

Introduction to Transitionalism Video - Transcript

The seemingly boundless ocean has always exerted a deep attraction where the distant horizon represents both fears of the unknown and hopes for the future. For the European explorers of the 15th and 16th centuries, the unknown induced fears of ships falling over the edges of the earth or becoming prey to horrific sea monsters. Along with the fear were dreams of great wealth to be gained from the rich lands of China and India. As history teaches us neither of these expectations were met. While wealth came to some, it came not from China or India but from previously unknown lands, peoples, and cultures whose consequences were an equal share of triumph and tragedy.

As fearful of the unknown as those early mariners were it was curiosity about what laid beyond the horizon and hope for a better future that prevailed resulting in a dramatically expanded view of the world, and humanity of itself. And it is these basic impulses that make me optimistic regarding our chances of not only surviving but flourishing as we approach the dawning years of the 22nd century. Just as Europe was a very different place after the discovery of the new world, the world in the waning years of the 21st century will also be very different than the world we know now. As the early explorers of the 15th and 16th centuries revealed to the people of their time an expanded range of possibilities, over the course of the next few minutes we will embark on a journey of our own to discover what the future might hold for us.

Hello. I'm Robert Wasley, and I would like to welcome you to brief introduction to a new worldview that both reflects and frames this newly emerging reality called Transitionalism. Transitionalism began as a personal quest to better understand the course of humanity's trajectory and about my own place in it by asking; where have we been, where are we now, and where are we going. Answers to such questions are crucial to understanding why things are the way they are, what we might expect in the future, and what we could be doing to give meaning to our lives in this time of radical transformation.

CROSSROADS

In the early years of the 21st century, humanity finds itself at a crossroad as a consequence of underlying trends and the value structures and choices made over the last couple of hundred years that now present us with two general challenge categories: immediate and near future. Immediate challenges include many that are long familiar such as a growing disparity of wealth, crime, political corruption, and environmental

degradation. What is unique about these chronic conditions at this time is how the severity and scope of these challenges are converging presenting humanity with a threat of existential potential. A crucial part of any solution to such problems requires the authority and power of political and economic institutions, however, also emblematic of the times, people's trust and confidence in most all institutions has reached new lows.

The second category of challenges are those of the near future driven by developments in artificial intelligence to augment the cognitive capabilities of both human beings and robots, giving AI the ability to come to know more about the world and make our jobs safer. Nanotechnology, involving the manipulation of matter at scales of a billionth of a meter and less will allow us to create a seemingly endless variety of material products at little or no cost. Then there is genetic engineering and synthetic biology, where DNA, RNA, and proteins will be manipulated and programmed giving us the control of the processes of life itself to greatly benefit human health and overall wellbeing. Singly anyone of these develops would have wide ranging repercussions; together, they present a path to a future without any precedence.

As with all things holding great promise, also present are dark possibilities. Through automation artificial intelligence and robotics will displace large segments of the working population within two decades. If not adequately controlled nanotechnology could have adverse effects for human health and the environment, while the impact of genetic engineering and synthetic biology could be dire in our ability to create wholly artificial highly pathogenic diseases or restrict individual freedom of future generations by means of mass coercive biological manipulation.

UNDERSTANDING TRENDS

Related to the kind of future we could have are two separate, yet related trends underlying our current value systems. The more short term and superficial of the two is the process of the global social order shifting its economic foundations from agriculture and industry to information. The second more fundamental trend is our continued evolution from animal to human being. The physical form we have possessed for about 200,000 years to the present and identify as human is simply a step on a progressive path of evolutionary development. Our emotional responses and fight-flight instinct act as a reminder of the existing active legacy of behavior patterns we share with animals due to the inherited structure of our brain. Humanity's evolutionary path is not 'progressive' in a strictly Darwinian or biological sense as with plants and animals. In

those terms we are not human but simply identified as Homo sapiens. To be human means to possess the capacity for self-reflective awareness and where our evolution is driven by socialization and technology.

Unlike animals, biology does not provide us answers to how to live out our lives. In possessing self-reflective awareness, there exists a perceptual gap where we feel the sense of standing apart from one another and things in the world with the question of who we are and why we exist, from which our spiritual nature emerges and defines all of our actions as an effort to find an answer or the acting on one. These qualities, together with imagination, formed the wellspring from which tool-making and socialization emerged initially giving rise to the first nomadic societies and then with the development of agriculture, urban civilization. After having dominated regions of the planet the different civilizations have now coalesced into one civilization that spans the globe and has begun its reach into space.

WE ARE NOT OUR VALUES

Understood in this way we see our future evolutionary path is not to 'dead-end' and remain as we are; part animal, part human; but to keep pushing on in our drive to becoming more human. How the underlying trends are expressed are in the consequences of the value systems, specifically religion and liberal ideology, that frame and drive the choices we make, individually and as a society. As advocates for change we don't suffer any illusions, fully aware that the collective attachment to what is familiar condemns humanity to a very difficult path during much of the 21st century.

