

## Response to the Marien-Halal Debate

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Concerning the debate between Michael Marien and Bill Halal, I am absolutely convinced that the future will be very good, if we assess it honestly and prepare for it fully. Of course, no responsible futurist should believe that she can "predict" the future. I certainly do not believe I can. I have insisted for almost forty years on viewing the futures as always exhibiting four generic alternative futures—Continued (Economic) Growth, Collapse (from one or many reasons), Discipline (to prevent collapse and/or fulfill values other than those of economic growth), and Transformation (usually of either a high tech or a high spirit variety).

For years, my preferred future was, and still is, high tech transformation, but I have always argued that it could only come about if the many challenges in its way were properly addressed in time. It was never an "inevitable" or "most likely" future in my view. It was a possible future that I preferred. I typically have written and spoken about this via the metaphor "surfing the tsunamis of change" where many of the tsunamis are the issues Marien-Halal discuss, and some they do not mention (such as Peak Oil. A very curious omission on their part! They speak of "energy shortages" but these are not from lack of energy supplies in their view.)

From the 1980s onward, with the triumph of global fundamentalist neoliberalism over everything else, especially ignoring concerns about the real economy, the environment (in many aspects), energy supplies, indigenous and other marginalized cultures, and governability, I became less and less certain that a transformational future would emerge, and more and more concerned about social and environmental collapse. I captured and expressed that concern in the phrase "The Unholy Trinity, Plus One," in many speeches, and in *The Journal of Futures Studies*, Vol.13, No.3, February 2009, p. 33 – 48, also published in Korean in *Shindonga*, August, 2008, pp. 450-459.

In that article and talks, and increasingly subsequently, I have stressed that indicators of collapse are now so prevalent and powerful that it is absolutely necessary that everyone assume that collapse will occur, and to prepare for it. No, not just prepare for it, but to welcome it, rejoice in it, look forward eagerly to it. Work I am doing with architectural and futures students at the University of Hawaii now is focused on fully embracing the Unholy Trinity.

To continue to deny the imminent possibility of collapse is irresponsible and suicidal. But to view it negatively as "doom and gloom" is even more irresponsible and stupid since people are thus encouraged to deny it or at least ignore it, and simply eat, drink and be merry before they die. But life during and after social and environmental collapse can be good, peaceful, meaningful, and abundant IF we anticipate the collapse and prepare for it as a form of transformation to a new and potentially better way of life.

It is distressing to me that Marien and Halal do not even hint at this alternative in their discussion. They label taking the challenges seriously as being "pessimistic" while denying them, or believing they will be overcome in high tech/high touch ways, as being "optimistic".

For them to persist in that way of thinking and writing is surely to doom anyone who considers their argument to an unnecessary and avoidable fate.

To view the coming collapse as a great opportunity for a new and better life, and to prepare for the collapse with that in mind and in behavior, seems to me the only responsible way for futurists to act now. To deny the severity and possibility of challenges, or to say that technological solutions will be brought on line soon enough, is to contribute to the probability and depths of the collapse, but to call that being "optimistic" while taking the challenges seriously as being a "pessimistic" view of "doom and gloom" is even more irresponsible, I believe.

It may be far too late to prevent collapse. That is a great possibility. But if collapse is somehow prevented, and the essential features of our continued growth society persist for centuries to come, then our preparing to thrive during and after collapse is still our best policy for now. As the slogan of the Australian Commission on the Future said about sea level rise many, many years ago:

"If we act as if it matters and it doesn't matter,  
then it doesn't matter.  
But if we act as if it doesn't matter, and it matters,  
then it matters."

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