

ought to regard *me* with contempt, & yet I don't think he does.⁷⁶ Gissing's death was not going to stop Wells's need to argue with him as a 'topic' or 'problem' that needed authoritatively addressing.

Wells's ungraciousness to Gissing's memory was thus not simply a personal betrayal, although by decent standards of friendship much of his behaviour is indeed inexcusable. Wells, as usual, felt he knew best when it came to Gissing's estate and the disposal of *Veranilda*. Without his help, he felt the pension would never have been gained, and it was characteristic of him to wash his hands of the whole affair if not done his way. Gabrielle and Clara Collet had made him angry: he bore a grudge against the guardians of Gissing's memory and carried his anger through to the memory of Gissing himself – although Wells's continued practical concern for Gissing's sons should be noted. Regarding Gissing's work, Wells increasingly desired the novel to serve a purpose: closely-observed if grey observations on a social theme were less and less artistically satisfactory to Wells without a legible didactic purpose to power them ideologically. Wells is unlikely to have reread or much valued the bulk of Gissing's novels in the latter part of his career; yet when younger he had evidently cared for Gissing the man a great deal, and had to some extent been influenced by his work. (I have already noted the influence of Wells's social novels on Gissing, and the story of Wells's 'Miss Winchelsea's Heart' was suggested by Gissing: surprisingly, their sense of humour seems to have been one of the things the two men had most in common, as they discovered when Wells taught Gissing how to ride a bicycle.)⁷⁷ Wells had applauded Gissing's ability to connect the sad individual destinies of his characters to a broader social theme, and he came to see Gissing's tragedy in the same way. Gissing came to stand for the failure of the Victorian age into which they had both been born: a sensitive, highly intelligent individual crippled by Wells's two most despised social evils, poor education and class. As the peculiar syntax of this passage perhaps betrays, Gissing was too perplexing a difficulty for even Wells to solve satisfactorily:

⁷⁶ *Letters*, viii, p. 288. James's reply, p. 290, casts an interesting light on his subsequent dispute with Wells, praising Wells while decidedly belittling him; see also another private letter to Gissing in *Letters*, ix, p. 42.

⁷⁷ *Letters*, v, p. 26, vii, pp. 117-18, *Autobiography*, ii, pp. 572-73 and 568.

So ended all that flimsy inordinate stir of grey matter that was George Gissing. He was a pessimistic writer. He spent his big fine brain depreciating life, because he would not and perhaps could not look life squarely in the eyes, – neither his circumstances nor the conventions about him nor the adverse things about him nor the limitations of his personal character. But whether it was nature or education that made this tragedy I cannot tell.⁷⁸

W. Warren Wagar

H.G. Wells and the Futurist Endeavour

By training and profession, I am an historian, and a card-carrying member of the American Historical Association. I teach in a university history department. Since history has been going on now for 6,000 years, on seven continents and five oceans, and consists, at least in theory, of everything that everybody everywhere has ever done, said, or thought, that should be enough to keep me busy. Strange to say, it's not! Especially over the past twenty years, I have all but abandoned history. I seldom go to meetings of historical societies and although I subscribe to a professional history journal, I almost never read it.

Actually, my troubles with history started more than 40 years ago. When I was writing my doctoral dissertation, *H.G. Wells and the World State*, in the late 1950s, I won a U.S. Fulbright Scholarship to study for a year in London. The Fulbright Commission had to find a British mentor for me, but when it approached history faculty in the Greater London area, it was met with dismay. Your scholar is writing a dissertation on what? H.G. Wells? The chap died only a few years ago. He's not part of history. History ended in 1914 or thereabouts. So the Commission scurried around and eventually found a mentor for me in the English Literature faculty of Queen Mary College in the East End. We got along famously.

But nowadays professional historians have drifted even further away from anything that holds my interest. Politics, wars, and ideas are "out"; witchcraft,

⁷⁸ *Autobiography*, p. 581.

carnivals, and the everyday life of Florentine street urchins are “in”. So I am out, too, and instead I have found new homes, in four delightful societies that care about what I care about. One, of course, is the H.G. Wells Society, which I joined in the early 1960s.

