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# From 'dystopia' to 'Ourtopia': charting a future for global governance

RAMA MANI

Governance is essentially not an end in itself, but a process, a means to an end. This being the case, it is vital to reconsider regularly what its ends are and whether the means deployed are commensurate with and appropriate for achieving those ends. It is equally essential for governance to be rethought and revitalized periodically, particularly in times of crisis. When better than now, when crises confound us, as we mark the 70th anniversary of the United Nations, our primary organ for global governance?

## ***Our global neighbourhood: the Commission on Global Governance***

My introduction to global governance occurred when the concept emerged from the chaotic clouds of confusion after the Berlin Wall fell. The International Commission on Global Governance was formed in 1992 at the initiative of the visionary German statesman Willy Brandt, and jointly chaired by Ingvar Carlsson, Prime Minister of Sweden, and Shridath Ramphal, former Foreign Minister of Guyana. Its 28 eminent members tasked themselves with addressing how to govern the complexity of the post-Cold War world. Their major preoccupation was how, at long last, the protection and the well-being of both people and planet could be secured, while maximizing the untapped potential of human development and multilateral cooperation.

From its inception in 1992 until the global launch of its report in 1995, I served the commission's secretariat. As Senior External Relations Officer, I solicited input from academic institutions, think-tanks, civil society organizations and intergovernmental bodies around the world to shape our analysis and recommendations. With such partners, we convened collaborative conferences and regional consultations, and presented and sought feedback on our interim findings at major UN conferences and summits. The final report was officially launched in January 1995 simultaneously at the UN General Assembly Hall in New York City and the World Economic Forum in Davos, to signal the nature and expanded scope of global governance beyond merely nation-state actors and intergovernmental issues. The report was then launched on all continents, to foster intellectual and political debate and action.

Early on, when I first reached out to academic, non-governmental and international organizations, including UN agencies, much of my time was spent

attempting to explain to curious interlocutors what this inscrutable new term ‘global governance’ might mean. It is noteworthy that a term unfamiliar to many within these circles just 23 years ago is now in common parlance.

The commission characterized governance broadly as ‘the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs’. It recognized that governance is not a one-off goal or project. Rather, governance is ‘a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and co-operative action may be taken’.<sup>1</sup>

Reviewing the report in retrospect after the passage of 20 years, four distinguishing features stand out as pertinent to the current context.

First, the report began by hailing the emergence of civil society as the major factor reshaping history, and recognized non-state actors as fundamental players in global decision-making.

Second, the commission framed the newly emergent post-Cold War world as an interdependent community or ‘global neighbourhood’ that encompasses humans, all life forms and the planetary ecosystem itself. In such a neighbourhood, ‘global governance’, or the collaborative, creative and inclusive management of our common affairs, was an imperative, not a choice.

Third, the commission determined that to establish such governance in a ‘global neighbourhood’ required above all a ‘global civic ethic’ as the foundation stone upon which institutions, procedures and rules could be built. The bulk of the report was then devoted to a detailed analysis of and recommendations for the main constituent areas requiring enhanced global governance—security, economy, environment, law and international institutions.

Nevertheless, the fourth distinguishing feature of the commission lies in the report’s conclusion, where it returned from an analysis of the parts to an integrated vision and framework of the whole of global governance. This signalled its recognition that bringing this ‘global neighbourhood’ into being and sustaining it required more than reform of its constituent parts. The report closed by underscoring the vital need for visionary, courageous and ethical leadership at all levels to carry forward global governance.

While several parts of the commission’s analysis and recommendations have been outpaced by the seismic changes of the past two decades, these four features stand out as guideposts in charting the future of global governance through present turbulence.

### **‘Just security’: a step forward for global governance?**

The most recent attempt to ‘confront the crisis of global governance’ was undertaken by the Commission on International Security, Justice and Governance, which launched its report in June 2015 to mark the 70th anniversary of the UN. This commission diagnosed current crises and offered remedies, both concep-

<sup>1</sup> Commission on Global Governance (CGG), *Our global neighbourhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 2.

tual and practical. Commissioners were aware of the vast leap in governance capacity required to meet current crises, as highlighted sombrely in their executive summary: 'Yet meeting these challenges, which undermine human security, human development, and human rights, also exceeds the operational and political capacities of global governance institutions created in the mid-twentieth century for critical but different purposes.'<sup>2</sup>

The conceptual cornerstone of the commissioners' contribution is the notion of 'just security', which, they believe, will effect the needed governance reform: 'The goal of just security is to forge a mutually supportive global system of accountable, fair, and effective governance and sustainable peace.'<sup>3</sup> The commission asserts that this conjugation of security and justice will both overcome crises and revitalize global governance: 'Just security is intended to enable humanity not only to survive but to thrive with dignity, offering the basis for a new global ethic and new direction for global governance.'<sup>4</sup> It proffers an adroit analysis of traditional and non-traditional global challenges, from conflicts to climate change to cybercrime, and proposes a range of detailed reforms. They go beyond convention to respond to changing times in two areas: addressing cybertechnology, and recommending enhanced inclusion of input from civil society and business in global governance. This expansion of the remit and scope of global governance is noteworthy. Their ultimate recommendation, to ensure that the vast number of reforms they propose go ahead and that the processes for expanded inclusion of non-state actors stay on track, is a Conference on International Institutions at the 75th anniversary of the UN in 2020.

Returning to their central concept of just security, the commissioners conclude optimistically in their 'Call to action': 'In seeking to forge a mutually supportive system of good democratic governance and sustainable peace globally through the intersection of security and justice, just security offers a unique prism for understanding and responding to some of the most pressing global concerns of our time.'<sup>5</sup> The commission's concise analysis of global challenges, from security to climate change to economics to global institutions, is informative, accurate and timely. Likewise, their recommendations in each area are thoughtful, methodical and competent. They reveal the commissioners' extensive knowledge and experience in the institutions and processes of governance, both national and global.

The report and its recommendations are an accurate reflection of the commission's membership. It was co-chaired by Madeleine Albright, former US Secretary of State and UN Ambassador, and Ibrahim Gambari, former Nigerian Foreign Minister and UN Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs. Like their co-chairs, the twelve geographically diverse members of the commission were all former ministers, diplomats or UN officials. Many were pathbreakers during their tenure—for example Lloyd Axworthy, former Foreign Minister of Canada,

<sup>2</sup> Commission on International Security, Justice and Governance (CISJG), *Confronting the crisis of global governance* (The Hague: The Hague Institute of Global Justice; Washington DC: Stimson Center, 2015), p. xv.

<sup>3</sup> CISJG, *Confronting the crisis*, p. xvi.

<sup>4</sup> CISJG, *Confronting the crisis*, p. xx.

<sup>5</sup> CISJG, *Confronting the crisis*, p. 113.

tenaciously championed human security as a principle of foreign and security policy and a foundation for global governance.

