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**Cyril Belshaw. *Fixing the World: An Anthropologist Considers our Future.*
Vancouver, BC: Ingram Books, 2010.**

With *Fixing the World: An Anthropologist Considers our Future*, Cyril Belshaw develops his take on what the world could, should, and in many cases, must look like in the future. This book extends well beyond the two draft chapters that won the 2003-05 World Utopian Championship competition (Belshaw, 2010, p. 586). Those preliminary chapters only covered ground on two realms of contemporary life: education and global government (586). Throughout his subsequent book, Belshaw further and meticulously develops his view of the world, adding contemporary global issues and examples (including ones as recent as the economic woes and bank bailouts of the past year). In the course of nearly 600 pages, he depicts a thorough composite of what life and the world is like, and how certain problems could be “fixed.”

As one could correctly presume, “fixing the world” is quite an endeavor, so how should global societies and their people work on a remedy? Belshaw proposes two prerequisites critical to the task. First, he claims, people must approach global society and its ills *holistically* (14), examining weaknesses systematically and philosophically. Societal problems must not be investigated in isolation but as a part of a greater *whole*. Belshaw contends that all “parts” of a problem must first be identified before a solution of any sort can be implemented, and he follows this pattern himself in each chapter. In short, says Belshaw, only after examination and planning and only with the strongest foundation and materials available can a “fix” to a global problem be executed. With this in mind, the second prerequisite critical to “fixing the world” is the close consideration of *innovation* (15) according to Belshaw. In the case(s) where it appears that no framework or foundation exists upon which to develop or “build” a solution to a given problem, Belshaw says that it is likely that an entirely new structure or framework must be constructed. He contends that, sometimes, a remedy to a particular problem is essentially non-existent and so must be constructed as an entirely new entity altogether. In this way, Belshaw believes that innovation is in fact a means of “reinforcing identity,” as societies who innovate must necessarily push themselves to reconsider their weaknesses and how to address them (32). Additionally, he focuses on the ways in which innovation itself requires both societies and individuals to take risks (34). He shows that risk-taking (in the name of innovation) even at the individual level is “significant” since through such action, norms for innovative thinking are established (36).

In the name of such innovation, Belshaw outlines his own proposals for resolving some of global society’s current problems. He creates a “utopia” of an environment, incorporating many innovative solutions that he believes would begin to resolve various societal ills. Among his suggestions are (1) the possibility of a *global* governing body or governmental structure (320), as he sees a need for a more highly ordered, unified world than the one which currently exists and (2) an organization called the “Youth Maturity Institute,” which would transform the U.S.’s existing educational system and contribute directly to the growth and development of the country’s young people. Through the “Youth Maturity Institute,” Belshaw believes that global issues like crime (Chapter 5), health disparities (Chapter 5), terrorism (Chapter 10), poverty (Chapter 11), and the global economic system (Chapters 12-14) must in part be understood as a function of how our young are educated and that if we seek solutions to these global problems, the

education system itself must first be addressed. For example, Belshaw contends that education could change how society views suicide, thereby preventing or more effectively discouraging suicide among in its young people (59-60).

Of course, the changing of the education system would require that teachers and adults dramatically alter how education occurs. Belshaw advocates for children to be encouraged more to *explore* (75) and be “allowed” to fail (82). Since he believes that young people also need to learn how to take greater responsibility for their own actions, students need to also learn appropriate ways to express their emotions (97). In light of the recent changes to the global economic system, Belshaw adds that students should learn not necessarily all technical skills, since those could become outdated, but rather, that they should learn instead what it truly means to work in a professional setting and “what [functioning within a] workplace entails” (91). Finally, Belshaw says, students must be challenged at a younger age to read documents and data, use logic, and understand biases and assumptions. He advocates for an increased focus on critical and analytical thinking, which he believes are needed most in creating a utopia in which innovation is a driving force.

Belshaw’s focus on innovation does not end with education. Indeed, throughout his work, the author returns many times to the discussion of innovation. Ultimately, in remedying global woes and shortcomings, Belshaw believes that the solution lies in optimizing efficiency and anything working towards fostering and encouraging innovation. He examines the issues which often hold societies back from such optimization or innovation, asking (1) What acts as a deterrent or an obstacle to innovation? (2) Within various societies, what are humans blind to when it comes to inefficiencies or outdated ideas, concepts, and social systems? and (3) In what ways and as a result of what type of limited thinking might society miss out on chances to change and to become more global and efficient?

Although this book is highly interdisciplinary and detailed, there are some areas in which this book falls a bit short. In his lecturing discourse, Belshaw goes into tangential discussions and never clearly connects them into the subsequent dialogue. An example of this may be found with a discussion on “text message speak,” and the use of emoticons (284-285), where some of the meaning seems not to be understood or appreciated by the anthropologist, nor is it linked into the larger utopia construction at hand.

Despite some meanderings, this book would make for an excellent video or book series, as Belshaw’s writing style comes across as a lecture in which discussion questions could arise organically. An instructor using Belshaw’s work could easily stop the video to discuss relevant material. In contrast, the book’s current format as a textbook has the appearance that Belshaw’s book is the final word on these fairly subjective matters, and the only solutions to these problems are discussed fully within the text. While his epilogue tries to counter this very concern, changing the format of his text would go a long way toward making his work more accessible to the average collegiate and public audience and would increase the likelihood that Belshaw’s work be used as a starting point for dialogue on the topics he explores. For now, his work serves more as a textbook for a more select academic audience. Particularly, the book reads more as discourse on how he believes problems should be solved, rather than a presentation of only one

perspective or possible set of remedies with a direct challenge for others to speak their views.

To understand “utopia” and to appreciate the complexities inherent in truly and thoroughly “fixing our world,” most readers need to be able to see the pieces, play with them, study and question them, and ultimately, synthesize those pieces for themselves. Even though snippets of this book and its excellent examples could be extracted for discussion in an undergraduate college course, this book in its entirety would be difficult to insert into a curriculum, as it in part becomes biased by the reader only seeing one perspective, shaped by the author. Ultimately, one must admit that Belshaw does an excellent job tying things up in the final pages, although some of his tangents could have been omitted. This is especially true with respect to the areas in which Belshaw does not seem to have an extensive background (perhaps including the textspeak discussion).

Despite this, his use of examples from the last 60 years makes the creation of a utopia seem plausible, and one can truly see what might be accomplished with some of the changes he suggests. As Belshaw states: “We do not normally extrapolate the consequences of our individual acts to the analysis of the nature of the world order. Yet the pond ripples, and it would be good to judge the effects of our own actions, however humble, in terms of their rippling results” (19). Belshaw pushes the reader to think about the process, and he lays quite an extensive cluster of items and actions with which students and professors can “extrapolate” for quite some time after finishing reading.

In short, even if one does not agree with Belshaw’s constructed “utopia,” the reader may still find him or herself deconstructing and deeply pondering Belshaw’s suggestions. It is precisely this deep questioning and healthy skepticism (basic tenets of anthropological investigation) that Belshaw is trying to foster more than anything else. Belshaw’s book, with his meticulous research and analytical approach, is a good place to start the necessary reflection and collaborative discussion regarding just how society could, should, and must “fix the world.”

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