

THE ROLE OF PROPHETS, PREDICTORS, LEADERS AND STRATEGISTS IN DEFINING CONTOURS AND SCENARIOS OF THE FUTURE

People always strived to acquire knowledge of characteristics and “contours” of the future of humanity, nations, associations, groups or individuals. For this end various forms, methods and tools were developed and used. Professions, professional expertise, skills and sciences emerged for people to comprehend the future hidden with invisible chaos of time. Initially intuitive, subconscious perception of the future was mostly used (even now it’s not recommended to ignore these non-scientific feelings when reflecting on future opportunities and threats strategically). Over the last years some serious studies, mostly international ones, have been focused on this subject [1], though these processes were first comprehended in the Soviet school of philosophy and futurology (e.g. in works by I.V. Bestuzhev-Lada [2]). Until the mid-20th century to get contours, scenarios and temporal characteristics of the future in scientific studies it was common to use various methods of analyzing processes in the past and projecting the results to obscure conditions of the future. First of all, those methods included extrapolation and interpretation of the past in schematic concepts of long-term periods and other heuristic methods and approaches to terms of high degree uncertainty of the future.

In the 20-th century, psychological schools of logical-psychological analysis and professional practice researches were established, and thought theories regarding the future emerged. Various functions of professional perspective thinking in processes of predicting, forecasting, long-term planning and – to a lesser degree - strategizing are studied. By the end of the 20th century it was initiated to analyze different behavioral models in field of economic decision making in terms of high degree uncertainty, in processes of forecasting, long-term planning and strategizing using neoclassical economics. It led to establishment of a brand new sphere of economic researches - behavioral economics. Due to its unusual and

unconventional subject, methodology and study findings scientists who were dedicated to that issue struggled a lot for the very idea of such researches to be recognized. For example, a scientist who was the first winner of the Nobel Prize in economics for his researches in that field (awarded in 2002), Daniel Kahneman, told that his first article written together with his main co-author Amos Tversky (who didn't last till awarding of the highest prize) was rejected by the magazine as a "poorly researched" one. The editor considered their paper too shallow for academy publication. As Kahneman says, "Psychologists really aim to be scientists, white-coat stuff, with elaborate statistics, running experiments. The idea that you can ask one question and it makes the point ... well, that wasn't how psychology was done at the time" [3]. Since then three Nobel Prize for researches in field of behavioral economics have been awarded, including Robert John Aumann in 2005 and Richard H. Thaler in 2017. After Daniel Kahneman had turned to researches and understanding of the future, he came to an exceptionally unexpected and productive conclusion: "We think of our future as anticipated memories" [4]. In this regard Kahneman himself concludes what understanding is, and how our vision of the future makes us think about it one more time with particular perception of our future expectations from important decisions.

It makes us conduct a deeper analysis of activities of prophets and seers described in sacred

books – those who strived to shed light on the unknown and thus even more frightening future that seemed so irrational. Besides, it was studies in "predictable irrationality" that Kahneman and Tversky turned to subsequently to work out the prospect theory in high risk terms which was vitally important for theoretical and practical strategizing (including development of strategic thinking bases) [5]. Understanding the future is also connected with conclusions of the cognitive science that allows better comprehending and evaluating of the potential of decisions being made with respect to risks they create and efficiency in the analyzed future. The right decisions based on strategic thinking are undoubtedly enabled by using results of Robert Aumann's studies related to behavior analysis

and reactions of competitors and opponents or partners to interaction or fight in the future. Forecasting and, moreover, strategizing are not a way to describe desired pictures of the future, but a way to find out possible and often quite undesirable scenarios and results in the long-term. And here it is important to evaluate and differentiate scenarios of objective and subjective probabilities where values, interests and priorities of subjects of strategizing may collide or cooperate. Besides, according to Aumann's conclusions, it's those who put their long-term strategic priorities above fast, but short-term success that win in long-term interactions and conflicts [6].

As for seers and predictors, first of all, it should be acknowledged how often they have to face manifestations of irrationality when studying and strategizing the future. Irrational characteristics of future processes sometimes generated by the subconscious and intuition are so often used in predictions and previsions that in some cases they turn into almost serendipitous unlikely reality of the future. Seers and/or prophets, those individuals who could "see" visions of the future, were the first known experts in identifying and understanding the routes that led people to the future, its characteristics and "contours". Foresight and prophecy are ancient categories and concepts. They represent a profession and a set of skills that had manifested themselves long before any records indicating activities of prophets and seers or their previsions appeared in Christian scripts. There are even some artefacts and notes about "professional" diviners and messengers considered mouthpieces of some invisible power or divine being, going back to the time before the Sumerian and Mesopotamian civilizations.