Ironically, the strength of this commission—the eminence and experience of its members in national and global governance—proves to be its weakness. Inevitably, the state-centric perspective and experience in foreign policy and global governance shared by the commissioners, notwithstanding their geographic and cultural diversity, is reflected accurately in their analysis. Their prowess lies in statecraft: in shaping the contours of UN and national policies and institutions over recent decades. Consequently, their recommendations focus primarily on institutional reforms, rather than on a fundamental rethink of global politics and a much-needed renewal of global governance itself. Ultimately, they exercise their schooled statecraft more than their capacity for vision and new direction. They bow to pragmatism rather than to the visionary impulse for change sweeping across the world, as ordinary people everywhere express their dissatisfaction with governance and their despair over global disorder.

With due deference to the value of the report as an authoritative guideline for UN institutional reform, two observations on the proposed remedial concept of just security are offered here to substantiate this critique of the commission's lack of vision and originality.

First, past commissions, such as the Commission on Global Governance and the UN High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change,<sup>6</sup> recognized that a central obstacle to accountable global governance is the unchanged status of the permanent five (P5) members of the UN Security Council (UNSC). They addressed this intractable challenge head on, offered detailed recommendations and made concerted efforts to change the status quo at the 50th and 60th anniversaries of the UN. Admittedly, they failed. The new commission avoided this poisoned chalice entirely, adopting perhaps what it considered a pragmatic approach to focus on what was achievable. It concentrated its proposed reforms of the UNSC on the expansion of the non-permanent membership, the improvement of working methods, and regular meetings with civil society and business actors. While such pragmatism might avert controversy and obstruction of their proposed reforms, it raises the serious question of whether the very persistence of uninterrupted 'permanent five' status does not contradict starkly their central concept of 'just security'.

Second, in accordance with its focus on security and its central concept of 'just security', the commission provided an extensive analysis of violent conflict, and offered detailed institutional recommendations on improving the UN's infrastructure to deal with conflict and peacebuilding. Yet, at a time when one of the greatest threats to global security is the dangerous stand-off between NATO powers and Russia, this issue is not even analysed, nor is a forward-looking solution proposed. Similarly, although the pernicious conflict in the Ukraine is straining East–West relations and remains unresolved, neither Crimea nor Ukraine is discussed in

<sup>6</sup> Its report was published in 2004: United Nations High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, *A more secure world: our shared responsibility* (New York: UN, 2004).

the report.<sup>7</sup> Equally striking from the viewpoint of 'just security' is that in the exhaustive list of detailed institutional recommendations on conflict and security, there is no mention of the soaring arms trade, or of the dangerous arms race, or of the unaccounted flows of military aid fuelling current wars. The commission missed an opportunity to demonstrate the utility and added value of the 'unique prism' of just security to provide breakthrough solutions to major global crises, and thus undermined the credibility of its own call to action.

Whether lapses or conscious choices to avoid controversial yet incontrovertible challenges, these omissions indicate the commission's decision to opt for pragmatism over vision or new direction, and to accept the prevalent paradigm of governance determined by national interests rather than to challenge, expand or renew this paradigm.

Certainly, the UN and its innumerable agencies, and global governance structures and bureaucratic processes, will be markedly improved if the recommendations spelt out by the commission are heeded. But the question remains: will implementing their recommendations either resolve the much wider crisis of governance they set out to address, or improve the lot of the millions who live in abject fear and want and who clamour for the very security and justice the commission promises?

## **The two shortcomings of governance reform**

The succinct comparison between the two commissions presented above allows us to discern two common shortcomings of most attempts at reforming global governance.

First, pragmatism tends to overrule the initial visionary impulse of such efforts. Attempts at (r)evolutionary overhaul consequently get reduced to piecemeal institutional reform.

Second, all such reform efforts are confined to the conventional logic of the nation-state as the inescapable unit of governance and market democracy as its prescribed form. They may pay lip service to mounting evidence of the failure of nation-states generally and market democracy specifically to deliver freedom from either fear or want, and to fulfil their citizens' needs. Yet they do not consider revising or overhauling the conventional governance paradigm as a logical consequence.

The paradox is that while such endeavours stem from the commitment to resolve complex global crises, they get caught unawares in these two traps, and despite their intellectually and practically rigorous reports, they finally have scant impact on either the actual causes or the actual consequences of these crises. Let us analyse these two shortcomings.

<sup>7</sup> Dmitri Trenin, 'Welcome to Cold War II', *Foreign Policy*, 4 March 2014, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/03/04/welcome\\_to\\_cold\\_war\\_ii](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/03/04/welcome_to_cold_war_ii), accessed 13 Oct. 2015.

## *The first shortcoming of governance reform: cautious pragmatism versus bold vision*

The new commission is not alone in falling short on vision. This need to balance vision with caution, and idealism with pragmatism, has beset most endeavours to improve governance in whole or in part.

Throughout its three-year term—while Bosnia, Somalia, northern Iraq and Rwanda collapsed into complex humanitarian emergencies—the Commission on Global Governance was equally seized of the need to balance idealism with pragmatism in defining its response. Several commissioners expressed this concern repeatedly, from the first meeting to the last. Numerous other commissions and panels have addressed governance reform in the interim, such as the UN High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, which reported before the UN's 60th anniversary in 2005.<sup>8</sup> Each panel and commission has shared this preoccupation with balancing idealism and pragmatism.

Note, for example, the famed Brahimi Report on peacekeeping operations.<sup>9</sup> Its worthy and timely contribution to ameliorating peace operations is acknowledged; however, one observation merits attention. The panel opined that to rescue its tarnished reputation, the UN should undertake peace operations only in cases where success was likely, based on conditions and contexts it outlined.<sup>10</sup> What this effectively meant is that in messy cases where atrocities and human suffering might be acute but chains of command and authority might be fluid, the UN should abstain from involvement. Thus, notwithstanding the strength of its operational recommendations, overall the panel's pragmatic concern with salvaging the UN's frayed reputation prevailed over the more challenging vital imperative of finding effective means to protect fellow humans, whenever and wherever their lives are massively threatened.

It would not be remiss to observe that the visionary scope of the Commission on Global Governance's own proposals was also reduced in practice to little more than piecemeal reform. The commission itself backed away from its initial commitment to stand firmly behind its vision and recommendations and help usher them into implementation. The least offensive proposals were given lip service by decision-makers and scholars, while the more ambitious recommendations were swept surreptitiously under the carpet. Some of the commission's proposals, such as the establishment of an International Criminal Court (ICC), already long in discussion and buoyed up by civic and political momentum, came to pass. Some proposals were adapted and enhanced by other commissions, and adopted subsequently. For example, the Commission on Global Governance's recommendations to make humanitarian intervention more accountable and consistent were considered more thoroughly by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty; ICISS proposed the conceptually more

<sup>8</sup> UN High-level Panel, *A more secure world*.

