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The Next 35 Years

by Jay Herson

Do you have predictions for the next 35 years? The editors of *Foreign Policy* magazine recently invited an international panel of experts to muse about life in 2040. Here is a summary:

The Sanctity of Life. During the next 35 years, the traditional view of the sanctity of human life will collapse under pressure from scientific, technological and demographic developments. By 2040, it may be that only a rump of hard-core, know-nothing religious fundamentalists will defend the view that every human life from conception to death is sacrosanct.

—Peter Singer, Princeton University

Political Parties. Political parties may soon disappear. Today labels such as left and right have less and less meaning. Citizens have developed multiple interests, diverse senses of belonging and overlapping identities. People today prefer to voice their interests directly or through nongovernmental organizations. Voting is essential but citizens of Switzerland, Bolivia and California now govern by referenda more than by elected officials in legislatures.

—Fernando Henrique Cardoso, President of Brazil 1995-2003.

The Euro. The likelihood of new countries adopting the euro has become remote ever since the French and Dutch repudiated the proposed European constitution earlier this year. A euro that is legal tender only in some parts of Europe will not only emphasize the continent's failure to eliminate differences: it will itself become one of those differences.

—Christopher Hitchens, columnist for *Vanity Fair*

Japanese Passivity. Japan clings to a hopelessly idealistic and historically illegitimate constitution handed down the U.S. occupation forces nearly 60 years ago to block Japan's reemergence as a military power. Japan now entrusts its survival to the United States but many in Japan feel that today the United States' capability as a superpower is limited. Japan's regional friction with China and North Korea will force Japan to emerge from its futile passivity and become a strong nation willing to accept sacrifices.

—Shintaro Ishihara, governor of Tokyo

Monogamy. The fall of monogamy does not imply the establishment of polygamy. Instead we will move toward a radically new conception of sentimental and love relationships. Nothing forbids a person from being in love with a few people at the same time and the jump in life expectancy will make it nearly

impossible to spend one's entire life with one person and to love only that one person. Just as most societies now accept successive love relationships soon we will acknowledge the legality and acceptability of simultaneous love just as legalized divorce, open homosexuality and gay marriage have gained acceptance over the decades. People will have partnerships with various people. Relationships with children will be radically different as will financial and living arrangements. It will take decades for the change to be complete but if we look around—movies, novels and music—it is already here.

—Jacques Attali, writer and president of PlaNet

Religious Hierarchy. *More and more people are viewing the world's religious traditions as a buffet from which they can pick and choose. In this environment religious hierarchy is crumbling fast. The notions of consumer choice and local control have stormed the religious realm. Moses and Christ did not involve focus groups in the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount but today's megachurches are powered by market research. Pentacostalism has no hierarchy but its divisions and rivalries have generated an entrepreneurial energy that has made it the fastest growing Christian movement in the world. They have proven that sometimes religion without hierarchy can endure and even thrive.*

—Harvey Cox, professor, Harvard Divinity School

The Chinese Communist Party. *Let's assume that China can continue to grow its economy at 5% a year. By 2040 this would imply an annual per capita income of about \$7000. Professionals, private property owners, and hard-working capitalists will number in the hundreds of millions. If history is any guide, it will be next to impossible for an authoritarian regime to retain power in such a modern society, let alone one as large and diverse as China's. The experience of General Suharto's Indonesia suggests that predatory autocracies have trouble turning high rates of economic growth into political stability. By 2040 the Chinese Communist Party will be 119 years old and in power for 91 years. Today, the world has no septuagenarian one-party regimes. One-party regimes have no intrinsic incentive to reengineer themselves and little capacity to correct course.*

—Minxin Pei, director of the China Program at the Carnegie Endowment

Auto Emissions. *By 2040 harmful vehicle emissions will be a thing of the past. Lead, sulfur and benzene have been progressively reduced or removed from new vehicles. In the United States, lead emissions have dropped by about 95 percent. If only a third of the cars in 2050 run at 60 miles per gallon rather than 30 miles per gallon, carbon dioxide emissions will decline by 1 million tons a year. New refinery technology is producing ever cleaner fuels and engines, whether hybrids or upgraded internal combustion machines, are becoming cleaner fuel burners.*