The other three could also be called H.G. Wells Societies, since H.G. occupies a central position in the work of all three: the World Future Society, which I joined in the late 1960s; the Science Fiction Research Association, which I joined in the early 1970s; and the Society for Utopian Studies, which I joined in 1976. It will not come as news to any of you that H.G. was the father of modern futures studies, the father of modern science fiction, and the last great architect of the literary utopia, as well as the prime inventor of that more characteristic 20th-Century phenomenon, the literary dystopia. Wherever I turn in any of these other three societies, I am in constant touch with the name, the work, and the memory of H.G. Wells.

But this paper is centered on H.G. Wells and the human future, and specifically on the place of Wells in the endeavor known as futures studies. I call it an “endeavor” because I am not quite sure what it really is. It has not yet become a recognized academic “discipline,” much less a “science,” and it is not quite a “field,” although it is also more than a “topic.” The only thing that seems indisputable is that it emerged as a self-conscious movement among a wide variety of researchers and publicists in Europe and North America during the 1960s.

Many of the pioneers did not know one another and appeared on the scene quiet independently. Among the landmarks in the 1960s were such books as the Dutch scholar Fred Polak’s *The Image of the Future* (1961), the Nobel-prize-winning physicist Dennis Gabor’s *Inventing the Future* (1963), the French economist Bertrand de Jouvenel’s *The Art of Conjecture* (1964), the Hudson Institute’s *The Year 2000* (by Herman Kahn and Anthony J. Wiener, 1967), and, by John McHale, the British disciple of Buckminster Fuller, *The Future of the Future* (1969). The first million-copy best-sellers of the futures movement came in the early 1970s: Alvin Toffler’s *Future Shock* (1970) and – the work primarily of an American husband and wife team, Donella and Dennis Meadows – *The Limits to Growth* (1972).¹

1. Fred Polak, *The Image of the Future: Enlightening the Past, Orientating the Present, Forecasting the Future*, 2 vols. (New York: Oceana, 1961); Dennis Gabor, *Inventing the Future* (New York: Knopf, 1963); Bertrand de Jouvenel, *The Art of Conjecture* [1964, in French] (New York: Basic Books, 1967); Herman Kahn and Anthony J. Wiener, *The Year 2000: A Framework for Speculation on the Next*

My own chief contributions from this era were *The City of Man* (1963) and *Building the City of Man: Outlines of a World Civilization* (1971).² The Harvard-educated journalist Edward Cornish founded the World Future Society in Washington in 1966; I joined soon thereafter and in no time its worldwide membership had climbed to well over 20,000. Inspired by the work of Bertrand de Jouvenel, the *Association International Futuribles* was founded in Paris in 1967. The Club of Rome opened shop in 1968. Lester R. Brown launched his astonishingly successful Worldwatch Institute in Washington in 1974. Writing in the same year, H. Wentworth Eldredge, a Dartmouth College sociologist, identified some 475 futures-related courses on North American university campuses.³

That was also the year, 1974, when I introduced my own lecture course “History of the Future” at the State University of New York. Offered 25 times since then, it has enrolled more than 7,000 students, perhaps the longest-running academic futures course anywhere in the world. Meanwhile, postgraduate programs were initiated at the University of Massachusetts (1970) and the University of Houston (1974). Major futures studies journals sprang up in France, Britain, the United States, and elsewhere. The Millennial Edition of *The Futurist Directory*, published by the World Future Society, contains entries on almost 1,400 professional futurists throughout the world.⁴

But who first thought of making the study of the future a rigorous discipline? Of course the answer is H.G. Wells, in two seminal publications from the year 1902: his marvelous collection of essays, *Anticipations*, and his Royal Institution lecture, *The Discovery of the Future*. He proceeded to practice what he preached, not only in his scientific romances, beginning with *The Time Machine*, but also in literally dozens

Thirty-Three Years (New York: Macmillan, 1967); John McHale, *The Future of the Future* (New York: Braziller, 1969); Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970); and Donella H. Meadows, et al., *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: New American Library, 1972).

2. W. Warren Wagar, *The City of Man: Prophecies of a World Civilization in Twentieth-Century Thought* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963; Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967); and W. Warren Wagar, *Building the City of Man: Outlines of a World Civilization* (New York: Grossman, 1971; San Francisco, Freeman, 1972).