<sup>9</sup> *Report of the panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi (New York: UN, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Christine Gray, 'Peacekeeping after the Brahimi Report: is there a crisis of credibility for the UN?', *Journal of Conflict and Security Law* 6: 2, 2001, pp. 267–88.

rigorous and politically more palatable concept of Responsibility to Protect, which was adopted by member states in 2005.<sup>11</sup> Other proposals of the Commission on Global Governance less favourable to the status quo, such as establishing an Economic Security Council or a right of petition for civil society, and especially UNSC reform, were ignored. As at the 60th anniversary, following the High-level Panel's report, debate stagnated in internecine arguments about procedural and institutional reforms. The focus thus slipped away from the broad, integrated vision of an interdependent, interconnected global neighbourhood anchored in a global civic ethic, nurtured by shared values and guided by courageous leadership. The opportunity to inculcate, if not a new paradigm of governance, then certainly a substantially upgraded, humanized framework for interstate relations, was lost.

Unfortunately and inevitably, in each case the vision of such eminent expert bodies has become so tempered with pragmatic concerns and worries about real and imagined obstacles and resistance to change that their ambitious projects for meaningful change are reduced to piecemeal restructuring of institutions and processes. Thus the common weakness of post-Cold War attempts to improve global governance has been the tendency for pragmatism to overwhelm vision, and for piecemeal institutional or procedural reform to replace meaningful overhaul or major change, even in the face of meta-crisis or impending disaster.

### *The second shortcoming of global governance reform: state sovereignty and national interests*

The second failing of most endeavours to reform global governance is their subjugation to the paradigm of state sovereignty, and their inability to see beyond the box of the nation-state model of governance. While they repeat the truism, oft-observed since 1989, of the decline of state sovereignty, these commissions do not question the pursuit of national interest, even when this is the proximate cause of the global crises they have set out to resolve.

To their credit, both the Commission on Global Governance and the Commission on International Security, Justice and Governance recognized the changing nature of state sovereignty, and recommended greater inclusion of civic and private sector actors in governance. However, neither questioned the centrality of nation-states as the locus of governance authority. While both commissions proposed some sound economic reforms, they implicitly accepted the orthodoxy that market democracy is the best form of governance, and economic growth, albeit with greater equity, is a legitimate national goal. While both criticized the abuse of national sovereignty and hinted at the dangers of the unfettered pursuit of national interest, neither seriously challenged the primacy of national sovereignty and national interest as legitimate norms, or proposed an alternative. Both

<sup>11</sup> International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), *The Responsibility to Protect: report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty*, co-chaired by Gareth J. Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001).



commissions basically accepted the status quo of nation-states as defining actors in global governance, albeit with greater non-state inputs. Particularly, they accepted the pursuit of national interests as legitimate, and did not attempt to challenge or regulate it in any significant way.

Despite 250,000 deaths and counting, it has proved impossible for the UN to end the Syrian war, or, more minimally, to stop the Assad regime's mass atrocities against its own citizens. Every day about 50 barrel bombs are being dropped by Assad's forces on their own citizens. Each barrel bomb explodes with force equivalent to an earthquake of 7.6 on the Richter scale; several types contain prohibited chemical and biological weapons, such as chlorine gas, violating international law and UNSC resolutions.<sup>12</sup> UN negotiations have failed, owing in equal measure to the national interests of states defending Assad and the reluctance of states sympathetic to the plight of the Syrian population to jeopardize their national interests to save Syrian civilians—despite their ostensible support for the Responsibility to Protect principle.

During the lengthy nuclear negotiations with Iran, Assad's major supporter, the P5+1 negotiators did not require Iran to withhold support for Assad or call for a cessation of barrel bombing. They justified this by insisting that the issues were distinct, and that they could not risk jeopardizing the negotiations.<sup>13</sup> No doubt the controversial breakthrough of a nuclear deal with Iran is an achievement in its own right. Yet this case confirms that current global governance arrangements allow national interests—the military and economic benefits to all negotiating parties of a nuclear deal—to outweigh humanitarian and legal concerns—the massacre of Syrian civilians in blatant violation of international law and UNSC resolutions. The efforts expended to mobilize an international coalition to conduct strikes against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)—whose mediatized atrocities are appalling but not yet comparable in duration or scale to Assad's—illustrate again the predominance of national interests in shaping global governance responses to crises.<sup>14</sup> Now, Russia's entry into combat to shore up Assad's regime exposes even more flagrantly the inability of the UN Security Council to prioritize its mandate to 'maintain international peace and security' or to protect human lives when its own members prioritize national interests over international or human security.

This applies not only in areas of armed conflict and military security, but equally in all other sectors: economic, financial, environmental, health, etc. Most governments refuse obdurately, at successive conferences and summits, to compromise on their national interests in order to safeguard the planet, despite mounting

<sup>12</sup> Author's meetings and interviews with James Le Mesurier, Founder of Mayday Rescue, and several members of the White Helmets or Syrian Civil Defence Units, Syrian humanitarian volunteers who save civilians from barrel bombs (not named individually for security reasons), 12 Feb. 2015, Istanbul, and 23–24 May 2015 by video conference call. See <http://www.whitehelmets.org>; Sanjay Gupta, 'Syrian "White Helmets" save civilian lives in Syria', CNN, 28 May 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/05/21/health/white-helmets-profile/> (both accessed 5 Oct. 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Author's confidential discussions with negotiators and observers involved in Iran negotiations, June 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Author's discussions with Syrian peace activists and humanitarians, June 2014, Feb. 2015, May 2015. They report feeling profoundly betrayed and abandoned by the international community. For each mediatized atrocity of ISIS, they cite several of greater magnitude by the Assad regime. They implored negotiators to put pressure on Iran during talks to change policy towards Assad or at a minimum end his barrel-bombing.

scientific evidence of the gravity and irreversibility of climate change. Despite unprecedented global public demands put to democratically elected leaders to prioritize environmental concerns above economic growth, and input from civil society organizations to preparatory documents and meetings, some governments succeed in hijacking the final document to secure their national interests, as at the Earth Summit of 2012, discussed below.

The result is that while global disorder spreads, despite well-intentioned attempts by eminent statespersons and scholars to reform global governance, the vision and courage to understand and undertake real change are not forthcoming. Efforts to redress global chaos without identifying and redressing its sources are fruitless. Visionary aspirations are reduced to pragmatic and uncontroversial structural and procedural reform. The would-be reformers readjust the deckchairs in the rising tempest, but neither fathom the waters beneath them nor protect the ship from sinking.

## **The perils of national interest based global governance, and the state of dystopia**

When rich speculators prosper  
While farmers lose their land.  
When government officials spend money  
On weapons instead of cures.  
When the upper class is extravagant and irresponsible  
While the poor have nowhere to turn.  
All this is robbery and chaos.

Lao Tzu<sup>15</sup>

Lao Tzu's words from the fifth century BCE are an accurate partial description of the state of dystopia we live in. This dystopia is largely the result of human acts of commission or omission, unchecked and sometimes encouraged by current global governance arrangements.