Vision of the future, prevision is a completely established category of scientific studies. Thus, the Russian Sociological Encyclopedia defines **prevision (P)** as "an informational (narrative and cognitive) by its nature aspect of anticipatory reflection in the function of a basic property of ultimate forms of matter. Prevision is divided into scientific and unscientific P., and the latter – into intuitive (connected with the subconscious), ordinary (by country lores based on life experience) and mantic (pseudo-prevision in the form of prophecies, oracles,

“revelations”, divinations, etc.) kinds. P. as an abstract category has several more concrete forms: forefeeling (simple anticipation) typical for any living organism, guessing (complicated anticipation) – a kind of intellectual activity of a person, reflections on the future based on personal experience...” [7]. It would appear reasonable that historically previsions and prophecies appeared not in the result of some special knowledge, but rather due to certain attributes of the subconscious and intuition of the individuals who announced them.

In the history of monotheistic religions it was possibly the most important function of a prophet to be an annunciator, an emissary of the Almighty. Nevertheless, in communities on different social and economic maturity phases, in social environments with different religious and cultural traditions and social preferences prophets performed in a peculiar manner; they were not only taken and accepted as heralds and messengers, but also served as preachers or even leaders from time to time. In hagiographies of Abraham and Moses presented in the Book of Genesis and the Book of Exodus in the Hebrew canon – the Old Testament, and Christian Bibles, as well as in the Quran these prophets appear granted with proactive roles and can be seen as leaders. Moses’ abilities are described as huge: thus, it is stated in the Hebrew canon of Torah, “No prophet has arisen again in Israel like Moses” (Genesis 34:10). Moses starts as an annunciator of the Divine Will and a messenger and arises to an undeniable leader and becomes the greatest strategists from the visionary point of view. His successor Joshua (Joshua Bin Nun or Yehoshua Ben Nun) doesn’t need to be considered a prophet or a seer, but rather the major military strategy leader.

Another outstanding prophet and seer in the biblical history is Samuel (Shmuel). He starts as a prophet and, just like Moses, becomes an outstanding leader and strategists during the War with the Philistines about 1040 B.C. (though the event and its date don’t have enough historical evidence). As per results of studies by J.Hampton Keathley III represented in his article *The Major Prophets* there are some discrepancies in descriptions of prophets and evaluations of their roles and significance between the English Bible published by King James and the

Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible). For example, Keathley highlights that Daniel is usually seen as one of the major prophets in the English Bible, but in the Old Testament he appears in the third part only – the one called Ketuvim (the Writings) [8]. In the Book of Samuel – Sefer Shmuel, the eighth book of the Hebrew canon – some prophets are granted various functions or even strengths. A prophet is someone who watches and understands, and who is also a seer. In another verse Samuel describes a prophet as a “Nabu”, or someone who calls and announces (1 Samuel 9:9).

Sacred texts studied from this point of view let us suppose that in some Christian traditions prophets as seers are acknowledged and described not with their actions (or in a lesser degree with their actions); they are rather called saints than impress with “professionalism” of their vision and announcements of prophecies. At any rate, it can be concluded that, as it’s depicted in sacred scripts, both types of prophets either were used by a higher power in order to make them announce the major events that would (presumably) happen in the future, or had an extra capacity – to see the future and announce it to the audience. In both versions a prophet is a seer and predicator, but not necessarily a leader.

In the majority of cases delivered prophecies were so much outside of the common person’s understanding that prophets as seers were not taken serious by their contemporaries. For example, it happened with Cassandra, a daughter of Priam, the mythical king of Troy, who foretold the fall of Troy, but no one believed her predictions until they turned into the crude reality.