3. For the early history of the futures studies movement, see Edward Cornish, *The Study of the Future* (Washington: World Future Society, 1977), pp. 78-92. The survey of college and university courses by Eldredge is reported in *ibid.*, p. 212. See also Billy Rojas and H. Wentworth Eldredge, “Status Report: Sample Syllabi and Directory of Futures Studies,” in Alvin Toffler, ed., *Learning for Tomorrow: The Role of the Future in Education* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 345-399.

4. World Future Society, *The Futurist Directory: A Guide to Individuals Who Write, Speak, or Consult about the Future*, Millennial Edition (Bethesda, Maryland: World Future Society, 2000).

of subsequent volumes, both fiction and non-fiction, for the remaining 44 years of his life. By my reckoning, in just the years after 1902, H.G. published eight utopias and 28 collections of prophetic writings.⁵

Does the futures studies movement of today acknowledge its parentage? The answer is a seriously qualified "yes."

The biggest problem has been the disciplinary affiliations of the majority of active futurists. The great majority are not historians, not students of literature, not even humanists. They hail from a wide variety of so-called "harder" disciplines, such as economics, the managerial sciences, technology forecasting, engineering, and the life and earth sciences. Many of those who ARE humanistically inclined harken to gurus of what we might call the counterculture: the sandal-shod counterculture of mysticism, amorphous outbreaks of "spirituality," neo-paganism, and whatever. Looking back to a commonsense secular forerunner such as H.G. Wells would hardly be their style.

But Wells did receive due notice in the first major account of the burgeoning futures studies endeavor, entitled simply *The Study of the Future*, by the President and founder of the World Future Society, Edward Cornish, published in 1977. Cornish devoted three lengthy chapters to the history of thinking about the future. Two of his chapter titles, in and of themselves, reflect Wells's influence: "The Shape of Things To Come" and "The Discovery of the Future." But Cornish was careful to put his subject in serious historical perspective, beginning with the ancient Greeks and carrying on through the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the age of Darwin before even touching the 20th Century.

When he did reach Wells, he devoted three full pages to an exploration of the two most seminal Wellsian texts: *Anticipations* and *The Discovery of the Future*.⁶

5. The utopias – not all of them fully worked out – are *The Dream*, *The Food of the Gods*, *The Holy Terror*, *In the Days of the Comet*, *Men Like Gods*, *A Modern Utopia*, *The Shape of Things To Come*, and *The World Set Free*. The collections of prophetic writings include *After Democracy*, *The Common Sense of War and Peace*, *The Elements of Reconstruction*, *An Englishman Looks at the World*, *The Fate of Homo Sapiens*, '42 to '44, *The Future in America*, *Guide to the New World*, *In the Fourth Year*, *Mankind in the Making*, *The New America: The New World*, *The New World Order*, *New Worlds for Old*, *The Open Conspiracy*, *The Outlook for Homo Sapiens*, *The Peace of the World*, *Phoenix*, *The Rights of Man*, *Russia in the Shadows*, *The Salvaging of Civilization*, *Travels of a Republican Radical in Search of Hot Water*, *War and the Future*, *The War That Will End War*, *Washington and the Hope of Peace*, *The Way the World Is Going*, *What Is Coming?*, *World Brain*, and *A Year of Prophecy*. Not every chapter of each of these books can be labeled prophetic, but they all contain substantial amounts of futures-oriented discussion.

6. Cornish, *The Study of the Future*, pp. 68-70.

Later, when the World Future Society began publishing a scholarly journal, *Futures Research Quarterly*, he reprinted *The Discovery of the Future* in its entirety in an early issue, noting that Wells "may be regarded as the greatest futurist of the twentieth century, perhaps of any century. [...] No other single individual did so much to develop the future as a legitimate field of study."⁷

In France, the counterpart of Cornish's *The Study of the Future* was *Histoire des futurs* by Bernard Cazes, published in 1986. This is a considerably brawnier volume, with even more references to Wells. In fact Wells is mentioned on 47 of its 475 pages; and subtitled sections of chapters 3, 5, and 6 are devoted entirely to Wells. If you take a tour through the index of Cazes' book, you will not find a single author cited as often as Wells, not even great Frenchmen like Jules Verne and Bertrand de Jouvenel!

