

Alternative Paradigms for Planetary Management

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A few weeks ago, my friend Gordon, who has read much of my writing, asked me whether I thought that the United States was the only country that could implement the “minimal-regret” population that I proposed some time ago. I was surprised at his question. The thesis of my book, *Can America Survive?*, was essentially that the US as we know it would not survive the petroleum age, for a number of reasons (e.g., the fact that its population is vastly larger than can be supported by solar energy; its absurd immigration policies, which are balkanizing the country; its open borders, which make it impossible to defend against even the most primitive types of terrorism). In that book (and in later writings) I examined a number of different countries and cultures, and concluded essentially that none of them would end up in charge of the planet (“ruling the world,” to put it crudely).

The approach that I took in *Can America Survive?* was to specify very general conditions that a long-term-survivable system of planetary management must satisfy, and posit a system that satisfied those conditions. Essentially, I required that the probability of extinction, for both mankind and other species, had to be very low. This requirement led immediately to the conclusion that the human population of Earth should be very small. This approach was quite different from virtually all other approaches to estimating the

“right” size of the human population. Invariably, the approach used by others was to attempt to *maximize* the size of the human population, either unconditionally or subject to the condition that the probability of extinction of mankind be less than one. It didn’t really matter how many other species were made extinct, or how great the risk of extinction for mankind was. Under my approach, the size of the human population should be as small as practically possible, so that human activity has very little impact on the planet’s biosphere. The human population should be no larger than required to keep the probability of extinction low. I called such a population a “minimal regret” population, since it attempted to minimize the “regret” that human beings would become extinct (the term “regret” is from statistical decision / utility theory).

I reached the conclusion that a human population of about ten million people was sufficient to thrive indefinitely (and in a rich biosphere similar to that in which mankind evolved). I reached this conclusion essentially because this is the level of population that had existed on Earth for millions of years. In the terminology of optimization methodology, it was a “feasible” solution – it satisfied the constraints, but was not necessarily an “optimum.” In a real-life system, it is not really possible to determine an “optimal” solution. The best that can be done is to determine a solution that is optimal with respect to an idealized representation (mathematical model) of the real system.

A major problem in identifying a long-term-sustainable population is the issue of population control. Without population control, human population (and any other population) quickly explodes. For nonhuman populations, the environment (including other species) keeps the population in check, in a fashion that continues a healthy

and rich biosphere (balance of nature). This approach no longer works for human populations, however, now that technology is “out of the bottle.” My suggestion was to split the human population into two parts: a single-nation high-technology population of five million, and a globally distributed population of five million hunter-gatherers. The role of the high-technology population is to keep global population in check (i.e., at a constant level of ten million or so) by not permitting industrial development anywhere on the planet except in the single high-tech nation. The role of the globally distributed hunter-gatherer population is to reduce the likelihood of human extinction from a local catastrophic event that might destroy a single locally compact population.

In *Can America Survive?* I emphasized the fact that the proposed minimal-regret population was a “feasible” solution. Life on Earth is too complicated to represent in detail by a mathematical model, and I did not make any representation that my proposed solution was “the optimal solution.” It is just one of an infinite number of solutions that satisfies the requirement that the probability of extinction be kept very low for all species, indefinitely. I am convinced, however, that it is not possible for human population to exist for an indefinite period in a rich biosphere (similar to that in which we evolved, with other large species), if it is large in size.

When global fossil fuels deplete (by year 2050 for petroleum, somewhat later for coal), the human population will collapse to about a few hundred million or less (since that is the most that the recurrent “budget” of solar energy will support). As I see it, the only choice is whether human society continues with as high a population as possible (and, it follows, as poor as possible) and a ruined biosphere (loss of many other

species), or whether it continues at a very low level in a Garden-of-Eden biosphere (with high quality of life). The minimal-regret population is an attempt to implement the latter approach.

The point that my friend, Gordon, had forgotten is that my proposed solution was a “feasible” solution – it was not represented as an “optimal” solution. There are infinitely many other feasible solutions that satisfy the requirements that I specified. Some of them may be better in some respects from the one that I proposed, some will be worse. And some of them my present additional detail that should be considered (e.g., changes in structure over time).