Notwithstanding the frequently acknowledged erosion of national sovereignty since 1989, global governance actors, particularly in the UN, remain locked into a world of sovereign states, even in 2015. International governance arrangements are subject to the perceived and proclaimed national interests of competing states, while national governance is hostage to the opposing interests and ideological positions of competing political parties. Furthermore, corporate interests have exerted a corrosive influence on politics and increasingly shaped the priorities of national interests. Scholars a generation ago predicted the demise of the nation-state, as they foresaw that economic and civic actors would come to wield greater influence than states. What they did not imagine is the current state of governance, in which economic actors manipulate or bankroll the political system to secure their interests, avoid regulation, or eschew social and environmental responsibilities,

<sup>15</sup> Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988), p. 53.

taxes or costs. Diplomats posted abroad have increasingly become emissaries for their country's commercial interests. Heads of state and government now make state visits accompanied by planeloads of business leaders and potential investors. Some states, certainly, are less susceptible than others to corporate pressure and obstructions by spoilers. Yet the influence of the market in shaping national interest is pervasive. Market mechanisms operated by private actors are the standard response prescribed for all problems requiring multilateral or state action, from the privatization of public goods and services to the challenges of climate change. Consequently, despite the disquieting degradation of the human and environmental condition, global policies are still made with the economic, corporate and security interests of each individual state as determining factors, rather than the shared well-being of humankind and the planet, or solidarity with those in chronic need.

Even at the 70th anniversary of the UN, despite public outcry, only few states attract the condemnation of the world community when they openly flout their legal state responsibilities or violate international norms, for example by perpetrating mass atrocities against their own populations or invading neighbours. Even in these cases, global governance institutions and decision-makers do little more than launch inquiries or task forces, and issue solemn declarations or occasional UNSC resolutions that remain unheeded, as in Syria. Other states continue, undisturbed, to violate international law, abuse their citizens, misuse natural resources or fuel insecurity, without opprobrium. Often, they have nursed their relationships with powerful states whose national and economic interests are now so closely tied to their own as to stifle any protest or demand for change. Law-abiding and law-breaking governments sit as equals around the table to raise their voices and cast their votes in determining global principles and policies. Unsurprisingly, the global governance decisions and arrangements that emerge from this process are little better than the lowest common denominator.

'New' governance actors, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media organizations and academic experts, have expended considerable effort and depleted their limited resources over the past two decades in attempts to influence these processes. Yet they rarely manage more than securing the least worst outcome. The mid-1990s and early 2000s saw some successful global governance breakthroughs on specific issues resulting from alliances between like-minded governments, NGOs and media bodies, such as the landmine ban and the establishment of the ICC. Recently, successes have become rarer, as recalcitrant governments flex their sovereign muscles more intractably. At the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, the calamitous outcome document was pulled out of the closet at the last minute and adopted hastily by state parties, in open disrespect for the years of laborious advocacy by NGOs and environmental experts and for the agreements commonly achieved during the preparatory process. NGO advocates present at both the 1992 and 2012 Earth Summits in Rio lamented that governments were more intransigent in 2012 about preserving their national interests

at any cost than 20 years before.<sup>16</sup> Now, ahead of the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 21) in Paris in December 2015, the UN Secretary General and the host government France's top climate ambassador are expressing grave concern at the lack of progress by governments.<sup>17</sup> Despite overwhelming evidence of the urgent need for robust mechanisms to manage climate change, and unprecedented citizen pressure, many governments remain complacent or obdurate in defending national economic interests above global climate concerns.<sup>18</sup>

This intransigence was apparent in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster in Japan in March 2011. This episode demonstrated the catastrophic fallout of combined nuclear and climate accidents. It proved that even in highly industrialized countries with high safety standards, technology cannot master nature. The climate–nuclear nexus has been researched authoritatively by scientists, who underline the risks of nuclear disaster posed by climate change.<sup>19</sup> After Fukushima, several authoritative scientists recommended phasing out nuclear energy for human security and environmental reasons and opting for cheaper renewable energy.<sup>20</sup> Fifty laureates of the Alternative Nobel Prize or Right Livelihood Award and Councillors of the World Future Council, including myself, issued a public statement calling for a global nuclear phase-out, based on existing evidence.<sup>21</sup> In massive public demonstrations held worldwide, citizens demanded a phase-out of nuclear power to avert future cataclysms. Yet, with a few exceptions (such as Germany), most states ignored all these warnings and decided to proceed with investments in nuclear power plants, even in geographically fragile environments, and despite their higher cost than renewable energy sources. At the level of global governance, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) convened several expert conferences and prepared its action plan on nuclear safety.<sup>22</sup> The plan, with its lengthy procedural and technical requirements on nuclear safety, was adopted with alacrity by its member states. The problem was considered settled by governments, although they had found no response to the real issue of inevitable human and technological fallibility in the face of nature's force. Fukushima

<sup>16</sup> Frank Biermann, 'Curtain down and nothing settled: global sustainability governance after the "Rio+20" Earth Summit', *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 31: 6, 2013, pp. 1099–1114; author's discussions, March–Oct. 2012, with staff of World Future Council (WFC) involved in preparatory process and at Rio Summit. See <http://www.worldfuturecouncil.org>, accessed 5 Oct. 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Adam Vaughan, 'French climate ambassador concerned over slow progress of draft Paris deal', *Guardian*, 28 July 2015.

<sup>18</sup> For a scholarly analysis of the relative merits of a comprehensive versus regime complex approach to climate change, see Robert Keohane and David Victor, 'The regime complex for climate change', *Perspectives on Politics* 9: 1, 2011, pp. 7–23.

<sup>19</sup> Jürgen Scheffran, *Climate change, nuclear risks and nuclear disarmament* (Hamburg: WFC, 2012). For further background, see [http://www.worldfuturecouncil.org/climate-nuclear\\_nexus.html](http://www.worldfuturecouncil.org/climate-nuclear_nexus.html), accessed 5 Oct. 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Jusen Atuka, Seung-Joon Park, Mutsuyoshi Nishimura and Tuyu Morotomi, 'Nuclear power is not the answer to climate change mitigation', 31 Jan. 2014, letter published online at [http://www.cneas.tohoku.ac.jp/labs/china/asuka/\\_src/2014/nuclear\\_power-climate\\_change\\_enver2.pdf](http://www.cneas.tohoku.ac.jp/labs/china/asuka/_src/2014/nuclear_power-climate_change_enver2.pdf), accessed 5 Oct. 2015.

<sup>21</sup> WFC, 'Joint statement on the Fukushima nuclear disaster', Hamburg, 29 March 2011, [http://www.worldfuturecouncil.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Press\\_releases/Joint\\_Statement\\_on\\_the\\_Japanese\\_Nuclear\\_Disaster.pdf](http://www.worldfuturecouncil.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Press_releases/Joint_Statement_on_the_Japanese_Nuclear_Disaster.pdf), accessed 5 Oct. 2015.

<sup>22</sup> IAEA, 'IAEA action plan on nuclear safety', Vienna, 13 Sept. 2011, <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/actionplannns.pdf>, accessed 5 Oct. 2015.

demonstrates yet again the chasm between the catastrophic scale of problems, scientific evidence and civic demands on the one hand, and the procedural and technical fixes proposed by global and national governance and economic actors on the other hand. These quick fixes avoid the root of the problem but ensure that national interests and economic investments will not be disrupted.