Most of his attention centers, first on *Anticipations* and *The Discovery of the Future*; later on the major utopias, *A Modern Utopia* and *Men Like Gods*; and still later on Wells's invention of the dystopia in *When the Sleeper Wakes*, which he says Aldous Huxley came near to plagiarizing.⁸ (When Huxley was still alive, I wrote to him asking about the influence of *When the Sleeper Wakes* on *Brave New World*, but there was no reply.) But Cazes obviously knows his Wells. On one page, he also makes the point, and documents it by quoting relevant passages, first from Wells's fiction and then from his non-fiction, that Wells was often more prescient in his fiction than in his non-fiction.⁹

I made the same point myself in an early article on Wells.¹⁰ My favorite comparison is between Wells's 1939 article, "The Map of Europe in 1949," and his scenario from 1933, *The Shape of Things To Come*. In January 1939, Wells looked ten years into the future and saw an enlarged German *Reich*, with or without (and more likely without) Hitler and his Nazis, German protectorates throughout what remained of Eastern Europe, a fascist France, fascist Spain, and Fascist Italy happily collaborating with Germany, an isolated and ineffectual Great Britain and Soviet

7. Edward Cornish, "Introduction to H.G. Wells's 'The Discovery of the Future,'" *Futures Research Quarterly* (1:2, Summer 1985), 54. *The Discovery of the Future* itself was reprinted on pp. 56-73 of the same issue.

8. Bernard Cazes, *Histoire des futurs: Les figures de l'avenir de Saint Augustin au XXIe siècle* (Paris: Seghers, 1986), pp. 63-65, 160-163, and 181-183.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

10. W. Warren Wagar, "H.G. Wells and the Radicalism of Despair," *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 6 (Fall 1973), 1-10.

Russia, and German on its way to becoming the world *lingua franca*.¹¹ A year and a half later, in the fall of 1940, this might have looked like an accurate forecast, but reality veered steadily away from it in the years that followed. Of course *The Shape of Things To Come*, where Wells's prophetic imagination was liberated by the device of fiction, came significantly closer to what would actually occur, a cataclysmic world war beginning in 1940 on the Polish-German frontier.

Now I know full well what Wells was thinking: like all too many futurists too much of the time, he was simply extrapolating from current trends. I have done the same more than once. In this case, Wells was writing at the beginning of 1939, furious with the Chamberlain government for appeasing the dictators at Munich the previous autumn. German annexation of the Sudetenland and the granting of autonomy to Slovakia had sealed the fate of an independent Czechoslovakia. It was clearly destined to fall into the German sphere of influence and lose whatever remained of its sovereignty, which in fact did occur fewer than two months after Wells published his article. The same sort of thing is what Wells foresaw for the rest of Eastern Europe. Russia would continue to stay out of Hitler's way, Britain would continue to appease the dictators, and no one would be left to stop Germany. Almost certainly, Wells was writing more out of anger and bitterness toward the Chamberlain regime and its myopic foreign policy than out of prophetic instinct; but I suspect that if he had been writing fiction, he would have come up with a bolder and more imaginative scenario. In fact he did, in his 1939 novel *The Holy Terror*, although in this instance wishful thinking triumphed over cold logic.

But back to the books of Edward Cornish and Bernard Cazes. It would be dishonest to represent Cornish and Cazes and their outstanding surveys of the futurist endeavor as typical. Most of the so-called big names in futures studies from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s ignored Wells. For that matter, they ignored the futurist endeavor altogether. They were not writing about themselves or their colleagues or their forerunners: their eyes were fixed firmly on the future itself, and what it might hold. You will search in vain through the major writings of the best-known futurists of that golden era for significant references to Wells: Buckminster Fuller, Alvin Toffler, Herman Kahn, Daniel Bell, Olaf Helmer, John McHale, Donella and Dennis

11. H.G. Wells, "The Map of Europe in 1949," *Sunday Chronicle*, January 22, 1939; cf. H.G. Wells, *The Shape of Things To Come* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), pp. 191-195.

Meadows. But in all fairness, they did not have a reflective agenda; they were all concerned with urgent contemporary issues.

