

## Phase 2 Case Study into “Fake News”

### Day 2: Refining conditioning and sublimating levels

*Note: Ambiguity is part of complex dynamic emergent structures, where multiple models may not cover the full extent of the structure. “Resolving ambiguity means understanding the context within which the event takes place. It requires systems thinking to see the interconnections, to gain different perspectives in order to build up the full context within which an event can be properly understood.”<sup>1</sup>*

We are entering a strange world indeed, one quite different from the traditional understanding of socio-political behavior and the world of politics and policy. It is a world of continual creation, of giving form to potential and actualizing that form through the creation and maintenance of a multitude of interlocking recurring schemes of operations embodied in a wide variety of institutions that may or may not be compatible with each other. What emerges is a revision of the standing wave of energy passing through the earth, a revision that modifies this standing wave to meet human concerns and interests via the production of a steady stream of goods to the extent possible within any given good of order or spirit of an age.

What adds to this complexity is the sublimating effect of the transcendental realm of meaning made real through the revelation of the Divine Mystery of itself to humans. This same world mediated by meaning that so modifies the natural recurring schemes of the world is in itself modified by a higher power that that of mere humans, a power that acts in human history not through the control of history itself—that is left to human beings—but to the infusion of the human heart of the Divine love that permeates the universe.

This is the individual’s own life-cycle, from a purely animal existence of the brain with its homeostasis, system coordination, and non-conscious psychic mediated world, to the conscious intelligence that creates these worlds mediated by meaning through which individuals live out their lives, to the transcendental precepts and the infusion of love operative at the transcendental level of human existence. For meaning lies in the individual and not in the “world out there.” Destroy or downgrade the individual’s capacity to control meaning and you destroy or downgrade the capacity of the institutional system to carry out its twin tasks: to restructure the standing wave of energy to provide a steady stream of goods to all humans, and to reach out and respond to the transcendental level of being that guides and directs human interests towards sound terminal values.

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<sup>1</sup> “What is VUCA?” (Complexity Labs, May 5, 2017), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yg\\_BLNSYZU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yg_BLNSYZU). VUCA stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Learning how to operate under such conditions requires a different way of thinking. RCB

In short, when considering the political and institutional issues of the day, it is important to take into account both the subsuming effect on the lower level as that level also conditions the core level, and the conditioning effect on the transcendental level as that level also subsumes human interests. What these exact interactions are we will consider over the next few weeks.

But in the end, how and why a civilization prospers is due to its culture, i.e., the communal world mediated by meaning that if sound leads to a better use of available energy resources, and if unsound destroys or downgrades the recurring schemes of operations at the institutional level and so is either malicious or ignorant or incompetent when it comes to harnessing available resources to provide a steady stream of goods for its members. The quality of such worlds mediated by meaning depends on the transcendental infusion of the Spirit into human affairs through the ongoing conversion of individuals who freely associate with each other to promote what is truly of value.

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The subsuming level of the transcendental realm of meaning seems stable, in the sense that it definitely is a higher level of intelligibility that has links with the global institutional structure. However, the conditioning level—civilization—is too similar to that of the institutional structure to be considered a lower level of intelligibility. In fact, while fundamental institutional change most likely takes place at the global level, there's no difference other than the scale of operation between global, regional, and local institutions: they are all representative of an existing state of the good of order. Since civilization is essentially operative at the same level, including technological development, that too cannot be considered the conditioning level.

Yet, the lower level does have something to do with civilization as representing a certain technological level. It is just that it's not the technology per se that is critical, but the amount of energy that a particular society has available to use for whatever it purposes its members deem of value. In general, the higher the energy flow the greater the complexity both in terms of variation and control mechanizations of the standing recurring schemes of operation that define the civilization. Thus the key conditioning factor to local, regional, and global institutional structures lies as the rate of flow of energy combined with the absolute size of that flow that powers the institutional structure.

For most of human history, energy sources have allowed little more than hunter-gatherer tribes. Energy was acquired both through the consumption of edible flora and fauna, leading to such things as the acquisition of visual colors to the eye that allowed people to distinguish between unripe (green) and ripe (red) fruit. Such societies were restricted in size, since they often had to rely on mobility when an area was hunted out. Furthermore, the productive capacity of the land to provide calories was also limited—not to mention the need for fuel for cooking, warmth, and safety.

The first major breakthrough to a higher energy level came with agriculture. Now stable crops could be grown over and over again in a specific area, something that allowed for the formation

of stable communities as well as the shift to less than portable assets such as stone buildings, dams, temples, and more complex non-mobile tools. This settling process was accompanied by the domestication of animals, something that had a dual impact on the energy flow both through a regular higher level of calories for consumption but the augmentation of human energy by harnessing animal power. Now it became possible for the development of larger institutional structures still dominated by a tribal mentality but now extend to formal bureaucracies so necessary for the control of water cycles (dams, canals, etc.). But even so, the majority of people lived directly off the land with only a small wealthy group to occupy positions of power. The problem is that collecting what is essential highly distributed solar energy requires a wide collector range: pre-concentration through animal protein still required large grazing areas and the productivity of the land was still low.

The shift to better tools, e.g., iron rather than bronze, as well as the slow development of technology, allowed for a better use of the existing sources of energy. Such refinements allowed for the emergence of wide-ranging empires that could draw upon and concentrate solar energy supplies over distances that less technological societies could only dream. So it is that trading ships were developed that could travel not only along rivers but across oceans (e.g., Vikings). Even so, it required large numbers of people to do all the work required to collect and distribute what energy there was, for there still existed the constraints of relying solely on energy that ultimately derived from the sun.