The subjugation of global governance to competitive national interests and the relentless drive for economic growth despite environmental depletion and disasters has already wiped out some populations, cultures, species and ecosystems and jeopardized others. Under the sophisticated veneer of cooperative diplomacy, global governance conceals a Hobbesian, neo-Darwinian approach of survival of the fittest and cut-throat competition, whatever the cost to distant others. The unfettered pursuit of national political and economic interests has created a dystopia where the majority live on the precipice in abject misery or fear, while a tiny minority live in oblivious comfort, and a fraction of them prosper in defiant luxury.

When states remain wedded to the notion that they have *carte blanche* to pursue their exclusive national interests regardless of the cost to their near and distant neighbours and to the immediate or wider environment, they threaten global security. When they pursue their national interests aggressively, whether through trade wars, military sales and aid to allies, or direct armed conflict, they threaten global governance itself.

Many policy-makers and scholars would hasten to argue that this is an inaccurate and unfair characterization of today's situation. They might point to signs of progress: for example, the elimination of certain age-old diseases or the successful collective response to new ones like Ebola, or the rise in living standards and emergence of a middle class of consumers in several parts of the world. Such optimism cannot be sustained in the face of the current explosion of the refugee and migration crisis, with more desperate humans risking death to flee unliveable conditions in their home countries than during the Second World War, and the national interest-based response of global governance actors, who bear considerable responsibility for the crisis.

Defenders of the status quo might point instead to the spread of democracy around the globe as an indication of heightened accountability of national and global governance to citizens. Yet while the form of democratic elections has spread across the globe, the democratic deficit in actuality has widened apace. Civil society is under attack globally.<sup>23</sup> Civic organizations are being monitored and shut down for daring to express dissent. In September 2013, on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, President Obama himself convened a meeting to address this critical issue. He noted: 'Strong nations recognize and value strong civil societies. They protect and empower them—even or especially when it is inconvenient.'<sup>24</sup> This is less and less the case. Public protests are on the rise, not

<sup>23</sup> Sarah E. Mendelson, 'Dark days for civil society: what's going wrong—and how data can help', *Foreign Affairs*, 11 March 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-03-11/dark-days-civil-society>, accessed 13 Oct. 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Barack Obama, 'Remarks by President Obama at Civil Society Roundtable', Washington DC, White House, 23

only in autocracies but also in established democracies. Increasingly, electorates are fed up with their elected representatives for heeding their own interests or the exigencies of the global market rather than the concerns of their citizens. Public anger persists against the bailouts by governments of their preferred national banks, which protected and enriched bank leaders while destituting thousands of ordinary citizens. Yet the crackdown on dissent is ferocious in democracies as well as in dictatorships. Civil society organizations and civilians who have exercised their civil liberties and protested against government policies, whether in demonstrations or in writing, have been attacked by security forces, imprisoned and criminalized in the world's leading democracies ever since the start of the so-called 'anti-globalization' protests in the early 2000s. The democratic deficit, moreover, is not felt within nation-states alone; it is particularly acute in regional and international organizations such as the EU and the UN, and has been extensively researched and debated.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, the continuation of national interest-based governance cannot be justified on the basis of a claimed rise of democracy and civil society. The fear of being ridiculed or dismissed as idealistic or naive constrains not only distinguished members of commissions and panels with reputations to protect, but equally the majority of the academic community studying this field.

The emergence of global governance ushered in a spate of literature that identified and examined the shortcomings of the nation-state system. Respected scholars such as Ken Booth and Robert Cox have been consistently pushing the frontiers, challenging the orthodoxies of state-centric thinking and hearkening to global cosmopolitanism.<sup>26</sup> Key questions such as asymmetrical power and normativity are raised in recent contributions to the literature, posing the critical question of 'who governs the globe?'.<sup>27</sup> New global governance scholarship is examining innovative triangulations of public policy, international law and International Relations (IR) scholarship, for example within the EU.<sup>28</sup> Certainly, the field of study on global governance is expanding to include normativeness, innovation and critique of the status quo. A recent article by the influential scholar Robert Keohane recognizes the need for visionary and accountable global leadership—though the author states that democratic global governance is highly unlikely even under the most favourable circumstances.<sup>29</sup>

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Sept. 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/23/remarks-president-obama-civil-society-roundtable>, accessed 5 Oct. 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Henrik Bang, Mads Dagnis Jensen and Peter Nedergaard, "'We the people' versus 'we the heads of states': the debate on the democratic deficit of the European Union", *Policy Studies* 36: 2, 2015, pp. 196–216; Thomas Poguntke, Sigrid Rossteutscher, Rudiger Schmitt-Beck and Sonja Zmerli, eds, *Citizenship and democracy in an era of crisis* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>26</sup> Ken Booth, 'Security and emancipation', *Review of International Studies* 17: 4, 1991, pp. 313–26; Robert Cox, *The new realism: perspectives on multilateralism and world order* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997); Robert Cox, 'Social forces, states and world orders', *Millennium* 10: 2, 1981, pp. 126–55.

<sup>27</sup> Deborah D. Avant, Martha Finnemore and Susan K. Sell, eds, *Who governs the globe?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> David Coen and Tom Pagram, 'Wanted: a third generation of global governance research', *Governance* 28: 4, 2015, pp. 417–20.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Keohane, 'Nominal democracy? Prospects for democratic global governance', *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 13: 2, 2015, pp. 343–53.

Despite the upsurge in such critical literature by eminent scholars, the centre of gravity of IR and political science theory has not shifted perceptibly. Realism and interstate competition remain the prevalent paradigm in scholarship as well as in practice among policy-makers and politicians. The explicit requirement of empiricism creeping across the social sciences, and the implicit fear of being considered unrealistic or idealistic, inhibit any visionary tendencies among conventional IR scholars and policy-makers alike, despite the chronic challenges we all face.

The 70th anniversary of the United Nations may be the moment for academics and policy-makers so long wedded to the twentieth-century paradigm of state-based governance to recognize that it is inadequate, indeed counterproductive, for the needs of the twenty-first. States have served their purpose since the Treaty of Westphalia. It must now be recognized, and quickly, that they are on a steep downward spiral of diminishing marginal utility and their pursuit of national interest is causing mayhem.

### Course correction for global governance: re-imagining the 'ideal state'

A great nation is like a great man.

When he makes a mistake he recognizes it.

When he recognizes it, he admits it.

When he admits it, he corrects it.

He thinks of his critics as his greatest teachers.

He considers his enemies as the shadow he himself casts.

Lao Tzu<sup>30</sup>

Lao Tzu offers a starting-point for the urgently required course correction of global governance: acknowledging honestly the scale of the problem, and standing accountable for the mistakes made, often despite best intentions. Two steps are required to transform today's dystopia. The first is to look backwards at the trajectory of philosophical thought on the ideal state of governance, to ground global governance in 'utopian vision'. The second is to look outwards at the unfolding trends shaping the globe, namely, civics, ethics, metaphysics and physics, to upgrade global governance to 'Ourtopian realities and action'.

