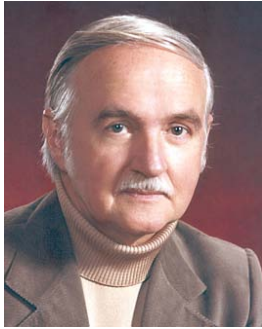


Alastair MacDonald Taylor

(1915–2005)



Alastair Taylor was born in 1915 in Vancouver, British Columbia, the youngest son of Scottish immigrants. In 1930 the family moved to California, where he attended Hollywood High School and then the University of Southern California, from which he graduated *summa cum laude*. The topic of his Master's thesis at U.S.C. was "The Decline of Scottish Monasticism in the Fifteenth Century". At age 22 he began writing *Civilization Past & Present*, with his professor Walter Wallbank. The first world-history textbook in the United States, it has been published in many editions over the decades and is familiar to generations of students. In 1942 he returned to Canada to enlist in the armed forces, but was recruited to the National Film Board in Ottawa, where he worked for John Grierson, making films for the war effort.

Between 1944 and 1952 Alastair worked for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in Washington and then for the U.N. Secretariat in New York. He was the Official Spokesman of the Security Council's United Nations Commission for Indonesia, which oversaw the peace settlement between the Netherlands and its former colony. In this capacity he spent considerable time in Indonesia during 1949 and 1950 and attended the Round Table Conference in The Hague. He received his doctorate from Balliol College, Oxford, in 1955. His dissertation was the basis for his book *Indonesian Independence and the United Nations*. In 1960 he joined the faculty of Queen's University at Kingston, Ontario, where he taught both Political Studies and Geography until 1980.

Alastair's encyclopaedic knowledge impressed all who met him. He could be discussing the prospects for the Toronto Blue Jays or the latest Middle East peace proposals, and switch at the drop of a hat to expound on the

Babylonian legal system or the travels of the fourteenth-century Islamic historiographer Ibn Khaldun, whom he particularly admired.

It was in the early 1960s, during his time at Queen's University, that Alastair developed his theoretically original model of the historical evolution of human societies and their distinctive world-views, with respect to their interactions with their environments. In the following decades he published a number of articles about this model, which he designated TST (Time-Space-Technics).

TST shows the influence of an eclectic range of thinkers in diverse fields, yet fashions a unique perspective. For example, while Alastair occasionally drew on the *general systems theory* of Ludwig von Bertalanffy and company, TST remains distinctive for the emphasis it places on quantitative and qualitative breaks between systems at different levels of complexity, for the respective roles in societal evolution that it assigns to what it calls material and societal technics, and for the importance that it assigns to characteristic world-views in shaping and maintaining these systems in their interactions with their natural environments. In these respects some conceptual affinity may be discerned with *dialectical* and *historical materialism*, though it should be noted that – with the exceptions of V. Gordon Childe and Joseph Needham – Marxist thinkers had little direct influence on TST.

Alastair was an inveterate composer of sonnets, often combining the personal with the political or philosophical. He was also an inveterate optimist, seeing life – both individual human life and the larger story of the world, in which the individual plays an active role – as a grand adventure. He believed that today we stand at a critical juncture: while industrial society has become culturally and environmentally unsustainable, we have the opportunity to replace it with new planetary values and institutions.

Some of Alastair M. Taylor's publications on the evolution of societal systems and world-views

- "Toward a Field Theory of International Relations", *General Semantics Bulletin* 35 (1968): 9–43.
- "Evolution-Revolution, General Systems Theory, and Society", in Rubin Gotesky and Ervin Laszlo (eds.), *Evolution-Revolution* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1971).
- "Integrative Principles in Human Societies", in Henry Margenau (ed.), *Integrative Principles of Modern Thought* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1972).
- "Some Political Implications of the Forrester World System Model", in Ervin Laszlo (ed.), *The World System: Models, Norms, Applications* (New York: George Braziller, 1973).
- "A Systems Approach to the Political Organization of Space", *Social Science Information* 14:5 (1975): 7–40.
- "Process and Structure in Sociocultural Systems", in Erich Jantsch and Conrad H. Waddington (eds.), *Evolution and Consciousness: Human Systems in Transition* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1976).
- "Societal Transformations from Paleolithic to Contemporary Times", *Philosophy Forum* 15 (1977): 323–398.
- "The Historical Evolution of Mankind's Inner and Outer Dimensions", in Ervin Laszlo and Judah Bierman (eds.), *Goals in a Global Community*, vol. 1 (New York: Pergamon Press, 1977).
- "General Systems and Their Value for Academic Research and Teaching", in Nicolas A. Nyiri and Rod Preece (eds.), *Unity in Diversity* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977).
- "Continuity and Discontinuity in Systems", in Nicolas Nyiri and John Redekop (eds.), *Uses and Abuses of Systems Theory* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Interdisciplinary Research Seminar, 1985).
- "Time-Space-Technics: The Evolution of Societal Systems and World-views", *World Futures: The Journal of General Evolution* 54 (1999): 21–102.
- "Ken Wilber's *A Theory of Everything*: Some Societal and Political Implications", *World Futures: The Journal of General Evolution* 57 (2001): 213–237.
- "September 11, 2001: The Clash of Competing Worldviews", in *World Futures: The Journal of General Evolution* 58 (2002): 293–309.