

Digital Domains Rising

Forging global empires of the heart and mind

Where emperors once levied taxes to fund territorial conquests, today's imperial visionaries engineer virtual networks built on commercial revenues fueled by secular dreams of new ways of being human. Today, the world's largest digital empires manage revenues larger than the annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of most countries. The top five digital providers have greater annual revenues than two-thirds of all individual nations.

What global visions have emerged as these digital behemoths expanded their domains?

Global Disaster Forerunner

The Club of Rome began in 1968 when a small group of international industrialists, financiers and academics met in Italy to discuss global issues. They circulated a declaration emphasizing the need to develop coordinated international efforts to fix what they saw as a looming global crisis. They didn't foresee the Internet or AI, but they anticipated a lot of other things.

Founder Aurelio Peccei described the Club as "the first to rebel against the suicidal ignorance of the human condition." No false modesty there! The Club's website now says they advocate "for paradigm and systems shifts which will enable society to emerge from our current crises, by **promoting a new way of being human, within a more resilient biosphere.**" Really?!

In 1972, the Club famously produced a report titled *The Limits to Growth*, which relied on then state-of-the-art computer simulations from MIT to develop global growth scenarios. It became the best-selling book on the environment ever published (a Google search on "Global Climate Change" today returns nearly as many hits as the book sold). The projections predicted that unchecked economic growth would deplete the world's natural resources while failing to keep up with projected population growth. Despite challenges, including sizable error ranges of the projections, it provoked a discussion well worth having about the future of our planet.

In 1991, the Club published a sequel, *The First Global Revolution*, that clarified the breadth and depth of their motivation for reshaping humanity. It said:

The ploy of finding a scapegoat is as old as mankind itself... In searching for a common enemy against whom we can unite, we came up with the idea that pollution, the threat of global warming, water shortages, famine and the like, would fit the bill.... All these dangers are caused by human intervention in natural processes, and it is only through changed attitudes and behaviour that they can be overcome. The real enemy then is humanity itself. *The First Global Revolution*, pp. 70, 115.

Humans are our own worst enemy! That's our topic all right, but the uber-irony of humans intervening to make human intervention a scapegoat seems lost in the Club's enthusiasm to unite the world in radical social transformation.

In 2022, the Club of Rome upped the disaster threat level by releasing *Earth for All: A Survival Guide for Humanity*. This book asserted humanity is on the brink of "**a sixth mass extinction of**

species.” It identified pain points and advanced five “system-shifting steps” to end poverty and inequality, and transform global food and energy systems by 2050.¹

As thought generators, the club’s publications have helped identify important matters that need addressing. However, taking a high level systems view of social transformation leaves a lot of room for factors deeply engrained in human nature to disrupt even the greatest of interventionist visions.

Enter the World Economic Forum

To add teeth to the Club of Rome’s visionary influence, some members of the Club established an activist offshoot in 1971 that came to be called the World Economic Forum (“WEF”), headquartered in Davos, Switzerland. Founded by German engineer and business professor Klaus Schwab, the WEF became a global NGO with a half billion dollar budget. It soon became one of the most visible NGOs working the last forty years to bring about global change.

WEF’s web site once unabashedly stated **“The World Economic Forum is the only organization in the world that takes a systemic view in everything it does.”** At a minimum, this sounds imperial. Elaborating, they stated their goal was to **improve the state of the world “by engaging...leaders of society to shape global, regional, and industry agendas.”**

The WEF also became deeply involved in advancing the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That program lays out 17 specific objectives such as eliminating poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality, catalyzing climate action, generating responsible production and consumption, and creating institutions imbued with peace and justice priorities. It’s an admirable list. It’s also fundamentally utopian. The tone is: “we’re going to make this all happen,” as if no one else has been about this before. Just how, one wonders, will they accomplish this?