For millennia, across human civilizations, the wisest thinkers of our species, including the Chinese philosophers Lao Tzu and Confucius, the ancient Greeks Socrates, Plato, Diotima and Aspasia, and, in the Middle East, Hypatia and al-Farabi, philosophized on and debated how best our societies should be governed for the common good. They reflected on the duties and limits of governance and sovereignty. They taught, trained and guided rulers in statecraft. Their philosophies were studied and discussed widely by the public. Even before them, in indigenous societies around the world, elders, shamans and wisdom teachers drew lessons from their systematic scientific observations of nature, the wider universe and its constituent elements to guide their societies. These were the antecedents that

<sup>30</sup> Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, p. 61.

over the ages defined the mutual obligations that bind rulers and ruled, and laid the ground for governance. The art of governance comes down to us from those ancient times when, across diverse cultures, philosophical reflection, the scientific investigation of the laws of nature, ethical considerations, inclusive public debate and wise custodianship provided the foundations for the management of human affairs.

Humankind's preoccupation since the earliest days was to envisage the contours of a better world, and to design the most beneficial governance to ensure personal, collective and environmental well-being. The construction of an ideal or perfect human society on Earth to enable the full flourishing of individuals and collectives, ideally in harmony with nature, has seized human imagination in all times and on all continents. From Plato's *Republic* in Greece to Tao Yuanming's *Peace blossom spring* in China, al-Farabi's *Al-Medina al-Fadila* ('The ideal city') or Tibetan Buddhism's kingdom of Shambala, philosophers and futurist thinkers described retrospectively mythical perfect societies or imagined prospectively the laws, customs and structures that would enable human society to live up to its highest potential. The renowned ninth-century philosopher al-Farabi described in his epic work *Al-Medina al-Fadila* that the goal of the ideal city is the pursuit of happiness or self-realization. He presaged ideal global governance and international cooperation in stating that in the ideal world, national societies cooperate with each other to pursue the happiness of all citizens. For Tibetan philosophers, the legendary kingdom of Shambala represented the ideal: 'a place of peace and prosperity, governed by wise and compassionate rulers ... the kingdom was a model society'.<sup>31</sup> Plato's *Republic* unfolds Socrates' template of the ideal society, the *kalipolis*, which enshrines the virtues of wisdom, courage, moderation and justice. The *kalipolis* is ruled by philosopher-kings and its goal is to ensure that everyone is happy to the extent of their nature, but that no one's happiness is achieved at the expense of others.<sup>32</sup> Plato's *Republic* closes with the injunction: 'Always uphold the upward path, pursuing justice with reason.'<sup>33</sup>

Across cultures, such mythical kingdoms or ideal states served as the models for rulers and citizens to aspire towards in their own times. For thousands of years until recently, whether in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Africa or the Americas, it was unthinkable for a ruler to govern without years of study and training in the arts of statecraft under the guidance of a sage. Without the instruction of the local Socrates, Confucius, Dronacharya or Black Elk, without a council of philosophers or wise elders to consult before every decision, no ruler would exercise authority. Equally, citizens were charged with due vigilance over their rulers and their advisers, and enjoined by their cultural and religious doctrines to remove tyrants.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Chogyam Trungpa, *Shambala: the path of the sacred warrior* (Boston: Shambala, 1984), p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube and Rev. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992).

<sup>33</sup> Plato, *Republic*, p. 292.

<sup>34</sup> See e.g. Mutombo Nkulu N'Sengha, 'Religion, spirituality and R2P in a global village', in Rama Mani and Thomas G. Weiss, eds, *Responsibility to Protect: cultural perspectives from the global South* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 25–63, esp. pp. 45–7.



## Restoring 'utopia' as a political imperative

The word 'utopia' itself was coined by Thomas More to describe an imaginary 'perfect' society devoid of the ills that beset the England of his times, as alluded to in his eponymous book published in 1516. He chose the word carefully: in Greek, *u*-topia implies 'no place' while its homonym *eu*-topia implies 'good place'. Many analysts have interpreted this to mean that More, while criticizing his own contemporary society, recognized that a perfect society akin to his 'Utopia' was 'no-place'—that it was non-existent and impossible. Rather, he may have meant to suggest that it is not utopia that is unattainable, so much as the requisite political will to create it.

Utopian literature and philosophy have persisted through the ages, reappearing in the twentieth century in books such as H. G. Wells's *A modern utopia*. Aldous Huxley offered *Island* later in his life to counterbalance his dystopic—and prescient—novel *Brave new world*. Recent decades have seen the long bibliography of male authors through the centuries augmented by feminine and feminist works, such as Ursula Le Guin's *Always coming home* (1985) and Starhawk's *The fifth sacred thing* (1993). Despite the striking realism and foresight of these literary and philosophical depictions of imagined utopias and dreaded dystopias, politicians and political scientists consistently dismissed as unrealistic the construction of such ideal societies.

However, as the toll of two world wars and the devastating power of nuclear weapons became apparent, the concept of utopia was adopted by leading political philosophers not as fiction but as political imperative. In their conceptualization, utopia is no longer associated with naive idealism or literary romanticism, but situated directly in the dystopic reality of contemporary politics. Influential philosophers including Paul Ricoeur, Paul Blanquart and Herbert Marcuse have insisted that utopias are rational, anchored in historical reality, and have demanded action for their realization. In *Ideology and utopia*, Paul Ricoeur, France's leading philosopher (much celebrated in the United States, where he taught at the University of Chicago), clarified the distinction between ideology and utopia. The former, he said, is prone to dogma and masks reality, while the latter is authentic and action-orientated.<sup>35</sup>

The eminent Peruvian liberation philosopher Gustavo Gutiérrez identified the retrospective, prospective and action-oriented characteristics of utopia. He summarized the distinguishing features of utopia thus:

- First, utopia 'necessarily means a denunciation of the existing order'. This is its retrospective character.
- Second, it is 'an annunciation of what is not yet but will be'. This is its prospective character.
- Third, between annunciation and denunciation is praxis, action. 'If Utopia does not lead to action in the present, it is an evasion of reality.'
- Finally, he says, utopia 'belongs to the *rational* order'.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on ideology and utopia*, ed. and trans. George H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

<sup>36</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A theology of liberation* (New York: Orbis, 1973), pp. 233, 234, emphasis in original.

Gutiérrez emphasized: 'Utopia must necessarily lead to a commitment to support the emergence of a new social consciousness and new relationships among people ... Authentic utopian thought postulates, enriches and supplies new goals for political action, while at the same time it is verified by this action.'<sup>37</sup> Most importantly, he underlined the necessity for utopia precisely in times of crisis, when normal means fail. 'Utopias emerge with renewed energy at times of transition and crisis, when science has reached its limits in its explanation of social reality, and when new paths open up for historical praxis.'<sup>38</sup>

As far back as 1991, the thought-provoking IR scholar Ken Booth made a poignant case for 'restoring the role and reputation of "utopianism" in international politics'.<sup>39</sup> Today, this mobilizing concept of utopia must be considered seriously in the renewal of global governance and the redressing of our global crises, for 'business as usual' has proved disastrous. What is required now is the revival and construction of this utopia of action and realism proposed by these contemporary political philosophers, not the utopia of literature that can again be dismissed by political scientists as naive idealism—as an impossible 'no-place'.