Some time ago, I launched The Omega Project, to bring attention to the human population problem, and to enhance the likelihood that a minimal-regret population scheme would be adopted upon the collapse of the industrial world (as fossil fuels exhaust). I then provided additional information on the type of social organization that might implement a minimal-regret population. Two approaches that I discussed were the concepts presented in Plato’s *The Republic* and the synarchy of St. Yves d’Alveydre (which is just a variation of Plato’s concepts / proposals). My rationale in presenting these two approaches to world government (I now generally use the term planetary management) was that they were proposed long ago (Plato about 2,500 years ago, St. Yves in the late 1800s), and have been subjected to detailed scrutiny by many educated people for a very long time. The synarchic movement saw keen interest in the early part of the twentieth century, and has received much renewed interest in recent years, from “New Age” groups.

I anticipated that The Omega Project would prompt discussion of other feasible solutions to long-term-

sustainable planetary management. So far as I am aware, there has been little recent discussion of this topic, other than the occasional references to synarchy in the New Age literature. Examples of alternative minimal-regret populations are listed below. The examples presented below are simply variations on the basic “binary” high-tech / low-tech population structure that I originally suggested in *Can America Survive?*. Note that, in my original discussion of my proposed minimal-regret population, I referred to the high-technology component as a “country,” and in my writings since then I have often referred to it as a “nation.” Also, I initially used the term “world government,” but have recently primarily used the term “planetary management.” The reason for these shifts in terminology is primarily that the original terms are loaded with preconceived notions / meanings, and some of these meanings are quite different from the concepts that I have in mind. If the high-technology population is relatively homogeneous (in race, language, spiritual concepts, culture) and geographically compact, then the term “nation” is reasonable. But if it does not possess all of these characteristics, then the term “nation” is not appropriate, since a nation (at least, one that lasts for a while) is a relatively homogeneous group of people with a cohesive sense of identity and purpose / destiny. The term “country” is appropriate if the high-technology group is compact geographically, but not as appropriate if some members of the group may be located in different parts of the planet. Without specifying the nature of the high-technology population, it is perhaps best referred to simply as a “population,” or “group,” or “organization,” rather than a “country” or “nation.” I tend to think of that group rather as the crew of a ship or the employees of a company or members of a specialized organization (military, governmental, church), rather than as citizens of a country in the usual sense. The reason for this is that members of this

group – a planetary management organization (PMO) – have a very specific and important purpose and mission (control of Earth’s human population and preservation of the biosphere; preservation of its history and technology; spiritual development). In this sense, they differ substantially in nature from citizens of a country, who may have extensive freedom of choice in their lives. The globally distributed hunter-gatherer population is not a nation in any sense of the word. It is comprised of countless tribes or clans, as existed for a long time on Earth prior to the advent of civilization.

For a list of several alternative paradigms for a minimal-regret population, consider the following, which are “variations on the theme” of the general high-tech/low-tech two-population solution presented in *Can America Survive?*.

A high-technology nation (in the modern sense – homogeneous in race, language, spiritual concepts, culture) and a globally distributed hunter-gatherer population, with minimal interaction between the two. Under this concept, the high-technology population simply destroys evidence of industrial development anywhere it occurs on the planet (outside of its own city/state). There is no social interaction between the high-tech population (the “guardians”) and the hunter-gatherer population.

A high-technology nation (in the modern sense) and a globally distributed hunter-gatherer population, with limited social interaction. Under this concept, some members of the high-technology population interact with the hunter-gatherer population, for limited periods of time. The purposes of this interaction are to more closely monitor the activity and spiritual development of the hunter-gatherer populations, and to guide them in their spiritual development.

