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Generation Omega



Over the next twenty years, the generation of kids born in the Third Millenium, will face three *fundamental* questions. The resolution of these questions will, for good or for ill, describe a world that is so profoundly different from anything that humanity has yet experienced as to truly be the end of an era.

As a consequence, I break with recent tradition (Gen X, GenY . . .) and consider these kids Generation Omega. If you consider the magnitude of what must be navigated during their lives, I think you will agree that it is most appropriate to view this generation as the last (human) generation. If they make it through these trials, what comes next will be something quite different from what we currently understand as human.

These fundamental questions are:

- Humanity's relationship to its environment
- Humanity's relationship to technology
- Humanity's relationship to itself

In this essay, I will briefly explore each of these three questions.



*"We are as gods and we have to get good at it." —
Stewart Brand*

Humanity's Relationship to the Environment

When Stewart Brand updated his 1968 Whole Earth Catalog slogan from "We are as gods and we *might as well* get good at it," the message was clear: human beings have

reached a degree of power and impact that, if we are to survive, we must learn how to take responsibility *for our entire global environment*.

From ocean acidification to soil depletion, from melting ice to dramatic changes in the chemical composition of our environment, the impact of humanity's swelling population and power has been decisive. Every ecosystem. Every species. Every complex and subtle dynamic. This is a challenge that is unprecedented in the totality of global history — and it is a challenge that will fall firmly on the shoulders of Generation Omega.

The resolution of this challenge is going to require deep systemic change. For example, we are going to have to dispense with the extraordinary bullshit that we call dialogue these days and develop a collaborative truth-seeking function that is up to the task of getting eight billion super-empowered people to dance.

This means more than just coming to a consensus on how the world works and how our actions impact it. It means learning to really coordinate in a way that we haven't experienced as humans since we first began building the walls of Jericho. Amidst enormous uncertainty and subtle connections, we are going to have to engage in geo-engineering at a grand scale while pursuing intelligent, elegant, and effective behaviours all the way down to the day to day lives of every individual.

It seems implausible. A utopian vision. Perhaps. But a utopia built not of aspiration, but of necessity. As Stewart said, "We are as gods. We have to get good at it."



“The greatest shortcoming of the human race is our inability to understand the exponential function.” — Albert Bartlett

Humanity’s Relationship to Technology

Perhaps the most astounding truth of the modern age is that certain kinds of technology advance not on linear, but on exponential curves. Moore’s famous law applies to batteries and bandwidth as much as to processors. Every year, more and more of our technical landscape is sucked into these exponential curves. In broad strokes, what this means is that every year sees more “innovation” than all of the years before combined.

More practically, what this implies is that the next twenty years will present technological changes so profound as to dwarf everything that has come before. The Science Fiction and “Transhumanist” communities have long toyed with the

consequences of exponential technological growth. For Generation Omega these speculations will move firmly into the realm of reality.

Estimating these kinds of changes is notoriously hard for the human mind to grasp. Mathematically, if our technological ability continues to grow at the same rate that it has been growing, in twenty years we will be *one million times* more technologically capable than we are right now. One million times — in one generation. That is a bit like going from the invention of writing to the invention of the computer — in a single generation.

Human beings as we currently know them have absolutely no idea how to adapt to that rate and scope of change. Forget self-driving cars, 3D printers and autonomous drones. Those are the pong and slinky of Generation Omega. Certainly cybernetically-enhanced intelligence and detailed control over our children's genetic material. Probably telepathy-like technologies and "swarm consciousness" where it becomes impossible to distinguish "your" thoughts from the thoughts of the people you are connected to. Possibly Matrix-like VR that is indistinguishable from reality.

And maybe digital super-intelligence, that favorite of "*singularitarians*." Listen to [Elon Musk](#), "[I] hope we're not just the biological boot loader for digital super-intelligence. Unfortunately, that is increasingly probable." Is the Singularity near? Maybe, but it's looking increasingly likely that Generation Omega will find out. And that if the Singularity does come to pass, it could be the single most important event in the history of life. It may still smell of science fiction, but for those who are paying the closest attention, it is becoming more salient every day.

Regardless, it is likely that Generation Omega will find itself wielding power over all the various aspects of life far greater than any so far touched by man. How we will navigate such power is anyone's guess. But what comes out the other end might very well be farther from us than we are from our hominid ancestors.



“If humanity does not opt for integrity we are through completely. It is absolutely touch and go. Each one of us could make the difference.” — Buckminster Fuller

Humanity’s Relationship to Itself

In the first question we examined the growing necessity of humanity taking responsibility for the whole of life. Then we looked at how, through the exponential growth of technology, we will have the power and capability of doing so — if we learn to master that power. We now come to the final crucial question: how will humanity come to have the collective and individual wisdom to accept this responsibility and to wield this power?

For those who are students of history and the human condition, this question is the most daunting. For millennia, we have (at least ostensibly) aspired to a world characterized by inner and outer peace. Great teachers have walked among us, numerous great traditions have attempted to provide practices to bring us wisdom. And

yet war, violence and hatred are still a dominant portion of our world. It seems a desperately foolish hope to think that in a mere generation we could bring a critical mass of humanity to a level of wisdom, compassion and integrity that is adequate to the task.

Nonetheless, this shall be the task for Generation Omega. And there are reasons for optimism. There does seem to be a trend over the long course of our becoming civilized towards peace and away from violence. Moreover, it appears that human nature is inherently peaceful and cooperative — that it is our circumstances and not our nature that leads to systemic violence.

This is more than theoretical. Over the past few decades an increasing number of thinkers have realized that we are currently undergoing a massive transition from an economy founded in scarcity toward an economy anchored in abundance. With this comes more and more research that those individuals, organizations and societies that can cultivate a generative or abundance mentality out innovate those who hold to older conflict and zero-sum ideologies.

Thus, not only is “collective wisdom” possible, it seems increasingly likely that in an exponential future, it is the *winning strategy*.



And here is where one of Generation Omega’s most unique characteristics becomes catalytic. Hitherto, generations have been an overwhelmingly national phenomena. A generation is defined by a shared set of cultural sensibilities. It seems that for quite some time, we have been witnessing the slow birth of a truly global culture. Certainly, the Baby Boomer generation in America has deep differences from their British or

German or Japanese peers. But equally certainly, they have much more in common than did their respective parents or grandparents. In the intervening seventy years, global media, global technology, global trade and an increasing synchronization of global crisis events has only served to intensify global culture.

This means that Generation Omega will not be merely the next American generation, they will be the next generation on the world stage. And, given the intrinsically global nature of their generational challenges, they are likely to be the **first truly** global generation.

Unlike every previous period in human history, where the kind, the creative and the wise have been voices in the wilderness; over the next twenty years, these voices will be able to find each other and when they do they will be able to coordinate and cooperate in ways that let them rapidly take leaps ahead of everyone else. Those who can follow will quickly realize that it is in their best interests to focus on peace rather than war. Those who don't will simply be left behind.

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NO doubt this is a daunting future facing Generation Omega. Win or lose, theirs will be a generational bridge to an uncertain future. And there is no guarantee that they will navigate these challenges successfully. In fact, in all fairness, the odds are stacked firmly against them. Where we sit right now, there are many reasons to fear and only a few reasons to hope. But there are reasons to hope. Foremost among these is that Generation Omega is not yet formed. The eldest among them are not yet adolescent and the youngest are not yet born. They are still in the process of becoming who they will be and, therefore, we have an opportunity to give them the best possible chance while we still hold the reins of power.

We know what they will face. What can we do now to help them?