In the Torah the word “Navi” is associated with strong and precise vision of such great leaders as Moses and Samuel, while “Navi’im” also indicates a prophet as a seer, but with no leadership qualities. It is not uncommon in the history of prophecies for a leader/a strategist to present their strategic vision in such a way that it is even considered a prophecy for a short period of time after it is implemented. At the same time it’s fair to stress that even though some strategists can be close to making prophetic predictions in their activities in a few cases, they can’t be considered prophets yet. In history there are recorded cases of various

degrees of credibility when some predictors could (or can) foresee events of distant future (even through centuries), though it can be said with high confidence that they were neither seers nor messengers of the higher reason. These undoubtedly gifted people were, for example, fantastic fiction writers, such as Jules Verne who had foreseen inventing of metal submarines (based on researching a few prognoses and practical, though unsuccessful attempts of creative people); Jonathan Swift who had made a guess about moons of Mars that were discovered later; Aldous Huxley who had described the life of society functioning on the basis of genetic engineering – an unknown science at the time – a few decades before it was introduced; Martin Caidin who had anticipated future in his novel *Cyborg* about a man with bionic prosthetics that were created more than 40 years later.

Several dozens of such examples can be given, but the most famous genius is outstanding *Michel de Nostredame* – Nostradamus (1503-1566). In about 1550 he started to publish his predictions, and in 1555 he collected them in the first edition of his book *Centuries* which since then has been translated and republished multiple times as *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus*. Nostradamus considered his predictions prophecies. In his preface to the first edition of the book he addressed his son Caesar, presenting himself as a prophet: “Such alone as are inspired by the divine power can predict particular events in a spirit of prophecy.” Nonetheless, in the same preface Nostradamus wrote: “Now, my son, although I have inserted the name of prophet here, I will not attribute to myself so sublime a title; he who is called prophet now, once was called seer, and prophets are those properly, my son, that see things remote from the natural knowledge of mankind. Or, to put the case, the prophets, by the means of the perfect light of prophecy, may see divine things, as well as human (which cannot but be seeing the effects of future predictions) and do extend a great distance, for the secrets of God are incomprehensible, and their efficient power is far remote from natural knowledge, taking their origin in the free will, causing those things to appear which otherwise could not be known, neither by human auguries nor by any hidden knowledge or secret virtue under Heaven. Only by the means of some indivisible

eternal being, and by Herculean agitation the causes come to be known by the celestial motion.”

Reading the above text by Nostradamus, it seems possible to conclude that he attributed both powers to himself, as a prophet and a visionary [9]. Though he attributes these powers, he also does not appear sure of whether he is a prophet or a seer, or if he has both capacities. He sometimes conflates and mixes the visionary power of a prophet with the “professional” force of a predictor.

For years I have been impressed with the accuracy of Nostradamus’ predictions of events, their internal relations and interinfluence, closed off from him by centuries of uncertainty and chaos. After fighting my own doubts for a few months, I concluded with reluctance and without any excitement that Nostradamus was a predictor, but not a prophet. I cannot judge all his quatrains, but with his prophetic precision many of his predictions have come true. In particular, one of them was about the Soviet Union.

The overwhelming majority of biblical prophets demonstrate their ability over long periods of time, and make predictions about events much further in the future than the best specialists in field of strategizing and strategic planning and even developers of strategic concepts, not detailed scenarios, are able to. Wisdom and vision of prophets encompass centuries, like visions of prophet Daniel, for example. Sure, for the contemporaries of prophets it’s difficult to confirm and/or refute such abilities: what the prophet announces might come true, when these contemporaries are long gone already.

It’s essential to emphasize that it’s not correct to conclude from things mentioned above that every single leader mentioned in sacred texts was a prophet. The Biblical King David is an excellent example of a man who was not a prophet, but the greatest leader. David didn’t demonstrate his prophetic qualities, but respected seers and surrounded himself with them, including Nathan who announced several prophecies that came true in the Bible. It was Nathan who foreseen Solomon to become David’s successor destined to raise the Temple. From this point of view “professions” of prophets and leaders were already divided in the

biblical history. Prophets were almost always considered people gifted with wisdom, though typically their first descriptive characteristic was them “being not quite normal”.

In Ancient Greek mythology and history the role of a wise person and a diviner were split. Philosophers didn't considered seers seriously as well, and philosophers' contemporaries didn't take them as prophets. At the same time, neither philosophers nor predictors saw leaders as prophets or even diviners (predictors). Although Plato in his dialogue *Republic* argues that philosophers should be leaders in a perfect state, possibly assuming that in this case perfect ideas and theories will be perfectly implemented by real government. Actually, in view of split functions of a leader and a predictor, let alone a seer, stressed above, it's logically possible (as some historians note) that Alexander the Great consulted the oracle at Delphi for better understanding of his mission and future.