A better index to the survival of Wells in futures thinking is a pair of books that appeared in the late 1980s, compiled by prominent futurists and devoted to profiles of some of the leaders in the endeavor. Here, reflection and reminiscing were very much on the agenda. One volume, *What I Have Learned*, contained essays by the futurists themselves. Only one mentioned Wells, and that was myself.¹² But in the other volume, *What Futurists Believe*, each futurist was asked to name the thinkers who had most influenced their own work – I was not part of the survey – and this time Wells figured prominently in two out of 17 cases: the late British economist Kenneth Boulding; and Sir Arthur Clarke. Not a rich harvest perhaps, but better than nothing.¹³

And what about Wells in the 1990s? Two books appeared in 1991 that showed striking influence by Wells. Most of the second chapter of my own book, *The Next Three Futures*, dealt extensively with Wells, seen as the founder of futures studies; and the thirteenth chapter of *Into the 21st Century*, by three British futurists – Brian Burrows, Alan Mayne, and Paul Newbury – focused on the pathbreaking ideas in Wells's 1938 book, *World Brain*.¹⁴ In 1994 Mayne brought out a critical edition of *World Brain*, with the cooperation of the H.G. Wells Society.¹⁵ My edition of *The Open Conspiracy*, now re-scheduled for publication in 2001, originated as part of the same London Adamantine Press series of 21st-Century studies in which the Burrows and Mayne volumes appeared; but unfortunately Adamantine Press collapsed a few years ago, and we had to return to the drawing board for another go with another publisher.

A further opportunity to sound Wellsian trumpets came in 1996, with the publication in the United States and Great Britain of *Encyclopedia of the Future*, an imposing, oversized two-volume set that purported to survey the entire futurist enterprise, past, present, and future. Hundreds of futurists and others supplied

12. W. Warren Wagar, "The Next Three Futures," in Michael Marien and Lane Jennings, eds., *What I Have Learned: Thinking about the Future Then and Now* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), pp. 3-21.

13. Joseph F. Coates and Jennifer Jarratt, *What Futurists Believe* (Mt. Airy: Maryland, Lomond), pp. 113 and 124.

14. Wagar, *The Next Three Futures*, pp. 15-23; and Brian Burrows, Alan Mayne, and Dr. Paul Newbury, *Into the 21st Century: A Handbook for a Sustainable Future* (London: Adamantine Press, 1991), especially ch. 13.

15. H.G. Wells, *World Brain: H.G. Wells on the Future of World Education*, ed. Alan Mayne (London: Adamantine Press, 1994).

hundreds of articles. I wrote the entry on Wells and also essays on utopias and on the history of futurism that referred at length to Wells.¹⁶ Four other articles, by four other futurists, also gave significant credit to Wells,¹⁷ and he was listed as the third most influential futurist of all time, right behind Buckminster Fuller and Isaac Asimov, and three places ahead of Sir Arthur Clarke.¹⁸ *The Shape of Things To Come* made it to the list of the 100 most influential futures books of all time, but not, I regret to say, *Anticipations*.¹⁹

I do not for a minute suppose that all the futurists polled who voted for Wells had steeped themselves in Wells's writing: but the point is that his name has surely not been forgotten, even by North Americans, who may have comprised most of the jury.

The next question is, do futures studies have a future of their own? A whole issue of the distinguished British journal *Futures* will be devoted to this question in 2001. My essay, and perhaps others, will argue that they may not, at least not in their current guise. One curious obstacle to their prosperity is the fact that we have now arrived in the future. For decades futurists published books and articles targeted at the year 2000. "The year 2000" became a mantra. For people born in the 1920s and 1930s and 1940s, it seemed like a far-distant, mysterious, wondrous destination. Not just a new century, but a new millennium!

The trouble is that when we got there, the year 2000 turned out to be just another year. The year 2000 was not a destination, and all the fuss and feathers about it proved pointless.