The Great World Reset

In 2019, the WEF announced the beginning of a **“Great Reset”** coming on the heels of what it called the **“Fourth Industrial Revolution” (4-IR).**² The first three revolutions were the mechanical, electrical, and digital revolutions that produced the modern world as we know it. The new 4-IR revolution is seen as a synergistic convergence of the previous industrial revolutions. It’s now being advanced by innovations such as AI, advanced biotech, ubiquitous high speed Internet access, the Internet of Things (IOT), and future technologies yet to be developed. Visionaries believe these technologies hold keys to dramatically transforming not only the way we live, work and play, but also how we think, monitor and regulate society.

One of the most important things identified by the Great Reset was to reset inspiration. A prominent attendee of the annual Davos meeting in January 2017 wrote:

¹ <https://www.clubofrome.org/publication/earth4all-book/>

² The timing of WEF’s Great Reset convinced some observers the WEF knew about the Covid pandemic before it happened, raising suspicions of it being part of a conspiracy to intentionally create a global crisis to justify taking more radical action.

In the era of the 4th industrial revolution, information is commodity but inspiration is precious...That's the new purpose of school: inspiration. We need to shift to an education paradigm that is more inspiration than information, and we need to do it fast.

The WEF concluded that any child can now find all the information they need. What's missing is inspiration. The same observer **noted that Klaus Schwab sounded like "many spiritual leaders who believe that a new form of consciousness may be emerging around the world."**³ The WEF saw itself as expressing an entirely new global spiritual mindset. It might be thought of as a digitally networked global community empowered spiritually by science and human knowledge freed from traditional religious constraints.

In April 2025, Klaus Schwab stepped down from leading the WEF amid accusations that he was responsible for manipulating research, misusing funds, and creating a toxic workplace culture. Whatever the outcome of the charges (which Schwab immediately labeled a character assassination), the WEF story produced a trail of breadcrumbs that help bring to light the origins of "Woke Culture" that began to take Western culture by storm following the Covid pandemic.

Beginning with Children

The WEF specifically highlighted a need to inspire children. Here, the wider context is important to recognize. Traditional families have long been under pressure stemming from a host of factors too numerous to list. The decline can be traced to the trauma of long-standing wars, as well as the emergence of the Industrial Age which drew large numbers of workers to urban centers. Today, the loss of family integrity and safety nets means children are among those who suffer most in the tumult of accelerated change. One striking result is a dramatic increase in children's mental health issues that disrupt their ability to learn.

Covid further stressed modern education by doubling pre-Covid levels of clinical depression and anxiety among children and adolescents.⁴ UNICEF reported in 2021 that post-Covid one in seven children ages 10-19 worldwide experienced anxiety, depression, behavior disorders and/or suicidal feelings. This totals at least 166 million children—"at least" because expanding wars since the UNICEF study have made matters worse. Picture a population of children greater than the entire population of modern Russia suffering from stress and trauma beyond the ability of most parents and teachers to cope!

Resetting Education

In response to humanity's Petrie dish of problems, the WEF positioned itself not only to provide inspiration, but also to advocate for new teaching concepts to reset old values. This immediately established the WEF as a competitor in the realm of values and ethics, which served as a prompt for traditional religions and other moral influencers to clarify how their tenets and practices address the problems of our world today. Meanwhile, WOKE culture worked to silence traditional religions, specifically focusing on Christianity.

Klaus Schwab's 2022 book, *The Great Narrative for a Better Future*, argued that younger generations radicalized through new educational initiatives will demand change if the world fails

³ Timothy P. Shriver, "What Davos Taught Us: Moving from Information to Inspiration," *The HuffPost*, Jan 25, 2016.

⁴ "Global prevalence of depressive and anxiety symptoms in children and adolescents during COVID-19: A Meta-analysis." *JAMA Pediatrics*. August 9, 2021. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.2482

to change voluntarily. Put another way, Schwab unabashedly asserted that resetting education through psychologically-driven, technology-enabled intervention would produce a generation ready to save humanity from itself.

