a ‘spiral of silence.’ This matters because what we read, share and see in the context of social media shapes our political and civic decisions.” KINDLE, pp. 94-95.

THE INDIVIDUAL

“The fourth industrial revolution is not only changing what we do but also who we are. The impact it will have on us as individuals is manifold, affecting our identity and its many related facets—our sense of privacy, our notions of ownership, our consumption patterns, the time we devote to work and leisure, how we develop our careers, and

cultivate our skills. It will influence how we meet people and nurture relationships, the hierarchies upon which we depend, our health, and maybe sooner than we think, it could lead to forms of human augmentation that cause us to question the very nature of human existence. Such changes elicit excitement and fear as we move at unprecedented speed. Until now, technology has primarily enabled us to do things in easier, faster, and more efficient ways. It has also provided us with opportunities for personal development. But we are beginning to see that there is much more on offer and at stake. For all the reasons already mentioned, we are at the threshold of a radical systemic change that requires human beings to adapt continuously. As a result, we may witness an increasing degree of polarization in the world, marked by those who embrace change versus those who resist it.”

“This gives rise to an inequality that goes beyond the societal one described earlier. This ontological inequality will separate those who adapt from those who resist—the material winners and losers in all senses of the words. The winners may even benefit from some form of radical human improvement generated by certain segments of the fourth industrial revolution from which the losers will be deprived.” p. 97, KINDLE.

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