—Lord John Browne, group chief executive, British Petroleum

The Public Domain. *The public domain has always lived alongside the private domain—the part of culture that is owned and regulated, that part whose use requires the permission of someone else. Traditionally, the law has kept these two domains in balance. However, digital technologies have made it easy—indeed too easy—for creative work in the private domain to spread without permission. Lawmakers have lost the sense of balance and the public domain is rapidly disappearing.*

—Lawrence Lessig, professor of law, Stanford University

Doctors' Offices. *Governments, insurers, and taxpayers around the world will be forced to confront a complicated and inefficient system that focuses too much on managing disease when it arrives and not enough on preventing people from getting sick. A critical step in reforming the system will be making visits to a doctor's office a last resort rather than a first step. Innovations in computing, communications, biology, nanotechnology and robotics will ease the way. Doctors will assess options for prevention rather than shepherding patients through their offices.*

—Craig Mundie, senior vice president, Microsoft

The King of England. *In 1948 the embattled Egyptian King Farouk said that soon only five ruling royals would be left: the kings of hearts, clubs, diamonds, spades and the English monarch. It now looks like he was off by one. The monarchy will not, however, drown in a wake of republican sentiment; nor will it be discarded because it fails. The crisis, when it comes, will be provoked by the unwillingness of the royal family to carry on with the job. Both William and Harry realize that the job of king is now utterly unappealing what with their parents suffering from the public and media intrusion into their private lives. As Charles grows old, the boys will choose to be pensioned playboys rather than dutiful royals.*

—Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, professorial fellow at Queen Mary, University of London.

The War on Drugs. *The model recreational drug of the future is already here in the form of crystal methamphetamine. It's cheap and easy to make—little more than Sudafed doctored up with plant fertilizer. One hundred percent of the profit goes to the manufacturer; no intermediary or army of couriers is required. Made of locally acquired materials in one's home the drug's production is nearly impossible to stop. By 2040 the illicit professionals who remain in the business will be custom drug designers catering to the wealthy. Eventually even these drugs will be able to be manufactured in the home. Users will look a lot like you and me.*

—Peter Schwartz, chairman of the Global Business Network

Polio. *Eradication of this disease is a matter of immunizing more children in more developing countries. Civil war and cultural mistrust of western organizations are the biggest obstacles but these are being overcome. In 1988 350,000 cases of polio were reported worldwide in 2005 just 760 cases have been reported.*

—Julie L. Gerberding, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Sovereignty. *Sovereignty—the notion that governments are free to do what they want within their own territory—has provided the organizing principle of international relations for more than 350 years. Thirty-five years from now, sovereignty will no longer be sanctuary. Powerful new forces and insidious threats will converge against it. Nation states will not disappear but they will share power with a larger number of powerful non-sovereign actors than ever before, including corporations, nongovernmental organizations, terrorist groups, drug cartels, regional and global institutions and banks and private equity funds. Dominant issues over the next 35 years will be greenhouse gases, goods, dollars, drugs, viruses, emails and weapons within and across borders. This type of traffic challenges one of the fundamentals of sovereignty: the ability to control what crosses their borders. Many nation states have willingly given up some sovereignty to organizations like the World Trade Organization and the Kyoto Protocol.*

—Richard N. Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations

Anonymity. *The internet once promised individuals new opportunities to explore the world without showing their face. Instead it is turnout gout to be a powerful force against anonymity. Most information about an individual's online actions and communications is traceable—if someone with resources cares to go through the trouble. Younger generations thirst for recognition causes them to join multiple networking sites, rate themselves and friends on various scales, fill in on-line questionnaires. Even as individuals evince more and more concern about privacy and identity theft the flood onto the Web as themselves, publishing blogs, posting photos and revealing all on dating sites. People are trading anonymity for connection. In 2040 the big question will be: are we getting as much as we are giving up?*

—Esther Dyson, editor of Release 1.0