Educating the Whole Child

An early Club of Rome book, *The First Global Revolution* (1991), anticipated Schwab's vision of transforming children and also noted "irrational and emotional realities" form much of the foundation of human relationships that need to be addressed educationally in order to create a new world order. **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)** emerged as the answer to this challenge. SEL represented a major revolution in public education that ambitiously aimed not only to change how children think and behave, but also to transform society at large.

The term SEL was born out of research that began in the 1970s to explore ways to improve high school graduation rates among disadvantaged inner city schools in Hartford, Connecticut, particularly among black youth. The research found educational success was heavily contingent on factors outside of school that affected students' lives. That seems more than obvious, but it gave birth to the term **Whole Child Education**, referring to the need for teaching to address broader social and emotional factors that affect a child's overall success in life.

The Emerging Ed Tech Infrastructure

In 1994, SEL training manifested as the **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)**⁵, dedicated to pursuing "equity-based education." CASEL prioritized emotional and psychological development over traditional academic priorities wherever institutionalized curricula were viewed as limiting accelerated educational reform. Among other things, CASEL embraced high tech learning and assessment tools. It also elevated the importance of collective needs over personal rights, including parental rights.

World Economic Forum involvement with CASEL led in 2015 to an ongoing series of WEF white papers on the future of education, all of which called for increased use of technology in education along with expanded social-emotional learning. A paper released in 2016 advocated for increased use of wearable tracking technologies, along with use of virtual reality, affective computing, and AI machine-enabled learning. It also endorsed gathering data on learners in order to better design and integrate SEL into students' lives.

In practice SEL relies on frequent assessments of students' social and emotional characteristics that yield what some refer to as "psychodata." The goal is to enable teachers to determine and fine-tune SEL lessons to prepare students for growth and success. The assessments might include physical-relational-mental health issues, as well as sexuality and puberty factors.

Prior to the Trump presidency, the data could be compiled without parental knowledge or consent and shared with external service providers if a provider had "legitimate educational interests" and were performing "institutional services or functions" for the school. States and school districts turned the concept of privacy on its head—prioritizing the privileges and privacy

⁵ CASEL's origin is linked with the Klaus Schwab Family, the Club of Rome/WEF, and the Rockefeller Foundation. See <https://libertysentinel.org/the-connections-between-the-global-elites-the-world-economic-forum-and-the-social-emotional-learning-movement/>

of children and government officials over the rights and privacy of parents. A paper by Ben Williamson in the *Journal of Education Policy* in 2019 detailed the scope and goals of SEL this way:

Large-scale computer-based assessment...makes ‘personality’ an international focus for policy intervention and ‘human capital’ formation, thereby translating measurable socio-emotional indicators into predicted socio-economic outcomes.... Society is measured effectively through scientific fact-finding and subjects are managed affectively through psychological intervention.⁶

Prime advocates of such **“algorithm-mediated” education** included UNESCO, OECD, the World Bank, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative, and the Templeton Foundation.⁷ The educational infrastructure they began creating—**“Ed Tech”**—resets global education on a foundation of scientific “fact-finding,” techno-management and psychological intervention scalable for all ages and social learning needs. One WEF pronouncement boasted of “reskilling” a billion people “to create a fairer world” by 2030.⁸

Another WEF white paper, *Schools of the Future* (2020), framed Ed Tech as a tool **“to activate [children’s] global citizenship and take action on economic and social issues...[in order to] champion more inclusive economies.”** In other words, algorithm-mediated learning aims to empower children to foster radical social transformation on a global scale.

Education as Revolution

Whole Child education became associated with **“Critical Education Pedagogy”** advanced by a Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, whose book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) advances a Marxist view of education. An introduction to Freire’s book published online by Harvard’s Graduate School of Education called it “canonical” and quoted his definition of Critical Pedagogy:

This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for liberation.... [It] is an instrument for their critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization.⁹

Freire’s comments were anticipated by Herbert Marcuse, a critical Marxist whose much earlier *Essay on Liberation* (1969) argued that the path to a liberated Marxist-socialist society requires a **“biological foundation for socialism at the level of peoples ‘vital needs.’”**¹⁰ In other words, Marcuse, Freire and others like them reconceptualize Marxist ideology as a radical revolution in education targeting very young children in their most impressionable years. Critical Education Pedagogy aims to fundamentally repurpose education to become an active agent for promoting socialist liberation ideology (or is it “theology”?).