However, while Transitionalism is critical of religion and liberal ideology, it is important to bear in mind that is not because they are thought to be without value. On the contrary, both embody what is best about being human – our spirituality and aspirations to be more than what we are. Still it is broadly recognized that each system has both positive and negative aspects. In making them more acceptable individually we are motivated to 'cherry pick' and adopt those parts we find desirable and seek to ignore those we find less so. Naturally, not everyone accepts or rejects the same parts. In either instance, this is a futile exercise. By accepting the positive aspects one must also accept the negative because both the positive and negative elements emerge from the same central idea. So, it is the case, in continuing to accept the values of religion and liberal ideology means perpetuating its evils as well as its goods.

Value systems are the foundation of a set of social practices, a tool set if you will, that arise out of the realities and needs of a particular social context that we utilize to make sense of our existence and negotiate living day-to-day life. When the social context changes and the previously held values and practices are no longer relevant to the new conditions, they need to be abandoned and replaced with more relevant values and practices to avoid social dis-integration. This is not an indictment of any particular value system or way of life, but simply describes the essential process of social change. This process can be eased by understanding and accepting the fact there is a difference between who we think we are individually and the values we choose to identify with.

TRANSITIONALISM

To truly reject and move beyond what is wrong, and build on what is right about what religion and liberal ideology has had to offer we need to adopt a new alternative value structure. The new value system being spoken of here is Transitionalism.

Transitionalism is founded on the transcendental question of meaning itself, thereby being able to act as the path to providing a new foundation on which we can form a more meaningful, positive, and realistic view of the world and ourselves. It allows us to see things, including human beings -- individually and communally -- as they are; dynamic and transitory, requiring that any answer defining what is meaningful must be replaced when the appropriate time comes to do so. For this reason it is important to avoid becoming overly attached to any particular answer.

Transitionalism identifies three fundamental elements that represent everything we know; individuals, society, and the environment. Transitionalism sees each of these elements as interconnected and interdependent making our nature to be both social and individual, where all human beings share the same physical-cognitive-social-psychological structure offering the opportunity of build a unified world perspective and shared sense of community.

Transitionalism promotes the principles and practice of self-actualization, a process of cultivating self-awareness to help realize a positive sense of life's meaning, as a driver for individual and social betterment. Reciprocation primarily defines the relationship between individuals and individuals and society. It also defines the relationship between the environment and the needs and desires of individuals and society, where consideration for the environment must be given at least equal weight if we are going to build a sustainable future. Lastly, while respectful of the past, Transitionalism does not

look to it as a guide for the future. Transitionalism embodies the conditions, challenges, and opportunities of the world as it is and what it is becoming where technology is an expression of our humanity, but not itself a solution.

In pursuing Transitionalism what are we being offered and what do we gain? For individuals this means obtaining greater awareness and understanding of self. It also means a renewal of one's connection to others and a sense of control gained through an understanding of the meaning of events. For society, Transitionalism serves to negotiate a path away from our fragmented present to an integrated future to build a new sense of communal vitality and one-ness.

BUILDING A NEW VISION TOGETHER

It is at this point we engage the next question, which is how can we realize such a vision? Transitionalism is more than a spiritual or intellectual approach, it is also a social activist movement advocating real, viable, practical system-based means to solve, not simply manage, society's most difficult challenges in ways where everyone benefits. You too can be a part by taking the following four actionable steps:

First, this video presentation should only be viewed as a brief introduction. In order to become more acquainted with Transitionalism read the free e-book *Meaning, Being and Transition*, along with the blog posts and articles published at Transitionalism.org. Critically assess the ideas expressed and if they continue to make sense at a deeper level then begin incorporating its principles and practices into your daily life.

Second, Transitionalism cannot be practiced in isolation, but requires one to act in community. Join together with other like-minded individuals who also can be found at Transitionalism.org.

Third, once you feel Transitionalism has provided value to your life and think that society could also benefit, do share your experience and ideas with those who express interest or you feel might be interested.

Fourth, reshaping society for the benefit of others is only made possible by those willing to become advocates for change. As a spiritually motivated social activist, you are encouraged to volunteer your time and energy to any cause of your choice.

It is expected that for many of you who are now watching this video you are doing so because you are looking for an alternative and find appealing at least some of the things discussed here, but in other ways it is too far of a reach. Not everyone who shares the basic Transitionalist vision and goals to eliminate social ills such as poverty, hunger, and the detrimental application of technology, will want to identify themselves as a Transitionalist or even with the movement in general. This is quite okay. What is important is the sharing of a common spirit and the desire act on it. For this reason we are willing to meet and work with you at whatever point you are at because any contributions you make, large or small, in whatever way you deem appropriate, becomes part of a greater united effort. The concept of a united effort extends further to a desire on the part of the Transitionalist community to act in association with any group who desire to collaborate in realizing this broader vision for humanity.

Only in this way we can provide everyone healthier, safer, more productive, and satisfying lives not only by addressing the problems of material deprivation and social inequity, but be assured that the fears we now associate with new technology will never come to pass. There is nothing intrinsically good or bad about robotics, artificial intelligence, bioengineering, synthetic biology or nanotechnology, since any one of them alone or together can be the path to our salvation or extinction. Instead, it is the value system on which choices are based that will determine what kind of future lies before us.

We now find ourselves at the end of this journey and I hope at the beginning of another. Only by freeing ourselves from what has been, can we hope to obtain what can be, and it is the role of Transitionalism to show the way. The future is in your hands. Which future will you choose?

Thank you for watching and I look forward to hearing from you soon.