For strategists the most important value of prophets as seers is their rule (and often a need) to connect prophecies with a time scale, since a time factor dominates in the strategy (according to my researches) [10]. Such a prophetic correlation of announced future events with time is not typical for philosophers though. Strategy and strategic scenarios are always related and correlated to the time scale. The law of economy of time, as it is proven in my researches, is the first and the most important law of strategy and strategizing processes. Though the Marxian economic theory considers the first economic law to be the law of values, other economic schools prove the first law of economics to be the law of supply and demand. In strategy both these criteria – price and supply-and-demand balance – can be fundamentally changed by time. Professionals who offered strategic advices also existed in the ancient times. In fact, it's an institute of advisors providing long-term recommendations. It is fair to say that the advisors of pharaohs in Ancient Egypt were strategists to a certain extent. The same can be said about the viziers who advised, for example, khans or sultans in the Ottoman Empire and in the Muslim world in general. What we don't know exactly about that time is the balance between myth, early beliefs, psychology connected with abilities to foresee

the future subconsciously and/or instinctively and practically and/or scientifically grounded strategic knowledge.

What is the difference between a prophet and a strategist? In most historical or legendary cases prophets foresee the future of the nation or an individual, be it positive or negative, or even tragic. Prophets do not plan and do not present multiple scenarios based on the analysis of facts and factors predetermining things they foresee. They somehow perceive the future subconsciously, instinctively – and (in cases I’m aware of) without alternatives. Characteristics of this futuristic vision of the future are connected with both a general cultural and scientific level of society, and the seer’s surrounding and their personal knowledge, cultural and moral values and interests. A strategist just by necessity must always have and present multiple scenarios, often alternative ones. If a strategist is absolutely certain in the results of his analysis, it’s possible to present and offer one scenario only, but it’s a rare case which can have far more dangerous consequences than having the main scenario and some alternatives. Even strategic geniuses have more than one scenario after the strategy is developed and planned; and it’s unprofessional to foresee one absolute result only and to rely on it. My researches show that it’s recommended having two or three objectively applied effective scenarios in case new opportunities or threats emerge in the period being strategized [11].

Prophets can’t have alternatives, because they don’t strategize the future, they rather “see” or foresee it as a complete (or mostly complete) “picture”. Let’s say a theoretical strategist or a practitioner admits and accepts this ability of prophets to foresee the future without any strategic development or implementation; then the strategist also has to understand that he/she has no capability to change this period of the future predicted by the prophet, regardless of all strict conclusions about the high probability of other scenarios and contours of this fragment of the future he/she came to using their knowledge, experience and strategic thinking. Actually, in this case a strategist and their long-term strategy is opposed to irrational *fate*, because relying on a prophet, trusting their ability to

foresee, a strategist subconsciously relies on *fate*, and it brings the humankind as an unmoored boat to a predicted end. In previsions and descriptions of the future foretold by a prophet the only response is to be ready to face it. Though even knowing that there are no alternatives in the irrational future instinctively foreseen by a prophet allows meeting it with a prepared scenario of further actions...

I know some unique examples that represent how even the greatest strategists who acknowledged drastic consequences of their concrete long-term decisions sometimes proceeded absurdly considering those decisions “all-seeing” irrational fate neglecting their own knowledge and experience. In this regard it appears acceptable to give such an example, which, I believe, demonstrates how a strategist went beyond a strategy predicting the high probability of incorrectness and unjustified risk of his rather unnecessary actions. Reading Napoleon’s memoirs of his 1812 military campaign in Russia it’s easy to note some passages where he emphasized optionality of that campaign and very high risks and directly noted a lack of any framed plan. Yet Napoleon stressed, “Even if I had had a well-thought plan, disposition of the Russian troops would have inevitably made me step back from it” [12]. It means Napoleon who could foresee inevitable loss of all his Empire to the devastating force just led an army of four thousand soldiers abandoning himself and his troops to absurd *fate*. Here it’s appropriate to remember a passage attributed to an Epichristian theologian and philosopher Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, “Credo quia absurdum est,” where a triumph of the subconscious and the irrational is virtually announced (the accuracy of this translation raises some questions). Yet, despite huge losses and growing criticism of associates Napoleon continued on his disastrous course. That strategic genius had no clear explanation for his action and emphasized multiple times that due to some political and military factors he didn’t have any alternatives. I have thought about Napoleon’s attitude to his own decisions in that company, and I have concluded that while he understood the outcome, he could not change his course. He finished the war with empty and tied hands, lost not only that campaign, but his army and thousands of lives on both sides and changed the course of France for the