⁶ “Psychodata: Disassembling the psychological, economic, and statistical infrastructure of ‘social-emotional learning’”, in the *Journal of Education Policy*, pp. 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2019.1672895>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ <https://www.weforum.org/impact/reskilling-revolution-reaching-600-million-people-by-2030/>

⁹ *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 48, quoted at <https://guides.library.harvard.edu/criticalpedagogy>. Retrieved 12/12/2024.

¹⁰ *SEL Social Justice Usage*, by James Lindsay, in *New Discourses*, <https://newdiscourses.com/tftw-sel/>. Vital needs include imparting new “values, thinking and sensibilities” into children, according to Marcuse.

Western Education at a Crossroads

Before the 2024 elections in the U.S., half of all states had formulated learning standards for SEL, relying principally on CASEL's recommended priorities. Under such headings as **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI)** and **Critical Race Theory (CRT)**, radical educational initiatives famously made their way into K-12 education, universities, government agencies, and a number of highly visible corporations. The suddenness with which these social experiments exploded on the scene left many wondering where they came from. Now you have a better understanding of that, albeit what I've shared is only the tip of a much deeper iceberg that dates to the formation of mass public education in the 19th century.¹¹

Among the first priorities advanced by the new Trump administration was the dismantlement of SEL, DEI and CRT, which are seen as trojan horses for teaching children socialist ideology, manipulating gender identity, and promoting alternative lifestyles that are actually harmful to children and families. Among the first things Trump did was to target removal of federal moneys to schools supporting such Woke policies. Many corporations began to abandon DEI initiatives on their own in the wake of Trump's new policies, defending their reversal as "common sense" and a return to recruiting staff based on merit rather than inclusivity or racially motivated goals.

Psychologists and many professional educators argue that banning or reducing funds for SEL initiatives harms kids just when anxiety, depression, and suicidality are on the rise.¹² This has prompted efforts to rebrand SEL to focus on "Life Skills" training, but such window dressing doesn't address the depths of parents' concerns. Rebranding SEL doesn't fly in a political climate where parents were previously placed under FBI investigation for disagreeing with school board policies that deeply affected their own children. Ironically, the very thing many progressives feared could happen under a Trump presidency was already happening under the Biden administration right before everyone's eyes.

Many defiant progressives began pushing back in 2025, to oppose the Trump education reform agenda. Conservatives sometimes label progressives' extreme attitudes "Trump derangement syndrome," while zealous progressives label Trump supporters fascist or worse. The battle over how to shape children's education is sure to continue.

Bill Gates Wonders

Bill Gates, Microsoft founder, super philanthropist and influential global spokesperson for technology innovation, is on record saying: "The potential positive path [of AI] is so good that it will force us to rethink how should we use our time. **You can almost call it a new religion or a new philosophy.**"¹³ Noting the huge potential of AI to address education, healthcare and global hunger, Gates also recognizes its addictive nature and power to engage people in virtual realities at the expense of meaningful human interaction.

¹¹ For a deeper view of the roots of American public education, see the works of John Taylor Gatto, a former U.S. National Teacher of the Year. A brief overview of his life and works is available [here](#).

¹² One in five high school students seriously considered attempting suicide in 2023, according to [data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#).

¹³ From the *Possible* podcast co-hosted by tech mogul Reid Hoffman: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KeGYI69sWvw&ab_channel=ReidHoffman.

On his own podcast *Unconfuse Me*, Gates said he worries about three things: “One is a bad guy in control of the [AI] system.... [Two is] the chance of the system taking control....” [Three] **“The one that sort of befuddles me is human purpose.”**

This last concern is an especially good question.

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