Of course the arrival of the year 2000 is not the chief source of the current plight of futures studies. A much greater issue is the failure of futurists to develop what H.G. called for in *The Discovery of the Future*: an authentic science of the future, comparable in rigor to the life sciences which had, even as early as 1902, worked out much of the history of life on earth. Futurists reply: we are not studying the real future, we are exploring plausible alternative futures for the human race, we

16. W. Warren Wagar, "Wells, H.G.," "Futurism," and "Utopias," in George Thomas Kurian and Graham T.T. Molitor, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Future* (2 vols., New York: Macmillan, 1996), II: 984, I: 366-367, and II: 958-959.

17. See John Platt, "Forecasting, Deterministic," *ibid.*, I: 333-338; Edward Cornish, "Futurists," *ibid.*, I: 367-369; George Thomas Kurian, "Popularized Futures," *ibid.*, II: 736-737; and Frederik Pohl, "Science Fiction," *ibid.*, II: 819-821.

18. *Ibid.*, II: 1077.

19. *Ibid.*, II: 1082.

are surveying options, we are suggesting synergies, we are not offering rectilinear predictions. And of course this can be a useful game to play. It can help prepare us for what might happen and even help us avoid some of it. But this is a game anyone can and does play, using any number of methods and theories. Policy makers in foreign offices, product development researchers in corporations, municipal planners, investment counsellors, real estate developers, millions of people everywhere are involved in studying the future.

So the relatively small number of people around the world who call themselves futurists – several thousand individuals, hailing from many different disciplines – really have no special authority or credentials, in large part because they have not, so far, been able to carry out the Wellsian mandate: they have not produced a powerful way of integrating the relevant disciplines so that we can predict not just the future of oil reserves or the future of on-line marketing or the future of the current British government, but the future of humankind in general. The proof is in the pudding. And there is very little pudding. So far. There may never be. The task may be literally impossible.

But the only sound reason for a specially designated futurist endeavor, for a separate and distinct science of the future, is the possibility of putting all the other sciences with predictive powers together under one roof. We see H.G. himself struggling to do this with his great educational trilogy, *The Outline of History*, *The Science of Life* and *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind*, and his plan for a world encyclopedia in *World Brain*, but even he did not succeed in actually creating a science of the future, and certainly his successors have not done so, either. Nor have they scored many triumphs in actual feats of specific forecasting. Unlike Wells, they have been wrong almost all of the time about almost everything.

But I know that if H.G. were here with us today, his first question would not be whether futures studies have a future of their own, or whether he himself had played a central role in the emergence of futures studies, but whether the human race is destined to bring its scattered, quarrelling tribes into a scientifically managed new world order that will transform this earth into the great garden-planet we now have the means and the know-how to achieve.

Will there ever be a recognizably Wellsian world? In many ways, of course, it is here already. Multinational corporations span the globe in ways that would astonish

even William Clissold. International governmental and non-governmental organizations wield formidable power and influence. So-called "rogue" nations like North Korea, Iraq and Serbia have been punished for their transgressions by internationally sanctioned "police actions." A common electronic culture connects hundreds of millions of people the world over, via the Internet. In the Western and East Asian democracies a standard of living has been reached by the average working family that dwarfs anything known when Wells wrote *Anticipations*.

But there are just as many trends and facts that militate against these globalizing forces: no narrowing of the immense gap between the rich and poor nations, uncontrollably mounting demands on the biosphere by the insatiable progress of industry and technology, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the rapacious greed of multinational capital, and the stubborn survival, despite all the churning tides of so-called globalization, of the armed and sovereign nation-states. And then we have our religious friends. Are fundamentalist Christians in the American South, fiery-hot Muslims in the Middle East, intransigent Hindus on the Subcontinent, and all the others, Buddhists, Mormons, Sikhs, whatever, in any danger of losing their faiths and welcoming life under the benign umbrella of secular democratic planetary socialism? I think not!

So, we have a ding-dong battle ahead of us, one that H.G. in his prime – and H.G. was almost always in his prime! – would have relished. I will not venture any predictions. But I am sure of one thing: there are no conceivable segmental or local solutions to our problems. The allocation of human and natural resources, the priorities of economic development, the preservation of the environment, the maintenance of world peace, the achievement of liberty and equality and fraternity throughout the planet, cannot be left to this country, or that corporation, or whatever church or faith. It is a task for what Wells many times called the Mind of the Race, for the Open Conspiracy, for the conscience and will of all humankind.