## **Towards a logical conclusion: the pathway from dystopia to Ourtopia**

If you want to govern the people,  
You must place yourself below them.  
If you want to lead the people,  
You must learn how to follow them.

Lao Tzu<sup>40</sup>

In 1995, the co-chairs of the Commission on Global Governance noted:

Time is not on the side of indecision. Important choices must be made now, because we are at the threshold of a new era. That newness is self-evident; people everywhere know it, as do governments, though not all admit to it. We can, for example, go forward to a new era of security that responds to law and collective will and common responsibility by placing the security of people and the planet at the centre. Or we can go backward to the spirit and methods of what one of our members described as the 'sheriff's posse'—dressed up to masquerade as global action.<sup>41</sup>

The newness they spoke of in 1995 was still one of opportunity. The dangers of making the wrong choices or, worse, no choices at all are much greater today. Given the dire urgency of our global predicament, it is necessary to sidestep the aversion to utopianism, and consider as a realistic twenty-first-century pathway out of dystopia what I call, playfully yet soberly, *Ourtopia*. While 'utopia' is too quickly dispelled by rationalists as an impossible 'no-place', this play of words

<sup>37</sup> Gutiérrez, *Theology*, p. 234.

<sup>38</sup> Gutiérrez, *Theology*, p. 234.

<sup>39</sup> Ken Booth, 'Security in anarchy: utopian realism in theory and practice', *International Affairs* 67: 3, 1991, pp. 527–45.

<sup>40</sup> Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, p. 66.

<sup>41</sup> Co-chairs' 'Foreword', in CGG, *Our global neighbourhood*, p. xix.

carries the message Gutiérrez and Ricoeur sought to convey: it is both possible and politically imperative right here and now, as all other solutions have failed.

*Ourtopia* is not so much revolutionary as evolutionary. That is, *Ourtopia* emerges from four interconnected and mutually reinforcing trends that have been evolving over the past years and are now emerging around the world today to reshape governance. These four interlinked trends, each epitomizing an area of human endeavour, form the constituent elements of *Ourtopia*. They can be summed up pithily and poetically as *civics, ethics, physics and metaphysics*.

By *civics* is meant not simply the exponential growth of NGOs, but the growth of civil society more widely, and, more importantly, its evolution into a compassionate, transboundary citizenry that cares for justice and mutual survival above self-interest and national interest. Nationwide protests of the kind recently witnessed in India, Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere are notable because they saw citizens of all ages and social and religious backgrounds uniting in common cause. Transnational civic mobilizations of unprecedented scale regularly express dissent and demand action on diverse global issues, or manifest solidarity with populations in distress, whether in Syria, Japan or Nepal. Online mobilization through campaigns such as Avaaz and change.org illustrate the extent of citizen solidarity and political activism transcending national and ideological borders on the full range of global issues.

What this means for future governance or *Ourtopia* is that civil society actors will go beyond simply opposing the harmful policies, structures and practices of political parties, governments and intergovernmental organizations. They will now take responsibility for shaping innovative governance arrangements that are inclusive, informed by ancient indigenous and philosophical wisdom and nascent scientific findings, responsive, proactive and beneficial to human and planetary needs. They will not merely tinker with piecemeal reform of governance structures that leave the current paradigm of governance intact, but fundamentally reshape governance arrangements and redefine the paradigm of power itself.

By *ethics* is meant the emergence of a global ethic and shared values embraced by citizens of diverse backgrounds. In 1995, the Commission on Global Governance emphasized why global governance needed anchoring in the bedrock of values and a global ethic. 'The global ethic we envisage would help humanize the impersonal workings of bureaucracies and markets and constrain the competitive and self-serving instincts of individuals and groups.'<sup>42</sup> The six 'neighbourhood values' the commission identified were generic: respect for life; liberty; justice and equity; mutual respect; caring; and integrity. Although global governance unfolded apace without adopting these values or indeed any global ethic, citizens around the world have become increasingly voluble in their demands for values and ethics in governance. The denunciation of rampant corruption, hypocrisy and dishonesty in global and national governance has not only fuelled mass citizen movements such as those in India and Hong Kong, but also been capitalized on by fundamentalist movements. ISIS, like Al-Qaeda, portrays what it perceives as the

<sup>42</sup> CGG, *Our global neighbourhood*, p. 55.

moral decrepitude of western politics and society to attract adherents. Thus the need to ground governance in ethics and values is doubly expedient today, both to meet the demand of citizens and to reduce the appeal of extremism.

What this means for future governance or *Ourtopia* is that, as citizens shape governance, rather than delegating this task to a distinct political class susceptible to economic and corporate influences, ethics will become the natural bedrock of governance at all levels. Indicatively, Avaaz's January 2015 poll of its 40 million members worldwide revealed that over 86 per cent identified with the values of ecology, democratic accountability, deliberative democracy, courage, compassion, integrity and honesty.<sup>43</sup>

By *physics* is meant the explosion of new scientific discoveries, from quantum physics to astrophysics to evolutionary biology, that is radically upgrading our understanding of reality. The Vietnamese astrophysicist Trinh Xuan Thuan observed:

There is the cosmic interconnection of the Big Bang. We are all products of that primordial explosion. The hydrogen and helium atoms that make up 98% of the universe's ordinary matter were made during the first three minutes of existence. The hydrogen in seawater and in our bodies all comes from that primordial soup. So we all have the same genealogy.<sup>44</sup>

Lynn Margulis, the eminent biologist, developed the theory of 'sybiogenesis', explaining that 'these mergers, long-term biological fusions beginning as symbiosis are the engine of species evolution', and asserting that 'the living cell is the true self'.<sup>45</sup> This evolution is driven by the creativity that is inbuilt in all living systems. The Chilean scientists Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana coined the theory of autopoiesis describing the 'self-generation of living systems'.<sup>46</sup>

The world's leading quantum physicist David Bohm observed how the fragmentation and atomization of the Newtonian perspective was detrimental not only to science but to society at large:

Fragmentation is now very widespread, not only throughout society, but also in each individual; and this is leading to a kind of general confusion of the mind, which creates an endless series of problems and interferes with our clarity of perception so seriously as to prevent us from being able to solve most of them.<sup>47</sup>

The physicist Fritjof Capra exposed the 'web of life' and the 'hidden connections' that underlie and connect all life forms.<sup>48</sup> In his most recent book, co-authored with the natural scientist Pier Luigi Luisi, he explains the inability to resolve global crises:

<sup>43</sup> [https://secure.avaaz.org/en/poll\\_results\\_2015/](https://secure.avaaz.org/en/poll_results_2015/), accessed 5 Oct. 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Matthieu Ricard and Trinh Xuan Thuan, *The quantum and the lotus: a journey to the frontiers where science and Buddhism meet* (New York: Three Rivers, 2001), p. 73.

