



## Battle of the Engineers in the World Tomorrow, Part 1

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**Remember an IEEE-produced book entitled “Engineering Tomorrow,” published in 1999? That got me thinking about what the underlying forces BEHIND the future of electrical and electronics engineering really are, and how they may drive future innovations.**

There was a television show in the 70's that became very popular, though you'd be hard pressed to find even one copy of it intact today. It was *The World Tomorrow*, a religious program that, at that time, featured the charismatic and handsome Garner Ted Armstrong. The program had a following of millions of people worldwide, perhaps largely because of the captivating and mesmerizing delivery of Mr. Armstrong. His style was a dramatic combination of Captain Kirk and Paul Harvey, delivered with an entertaining bit of sarcasm and sense of irony, punctuated by an occasional weighty pronouncement worthy of a Shakespearean actor. So engaging was he that he even appeared on an episode of *Hee Haw*, and, later in his life, on *Oprah Winfrey* (as most great thinkers eventually do). It didn't matter that the church he represented at that time, the Worldwide Church of God, had predicted World War III would begin in 1972, with the “United States of Europe” overthrowing the United States of America. It didn't matter. You'd watch anyway. At least until Garner Ted and his church got into a fight and Garner Ted pretty much disappeared.

What reminded me about that program was a book that came out in 1999 by our old friends at the IEEE. The book was called *Engineering Tomorrow*, and was intended to—well, it was probably intended to make money, but more likely succeeded only in keeping some IEEE staffers busy for awhile. Maybe there were some extra tips for the waitresses at the Fountainbleau Diner in Piscataway, New Jersey, too, with anything left over going to John Wiley & Sons, the co-publisher. Anyway, it was supposed to examine how engineering might change the 21st century, and featured interviews with a bunch of experts to, I imagine, give it credibility. According to the publisher's blurb on the back cover, the idea was to see if technology in the world tomorrow would be “humane and not inane,” and which technologies the experts would “uninvent” if they could. (Probably sounded good at the Fountainbleau after a couple of French Silk pies. If the boss hadn't been there and told them to get it done tout suite, they might have thought better of it later and kept quiet about the whole thing.)

So here we have this book purporting to summon the spirits of the future through the medium of our most highly respected engineering priests. As would be appropriate to such a visionary endeavor, the cover is very futuristic looking, and the title is engaging and thought provoking. But the book disappointingly contains some very anti-climatic conclusions, such as, nuclear power could replace fossil fuel plants in the future, because fossil fuels will be harder to get. Wow, do ya think? Kind of like expecting an intellectual fire and getting some ashy old coals, instead. (Not that I'm against nuclear

power—in fact, I'm looking forward to power derived from Helium3 nuclear fusion.) There's even the chillingly threatening chapter about how we can “separate the Internet's wheat from its chaff,” as if we needed somebody to do that for us, because you know we just can't think so good by ourselves. And the whole thing was packaged inside to look like a textbook, which you KNOW is exciting. So, unlike Garner Ted Armstrong's electric, multi-media delivery of what might be considered fairly unbelievable stuff, we have here a pretty flat delivery of some bland, yawningly believable, warmed-over gruel-like material (kind of like what the Fountainbleau might serve on a very bad day). They both tried to foretell the future, and while one was a spectacular success, for a short while, in spite of being out and out wrong in some fairly big ways (unless the USA actually was overthrown and the headline was buried because Paris Hilton had her behind tattooed again), the other was—well, it was the IEEE.

That got me thinking about what the underlying forces BEHIND the future of electrical and electronics engineering really are, and how they may drive future innovations. I think the underlying forces might be better predictors of the future than mere extrapolations of current research. As you might expect, I see it in terms of a battle between what is noble in the profession, versus what is mercenary. The outcome of that battle could determine our fate, with as much finality as World War III. I'll explore it in the next installment of the Noble Profession.

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