

This is summarized in my published comments on the coincidence and differences between Vladimir Vernadsky's definition of the *Noösphere* and my own approach to the same topical area.

The working-point of relevance here, is the fact that the functional difference between the human species and all lower forms of life, is those cognitive powers which exist as a potential of the individual human mind, by means of which experimentally valid universal physical principles are discovered, and by means of which knowledge of those principles is transmitted within and among societies. Without that distinctive characteristic, the living population of the human species could never have exceeded a total of several or slightly more millions, on this planet, under changing conditions prev-

alent during a period of the recent two millions years. Thus, a competent definition of "culture," signifies the transmission of increases of the human species' "ecological" potential to exist, across cultures, and through successive generations.

As Plato emphasizes in his *Timaeus* dialogue, in his time, several causes for the collapses of cultures were known to him, partly through the work of Egyptian historians of that time: great floods, such as that caused by the cumulative melting of the great Eurasian glaciation, which struck the Mediterranean and Black Sea about 12,000 years ago; tectonic effects such as the great explosion of the Aegean island of Thera; and self-inflicted disasters of mankind. Ultimately, we would expect that progress in science would enable mankind to deal more effectively with so-called natural disasters; in the mean-

Video Ban Would Stop 'LAN Tournaments'

Germany's shocked national reaction to the massacre at a high school in Erfurt on April 26, has included calls by several political leaders—most notably by Helga Zepp-LaRouche of the Civil Rights Movement Solidarity (BüSo)—for a national or international ban on sales of violent "point-and-shoot" video and computer games. Even though a ban seems difficult to enforce, as far as the Internet is concerned, it would still hit another, very important aspect of the big business with these games.

These are the so-called "LAN parties" or tournaments, where up to 2,500 video-game fanatics convene for several days, usually on weekends, to kill each other, virtually, in tournaments. LAN stands for "local access network," comprised of a larger or smaller number of personal computers connected in a local network, which creates the hardware and software configuration needed for these tournaments.

Many of the games offered in these events are first-person shooter games like Counter-Strike, which was habitually played by Robert Steinhäuser, the 19-year-old who killed 17 people, including himself, in the Erfurt High School. A big LAN party was supposed to take place in Erfurt, on May 3, which was only cancelled because the state government proclaimed a day of mourning, which includes a ban on all public entertainment events.

But, without funding, such events will be impossible because of the gigantic logistical efforts necessary to create the LAN network, not to speak of the travel expenses

and prize monies involved. As in golf, tennis, or motor sports, a number of professional LAN "sports" teams—called clans—have been created, who massacre each other (in virtual reality), for up to \$300,000 in prize monies per tournament. Some of the point-and-shoot "super-stars" earn up to \$100,000 a year. Like the gladiators of ancient Rome's circuses, they are popular heroes who are taken from one event to the next one, all expenses paid—including their own website—by some information technology or entertainment-media corporate sponsor.

The LAN parties are designed to create and sustain a milieu of game addicts, who, trying to become "professionals," will spend large amounts of money to buy the equipment needed to mimic the "stars." If the stars have the most up-to-date machines, they will buy them, too; if they have a new kind of "mouse," they will buy it, along with plenty of other paraphernalia, similar to other professional sports. This, in turn, creates a large market for super-fast processors, and this is why chip producers like Advanced Micro Devices (AMD) or Intel are among the chief sponsors for LAN parties.

Some sponsors have become cautious, because of the intensive public debate about the dangers of killer video and computer games. But, negative publicity by itself will not force them to withdraw as event sponsors. As a spokesman for Intel told the German financial weekly *Handelsblatt*: "We are waiting to see how public opinion develops, and what the lawmakers do." A ban on killer video games will put an end to this ghastly spectacle, though. *Handelsblatt* quoted AMD spokesman Jan Götter: "If Counter-Strike is banned, this will be the end of sponsoring."

Unfortunately, however, on May 17, the German Office for the Oversight of Media Harmful to Youth, decided not to ban Counter-Strike, for the time being.

—Alexander Hartmann