<sup>45</sup> Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, *Acquiring genomes: a theory of the origins of species* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), pp. 12, xvi.

<sup>46</sup> Francisco Varela with Humberto Maturana, *Autopoiesis and cognition: the realization of the living* (Boston: Reidel, 1980).

<sup>47</sup> David Bohm, *Wholeness and the implicate order* (London: Routledge, 1980), pp. 1, xi.

<sup>48</sup> Fritjof Capra, *The web of life* (New York: Anchor, 1997), and *Hidden connections: a science for sustainable living* (New York: Anchor, 2002).

It is becoming more and more evident that the major problems of our time—energy, the environment, climate change, food security, financial security—cannot be understood in isolation. They are systemic problems which means they are all interconnected and interdependent ... Most people in our society, and especially our large social institutions, subscribe to the concepts of an outdated world view, a perception of reality inadequate for dealing with our overpopulated, globally interconnected reality.

There are solutions to the problems of our times, sometimes very simple ones. But they require a radical shift in our perceptions, our thoughts, our values.<sup>49</sup>

This shift, scientists inform us, is happening rapidly. Taken together, these new scientific findings replace our old understanding and treatment of the material world as a machine of separate parts pliable to human manipulation with a new understanding of the interconnected, systemic and integrated nature of the living universe, of which humans are a modest part. Furthermore, as the ecologist James Lovelock warns us: 'We live on a live planet that can respond to the changes we make, either by cancelling the changes or cancelling us.'<sup>50</sup> MIT scholars Professor Peter Senge and Otto Scharmer and their co-authors apply these findings to global governance: 'Nowhere is it more important to understand the relation between parts and wholes than in the evolution of the global institutions and the larger systems they collectively create.'<sup>51</sup>

What this means for future governance is that as people everywhere become increasingly aware of this integrated, holistic perspective of human life as an integral part of the universe, they will increasingly design governance structures, processes and outcomes that are also integrated and holistic.

By *metaphysics* is meant the widespread re-examination of the nature and purpose of human life, leading to the emergence of a deeper metaphysical understanding of interdependence and interconnectedness, as substantiated by the new physics. Global governance actors and academics have—understandably—devoted great attention to the rise of religious extremism since 9/11. They have not given equal attention to the wider phenomenon of the exponential expansion in the mindset or consciousness of global citizens affecting politics and governance. The Commission on Global Governance noted presciently in 1995: 'People have to see with new eyes and understand with new minds before they can truly turn to new ways of living.'<sup>52</sup> Over the past 20 years, this change has largely come about. A real sense of proximity to and responsibility for distant others has entirely shifted the mindset of ordinary people, partly but not entirely as a result of the communicating effects of technology and social media. *Ubuntu*, the timeless African notion of interdependence, or 'I exist because you exist', made famous by Desmond Tutu, is a way of life for more and more people, especially youth, around the world.

<sup>49</sup> Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi, *The systems view of life: a unifying vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. xi.

<sup>50</sup> James Lovelock, *The revenge of Gaia* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), p. 17.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski and Betty Sue Flowers, *Presence: an exploration of profound change in people, organizations and society* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 2005), pp. 5.

<sup>52</sup> CGG, *Our global neighbourhood*, p. 47.

The intellectual concern with environmental degradation has evolved into a deep ecological connection between people and nature. In his short inauguration speech in 1994, at a moment when civil war in his country had just been narrowly avoided, Nelson Mandela noted ‘the spiritual and physical oneness we all share with this common homeland’ and observed: ‘Each time one of us touches the soil of this land, we feel a sense of personal renewal.’<sup>53</sup> He recognized that love for the land alone could unite people torn apart by man-made racial and ethnic divisions. Today, people everywhere are moved to protect nature not out of ideological or intellectual conviction, but out of the ‘oneness’ with the land evoked by Mandela.

Young people aspire no longer merely to find a job and earn an income, but to find meaning in their lives by doing work that will serve their communities, regenerate nature, and make best use of their talents, skills and passions. Certainly, when they do not find such meaning in their societies, some are lured into seeking it elsewhere—in extremism or crime. Studies, surveys and documentaries seeking to understand why young westerners have been attracted to join ISIS find that a desire to belong to a community and serve a higher cause are strong attractors for disillusioned and alienated youth.<sup>54</sup> What the majority seek, however, is a wider sense of purpose and community or communion with near and distant others that transcends ideological grounds and fulfils their growing sense of multiple simultaneous identities beyond nationality.

Google provided a graphic illustration of this change in consciousness by analysing what people looked for in 2014 in their several trillion searches conducted online. They searched notably for hope, for love, for meaning, and for inspiration.<sup>55</sup>

What this means for future governance or *Ourtopia* is that the purpose and consequent strategies of governance will no longer be directed at maximizing national security or economic growth at any cost to others. Rather, global governance will be redirected towards the goal of enabling people to live lives of meaning and purpose, in harmony with each other and with nature. Governance structures and processes will be flexible and dynamic in responding to evolution, while anchored in the ethics and values, culturally distinct yet universal, cherished and expressed abidingly by humankind, even and especially in times of crisis, as now.

Interestingly, these four trends roughly parallel the four distinguishing features of *Our global neighbourhood* identified as pertinent for the current context. That is, the commission had recognized partially, but perhaps prematurely, that global governance needed a more ethical, civic, integrated and visionary framework.

At last, global governance can be updated to current realities: grounded in an ethical framework of shared values; powered by a creative, compassionate transnational citizenry; modelled as an integrated, systemic, co-evolving frame-

<sup>53</sup> Mandela’s speeches are archived at [www.nelsonmandela.org](http://www.nelsonmandela.org), accessed 5 Oct. 2015.

<sup>54</sup> Barbara Franz, ‘Popjihadism: why young European Muslims are joining the Islamic State’, *Mediterranean Quarterly* 26: 2, 2015, pp. 5–20; Deeyah Khan, ‘“Jihad”: my journey into the roots of Islamic radicalism in Britain’, *Huffington Post*, 15 June 2015.

<sup>55</sup> Google, ‘Google year in search 2014’, <http://www.google.com/trends/2014/>, accessed 5 Oct. 2015.

work, like the living universe, with humans as its custodians; guided by a metaphysical world-view of interconnectedness and shared purpose; and galvanized by utopian/*Ourtopian* aspirations.

A sizeable majority of the world's population, especially its burgeoning youth, has already graduated out of the old framework of national interests and the consumer mindset of 'I, me and mine' demanded by the market economy. The world's populace, especially its youth, is on the streets, or on their electronic gadgets, expressing their desire for a world of 'we, us and ours'. They are already utopian in their vision, and *Ourtopian* in their actions.

Now, in 2015, it's time for global governance to catch up.