A high-technology group and a globally distributed hunter-gatherer population, with a higher, but still very limited, level

of social interaction. In this paradigm, the high-tech group is not a nation in the usual sense – it may be heterogeneous with respect to race (but it still has a common language, common spiritual concepts and culture). The representatives of the high-tech group to each tribe or clan speak the local language and are familiar with local culture and customs. They are of the same racial stock as the local clan or tribe. Except for the posting of representatives for limited times in local settings, there is no further interaction. A high-technology group and a globally distributed hunter-gatherer population, with a low level of social interaction. In addition to posting of representatives in local tribes, some members of the high-tech group are permanently placed in the hunter-gatherer population, and some babies are accepted from the hunter-gatherer population to become permanent members of the high-tech group. This social mobility is along the lines discussed by Plato in *The Republic* (social movement among the guardians, auxiliaries, and the rest of the population).

The preceding are but a few examples of structures for the components of a two-population high-tech/low-tech minimal-regret population. The preceding examples describe the racial composition and degree of social interaction between the two groups. They do not address the nature of the organizational structure of the high-tech group, i.e., the nature of the implementation of Plato's or St. Yves' concepts for social organization. Note that the nature of the high-tech group and its form of interaction may vary over time, i.e., the situation could start out as described in the first item of the list, and later, after time for experience and reflection, slowly incorporate aspects of the other items (e.g., conduct geographically localized experiments to assess the advantages and disadvantages of alternative approaches).

The advantages of interaction between the high-tech and primitive groups include the ability to take advantage of spiritual developments that may occur in the primitive groups, and increased distribution of the human genetic pool. Disadvantages include susceptibility to disease and increased vulnerability of the high-tech group to damage or destruction from the primitive component (since the capabilities of the latter will be enhanced, and it will have increased awareness of and knowledge of the nature of the high-tech group). It would appear that a strict ban on social interaction would be the safest route to follow, at least initially (for several human generations, to permit the hunter-gatherer population to stabilize), in order for the likelihood of a treacherous attack on the high-tech group by a renegade member posted to a primitive tribe to be reduced to near-zero. These are simply a few observations on the relative merits of different organizations and structures, to illustrate the type of discussion of planetary management alternatives that could and should take place. The advantage of identifying alternatives and evaluating them with respect to a set of criteria is that, when the time comes to implement a minimal-regret population, the survivors of the industrial world will know the best route to take, taking full advantage of a careful analysis of alternatives. By suggesting consideration of alternative minimal-regret populations, I do not wish to imply that the one that I originally suggested is not a reasonable solution. It is. But it contained little detail and no “dynamic” (over-time) aspects, and it is very possible that other people who consider this problem in greater detail may conceive other candidate (feasible) solutions, or more detailed candidate solutions, that satisfy the basic requirements and merit consideration.

As I noted earlier, there has been discussion of Plato’s and St. Yves’ concepts for a long time, but that discussion has

often been in a rather Utopian setting, where other government alternatives (e.g., monarchy, liberal democracy, republic, parliamentarian, dictatorship, communism, socialism) were clearly satisfactory at the time and preferred at the time (at least by those in control at the time). When it becomes patently clear (following the demise of the industrial world) that these other alternatives are not applicable to sound planetary management at the present time (if extinction is to be avoided), then renewed attention will focus on Plato's "republic" and St. Yves' synarchy (I place "republic" in quotes because Plato's concepts relate to general social organization, not to a "republic" in the modern sense). The time to do this analysis is now, however, while there is some time, and not at the time when the industrial world is disintegrating (which will likely occur with catastrophic rapidity). As I have remarked on several previous occasions, I am a strong believer in the value of systems engineering to develop good solutions to complex problems. This approach includes situation analysis, specification of evaluation criteria, synthesis of alternatives, evaluation of the alternatives with respect to the evaluation criteria, selection of a preferred alternative, and implementation (see my book, *The Value-Added Tax* (posted at <http://www.foundationwebsite.org> for an example of the systems engineering methodology). In the present context (of implementing a synarchic government in a collapsing industrial world), there will not be opportunity for a "field test," although there will eventually be room for "evolutionary operation" (modification of the minimal-regret population or planetary management approach over time) if the initial implementation succeeds. I have focused on Plato's "republic" and St. Yves' synarchy since these social-organization concepts have been around for a very long time, are applicable to the present problem, and have been much discussed. In the absence of thorough investigation of

other alternatives, it is probably better to select a much-discussed alternative that appears to be pretty good, than a totally new and unexamined one that cannot be given careful evaluation over time.

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