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Johan Galtung, *World Politics of Peace and War*. New York: Hampton Press, 2015.

Reviewed by Michael Andregg

This 2015 book published by Hampton Press, New York, NY, has 192 pages of text in 12 chapters, an appendix on trends and predictions, an index, 5 figures and 22 tables. Its author is Johan Galtung, an undoubted world leader in development of “peace studies,” an emerging field, which I have watched emerge. The book is based on a series of lectures he taught at Princeton and other universities from 1985-2000. He has reflected deeply on his geopolitical theory of peace and war since then of course, in many venues not least the Transcend, Global, on-line Peace University, which he founded. But some of Galtung’s chapters have an ancient air about them today, because so much history has passed to challenge his visionary prescriptions.

Chapters:

1. The Four Worlds: A Classification
2. The Four Worlds: A Characterization
3. The Four Worlds: The Six Relations Among Them
4. Inside the First World
5. Inside the Fourth World
6. On the Causes of Terrorism and Their Removal
7. Relation-Oriented Approach
8. Structure-Oriented Approach I: The State System
9. Structure-Oriented Approach II: The Center-Periphery System
10. Diversity, Symbiosis, and a Moral Imperative
11. On the Abolition of War and Other Social Evils
12. Visioning a Peaceful World

Galtung’s conclusion on page 189 begins with “Almost 40 years have passed since the 12-part framework for this book was written as a 12-week University course.” I have concluded after reading the book through that lens, therefore, that his latest among many books is better as a historical document on Galtung’s thinking than as a literal prescription for change today.

One cannot doubt that Professor Galtung is daring! His Appendix lists 50 predictions about the world written in 1988 for a World Futures conference in Beijing, China. To publish such a list 27 years later for review is to risk all your errors being obvious. He concludes this appendix with a brief paragraph claiming that about 48 of the 50 have come true. Well that is debatable. Many are quite broad and some are truly visionary, but others have clearly not come true.

I am going to illustrate that in some detail so I want to acknowledge again the undeniable and considerable contributions of Professor Galtung to social science theory and especially to peace studies, even though so many of his predictions were ... less than fully accurate. I will run through some that I find most noteworthy. By all means, judge for yourselves.

3. Galtung predicts “ever more pressure on empty land in Siberia, Alaska, Canada, parts of the United States” ... and on around the less populated parts of our world. Well that is easy, and on the positive side, Galtung explicitly considers demographics, which are very powerful forces in international affairs, but are also often neglected by scholars who want to avoid controversy. On the negative side, Galtung concludes therefore that “Increasingly, this will mean the end of nation-states.” We certainly see failing states today, but end of nation-states? I do not think so.
6. He predicts an “Accelerating deterioration of moral standards.” Amen to that. But have not all elders predicted this since the beginning of time?
7. He then predicts an “Accelerating deterioration of intellectual standards.” Little doubt there.
9. He predicts “A changing world economic power composition.” Well, of course the composition of world economic or other powers is always changing. Galtung predicted a “major increase for China and the Soviet Union.” He was obviously right about the former and wrong about the latter. This is a recurring pattern of his predictions; something very general which is almost inevitable, followed by details that are sometimes right, sometimes wrong, and sometimes very wrong. But again, I give him considerable credit for daring to a) make the predictions, and b) publish them decades later so we can see for ourselves how accurate his model was.
13. “The peace movement will continue influencing the discourse.” In his dreams. To this, life-long participant in the US ‘peace movement’ this appears to be pure rosy-glasses illusion since the peace movement I observe has been quite marginalized since the Vietnam War. Yes, if you consider any tiny thing to be influence, once in a great while we accomplish microscopic changes in policy. But mostly, powers that be ignore even multi-million person protests as insignificant irritants even before major mistakes like the US invasion of Iraq on false “intelligence” in 2003. For a non-US example, consider how feeble the “peace community” in Israel has become.
14. Galtung predicts that 1992 will be a “take-off for major movements.” I was there; it was not.

15. “America may give up its image as the leader of the free world.” Well, predictions that have “may” in their structure are impossible to falsify. But what I see is a President Trump and “America First” (again). Neither looks eager to give up our images of leadership in the world.
16. Here, Galtung claims that the Soviet Union “may give up their image as a unique and chosen country.” Well the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, but President Putin of Russia seems keen to restore the prestige of imperial Russia, not to abandon its version of national exceptionalism.
17. “The superpower character of the European Community will be increasingly clear.” Actually, the EC appears to be fragmenting as we watch it in 2017, again to me at least.
18. “Africa south of the Sahara possibly to be recolonized by the EC.” Well possibly, but not visibly to me. China might be colonizing Africa economically, but not the EU or the EC.
19. “War in the Western Pacific over maritime resources is possible.” Again, anything is possible. But I think Galtung is more prescient here, because we are certainly seeing more tensions over the South China Sea and other resource issues.
20. “ASEAN to emerge as a major power with 10 member states.” ASEAN is the Association of South East Asian Nations, which indeed includes 10 states and is fairly important economically. But a “major power?” Not remotely in military terms. It is dwarfed by China, Japan, India and even Pakistan if Pakistan were to get really upset with its >100 nuclear warheads and missiles.
21. “Unification of divided nations will proceed in the 1990’s.” Galtung was right about Germany, but wrong about the Koreas and China (by which he meant reunification of Taiwan with mainland China). Once again, Galtung presents an attractive generalization followed by both accurate and non-accurate detailed predictions.
23. “The UN is in for a major revival as pax americana and pax sovietica are coming to an end, with no pax nipponica or sinica emerging.” The UN appears to me in major decline. Galtung is certainly correct that no pax anything has emerged to replace the UN. But he also ends this section with the amazing sentence “Been solved.” No, the war puzzle has not “been solved.”

30. “The debt crisis will be solved politically not economically.” Well I certainly hope someone solves those crises, both domestically and internationally. But I do not know any economist who believes that either has been solved today in any fundamental way.

32. “More power to academics all over the world.” What a hoot of a prediction! Which world is he observing? Galtung follows this with “A major result of the education revolution all over the world will be the near impossibility of keeping the (near) Ph.D. class out of power.” This prediction also seems to contradict his prediction #7 noted earlier.

35. “Glasnost and perestroika will come to the United States.” I cannot wait, but will not hold my breath on that.

36. “The Soviet Union will experience dynamism as never before.” Well, as noted before, the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991. So that is not happening. But in Galtung’s defense, even the CIA failed to note the deep decay that undermined the Soviet Union while they were building ever-bigger nuclear bombs. Remember, visionaries who dare to predict run exceptional risks – Galtung has accomplished many great things even though his visions are too rosy to me.

37. “Palestine will become independent.” No commentary needed there. Perhaps, someday, we pray. But not in any future I can see through the fogs of uncertainty that bedevil all forecasters. My formal prediction for that area is eventual genocide or more likely, ethnic “cleansing.” I do hope that Galtung is more correct than I am about that.

42. “There will be more KGB and CIA defectors.” Well the last KGB defector I know was assassinated in London (Alexander Litvinenko). The KGB’s successors, Russia’s “FSB” and “SVR,” seem equally brutal. More recent CIA leakers have been put in jail than in the past, and I do not know of any recent CIA “defectors.” So this prediction seems very optimistic to me.

Therefore, I conclude by applauding again the many accomplishments of a true visionary, Johan Galtung, but recommend the book only as one of historic interest on his thinking rather than as a formula for the peaceful world we all desire. (Well, most of us desire that.) One recurring failure of my rosy-eyed peace friends is failing to deal with those who actually love wars, and start them.