worse significantly, though not totally. He was abruptly and severely vanquished at the relatively young age of 43 and at the height of his talent and success as a statesman and a military leader. In his memoirs he made statements about the inevitability of attacking Russia, because he honestly believed he had no other choice. I am convinced, it was fate destined by a prophecy which affected Napoleon's subconscious so much. It's difficult to find another explanation why a person with such a brilliant strategic mind could write that confession despite losing everything he had achieved before.

A prophet and/or a predictor is rarely a leader of any practical decisions and actions. A prophet is first of all a spiritual guide and a part of the soul of his nation, his surrounding and his followers on the way to "seen" or foreseen future. This is why prophets, who combine their abilities of a seer and a messenger of a higher power with leadership skills of a practitioner, are absolutely unique. In the majority of the Christian beliefs and doctrines three separate leadership roles presented in the Old Testament are described: a prophet, a priest and a king. The rarest individuals unite these roles. Biblical Aaron was the first priest, but Moses was a prophet and de facto leader. During the whole "Time of the Judges" before the Saul, the first King of people of Israel from the Old Testament, judges were leaders and priests. Aside from historical facts, even in mythological stories it's difficult to find a prophet who is also a practical leader, except, first of all, Moses and Mohammad (Mahomet). However Moses was never an official or state leader of the Israelites even in biblical stories; he died before the nation settled its territorial borders, according to the Old Testament. Comparing talents of a strategist and a leader it should be emphasized that, first of all, a strategist is a profession going back to historical depths of military activity. However, as it's explained in my studies, people with strong intuition (if they don't ignore it, of course), a deep knowledge and a clear vision of the future can be considered practical or theoretical strategists regardless of their fields of work. Such a unique (in not the only) example of a person gifted with all those qualities at the same time in a varying degree was Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. Few speak about this great philosopher of the stoic

school, emperor and strategic leader seeing him as a seer, though throughout his life and even after he had gone to a better world, there have never been any evidences of serious mistakes in his actions and decisions caused by a contrariety of such a surprising combination of Emperor's various traits. In the history of civilization only a few major philosophers and masterminds who had important roles in leadership of the state or in the government can be singled out. Francis Bacon is undoubtedly one of them, since he was a Lord High Chancellor in the 17th century, which was the highest position in the English Government, who wrote some works lying at the root of empiricism and English materialism, and also left a few profound theological studies behind. But even this giant is inferior to a Roman philosopher and Emperor: Bacon was never a seer unlike Marcus Aurelius.

The process of strategizing trajectories and vectors of movement toward the future separated from today with some years, decades or even centuries gradually acquired its own characteristics, skills and knowledge, and by the mid-20th century a new profession was established. Departments to train professional strategists began to appear in leading universities of the world. At the same time a professional strategist doesn't have to be a person in charge or a leader. If a great professional strategist doesn't have leadership qualities or doesn't develop them by some reasons, even without any interest in managerial work they can get better as a specialist in field of practical strategizing, a consultant and/or a researcher of theory and methodology of the strategy. A professional strategist is a wise, optimistic and disciplined specialist with strategical thinking, some vision of the future and intuition he/she must never just neglect [13]. A strategist has to study and consider the cultural and religious environment of the strategized object and regions where the strategy is implemented. It is clear that a professional strategist should have a strategic methodology, be able to use profound knowledge of the subject to multiple its achievements and to strengthen its reputation; they must have a broad understanding and fast perception of new technological, social, economic and ecological patterns and trends. When interacting with a leader and

helping him/her, a professional strategist can make indispensable contribution to leader's activity in correct evaluation of competitive edges of the subject being strategized, processes of establishing priorities, developing scenarios and plans, forms and methods of implementation on the way to scenarios of the future. In 21st century contours and features of the future, values and priorities the society should aspire to, vectors and rates of this movement can't be defined correctly and efficiently without professionally developed and consistently implemented strategies.

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