Refining the technology was only part of what was going on; the other part was the gradual improvement of society's world mediated by meaning from traditional tribal or pagan foundations to civil societies based on some form of universal standards. But now we are talking about the conditioning operations on the core global/regional/local institutions level of intelligibility. For the central aspect of any institutional level in the world mediated by meaning that structures its recurring schemes of operation. Such structures are conditioned by the available energy and sublated by the transcendental realm of meaning.

It was the British industrial revolution that shifted energy flows from solar to highly concentrated forms of energy such as coal, oil, and eventually nuclear. Now wealth depended not on capturing through redistribution large sections of the energy flow, but on the creation of new energy flows—and through that the creation of new forms of wealth not dependent on solar energy. And these new flows of energy came not from highly diffuse solar energy collectors but from highly concentrated forms that were far easier to collect, store, and use. All of a sudden, human history took off in very different directions as it was now possible for humans to exist on the productivity of only a few—something that released them for other tasks not related to agriculture or war.

For the first time it became possible to have institutions that spanned the globe, institutions such as the commercial enterprises of the Dutch East India Company or the political expansions of national political institutions into the British Empire upon which “the sun never set.” With this expansion came two separate institutional types that are still in conflict with each other. The first is the traditional “court” system of patronage typical of early societies where wealth

could only be acquired through political power and influence, and the protection and enhancement of one's own group was of paramount importance. In contrast to this was the commercial requirement for contract law and the enforcement of such laws across wide expanses of territory. Together, these two value systems form a core tension between the exercise of political power in a hierarchal system of control and what is becoming a highly complex network of technological interactions grounded in maximizing individual contributions through a legal system of rights and duties largely outside the political system. This is a highly unstable situation, one that places a great stress of political hierarchies since they are now assessed not according to their right to hold power but on their ability to sustain and enhance that steady stream of goods upon which so many people in developed and developing nations depend.

And that depends on the control of energy assets, not only available resources such as coal or oil deposits but on the ability to utilize such resources through refinement and distribution. Controlling such resources in effect controls the degree a society's "standing wave" of energy can be sustained or enhanced, or ever cut off at the roots. In short, the institutional level that is our primary concern is conditioned by the availability of highly concentrated forms of energy that exceed any possible amounts attained through enhancing a society's ability to channel solar energy in whatever form it may take for human use.

This accounts for the second ongoing fundamental institutional change, the first being this tension, this conflict, between two quite different value systems. This second form takes place between two different types of institutions that seek control over energy flows. One of these sets justifies their existence through "sustainability", "compassionate capitalism", "social justice" through the redistribution of wealth, and the "fight against global warming." Regardless of their rationalizations, what they do is seek control over energy resources for their own benefit, their own "value signaling." They are in direct conflict with the other set of institutions whose existence is conditioned by the need to control highly concentrated forms of energy.

This second set of institutions justify their own desire/need to control the flow of energy through a variety of means, running from autocratic structures (political) whose members seek to enhance their own positions, to maintaining sound banking systems, to providing an ever larger flow of resources to a populace that in a case like China have been poor for generations.

So, now we have three identifiable and distinct levels of intelligibility connected with our study into fundamental institutional change and the news cycles that reflect such changes. The core level has to do with the good of order as it exists and is embodied in an institutional structure that ranges from local, to regional, to global recurring schemes of operation. Assuming that we are not to waste resources on solving local or regional problems because of a larger change operating at the global level, understanding fundamental institutional changes at the broad scale is our starting point.

Conditioning this core level is the energy flows upon which it depends, such that the core level can be considered to represent a standing energy wave given form through institutional roles

and tasks that provide a steady stream of goods. This conditioning level is itself sublated by the institutional level in the sense that the human created world mediated by meaning, the development of control mediators, and the refinement of technology all have an impact on developing and regulating this conditioning energy level. But the core level is always constrained by the energy flows themselves.

Sublating the core level is a transcendental realm of meaning innate to being human. This is the realm of the Divine Mystery operative in human history not as a blunt instrument but as the quiet infusion into individuals enhanced by a communal reinforcement or augmentation. This becomes the driving force in intellectual, moral, and religious conversion—all three of which, when combined, account for the development of sound positions, plans, and policies while the lack of the same accounts for counter-positions grounded in falsehoods so profound that following such plans and policies only degrade the social order, i.e., the good of order. While sound positions can be developed at the institutional level, counter-positions can only be reversed. Much of the fundamental institutional changes currently playing out are the result of the conflict between the two, a conflict best understood through the functional speciality of Dialectics. At its extreme, it is a fundamental conflict between life-affirming and life-destroying recurring schemes of operation, the former valuing individual life while the latter operates in such a way as to destroy the individual through gas-lighting, authoritarian political structures, and the human assumption of divine powers of creation.

The destruction of the individual in effect destroys the capacity of people to be open to experience, be intelligent in understanding, be reasonable when it comes to making judgments, and responsible when it comes to acting. When downgraded or destroyed, all competition to existing power structures is removed. The downside is the loss of sound positions eventually degrades the social, political, and economic order to the point where the gap between what the individual is told by the state and what the individual knows from their own experience is so great that all legitimacy is lost and a hermeneutics of suspicion raises its head to further degrade the trust required for a well-functioning society.

Now we are in a better position to understand what in fact is going on at the global institutional level. Knowing both the conditioning and sublating effects of higher and lower levels of intelligibility on the institutional level, and the corresponding sublating and condition effects of the core level on both the lower and higher levels of intelligibility, allows us to better anticipate what there is to be known through a study of the news presented in so many ways as to influence the course of human events.

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