

Hubris

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Each morning I check the SynEarth web site, <http://solutions.synearth.net> , to read the interesting articles that Dr. Timothy Wilken, a synergic scientist, posts there. A few days ago (February 3), his feature article was about the Space Shuttle Columbia disaster. It appears that although a piece of insulation was seen falling off the external fuel tank against the left wing of the shuttle shortly after lift-off, no effort was made to inspect the wing to see whether damage had been caused. This could easily have been done at any time in the sixteen days before the shuttle returned to earth. It would not have been easy or without risk, but it was certainly doable. Preliminary reports indicate that the shuttle began to heat up rapidly on the wing that had been struck by the insulation, and it appears therefore that damage to this wing was a direct cause of the catastrophic loss of the spaceship.

On the day that the shuttle was lost, my wife and I watched the television coverage. I did not see as much of the coverage as my wife did, and I asked her what they had seen up close in a space-walk inspection of the shuttle. She told me that she had not seen any mention of a space walk to inspect the damage. I was a little surprised at this, but I now realize why she had not seen discussion of an inspection, since none was done.

Had a space-walk inspection revealed damage (or even if damage was suspected but not visible), a second shuttle could have been dispatched to retrieve the Columbia crew. Yet no effort was made to do this. Quite the contrary, NASA announced that it had “no concerns whatsoever” over the condition of the spacecraft, and that the landing would proceed as planned. The question is: Why? In his discussion of the shuttle incident, Dr. Wilken attributes the failure to conduct a physical inspection of the craft to a collective refusal to admit the possibility of damage, since admitting to this and dealing with this would have caused at least some discomfort and at most a significant inconvenience.

When terrorists flew airplanes into the World Trade Center Twin Towers buildings on September 11, 2001, my wife and I were watching television. We followed the episode from beginning to end. As soon as I saw that a large plane had hit the first tower, I told my wife that the building had to collapse – that the fire was too large and the weight of the building above the fire was too great, for the building to survive. This was obvious to me, a layman (i.e., I am not a civil engineer). Yet the New York Fire Department, aware of the same TV coverage as I was, and professionally trained as firefighters who know all about collapsing buildings, sent hundreds of men into the building and to their deaths. While it is shocking that professionally trained firefighters would have erred so egregiously, the really strange thing is that after the building collapsed, civic leaders at every governmental level above the Fire Department expressed utter surprise that such a thing could have happened and absolved everyone of blame. Total denial, at every level, of responsibility for a catastrophic blunder that was totally caused by human error.

After the first building collapsed and the second one had been hit, I had to go to a nearby store for some computer supplies. At the cash register, the clerk asked me what the situation was. I told him that one building had collapsed, and I expected that the second one would do so before I got back to the house. When I arrived back home a

few minutes later, the television was indeed showing coverage of the recent collapse of the second building.

Following the attack, at every level of government, civic leaders were saying that this attack could not have been anticipated, and that the collapse of the buildings could also not have been anticipated. And to date, no one, so far as I am aware, has stepped forward to say, “No, that is not correct. The terrorist attack was virtually certain to occur, and the buildings were virtually certain to collapse when hit by large airplanes, and this was very apparent, and you are lying.” After terrorists attacked a World Trade Center Building several years ago, and were thwarted (the bomb went off, but the building did not collapse), they proclaimed that they would be back to try again. And they did. How can civic leaders claim that they could not have possibly foreseen the next attack? They were told about it, by the terrorists themselves! And they approve of the nation’s open-borders and mass immigration policies that have made our country impossible to defend from even the smallest of terrorist attacks.

Does Dr. Wilkin’s explanation apply in this case, too? It may, but I have a slightly different explanation. To a large degree, I think that his explanation applies. When it is possible that a very unpleasant situation may occur, most people choose to deny the possibility that it may happen, or at least ignore the possibility. There are many examples of this. A person who smokes cigarettes knows that the odds of contracting lung cancer is increased substantially, but he refuses to accept that he will be the one to get cancer. A person who refuses to wear automobile seat belts or a motorcycle helmet also refuses to consider seriously the chance that he will be the one to die or be injured in an accident. A married man who takes a mistress may lose his wife and children. A person who flies in an airplane may die in an airplane crash. These are discretionary risks, and they are understandable – in the eyes of the beholder, the pleasure is worth the pain or the risk of an early death (at least when viewed from many years away – an example of “discounting in time”). A soldier may know that the odds of his dying in battle are very real, but he may choose to act bravely or even heroically, accepting the risk of death in battle because the alternative (being shot as a deserter) is unacceptable, or even increasing the level of risk in order to play a more exciting and significant role in life. To function well in the face of unavoidable adversity, it is best simply to put it out of one’s mind, perhaps to adopt a fatalistic attitude that, at least in some situations, what will happen will happen and there is not a great deal that can be done about it. But in the case of the space-shuttle disaster, all that was required to avoid disaster was to conduct an unscheduled space walk to inspect the shuttle wing – and those making the decision to do the inspection would not even be at risk!

And how do you explain this type of behavior – refusal to accept reality, and to simply assume that things are otherwise or will work out all right – on the part of nations – very large organizations which should “know better”? In 1941, the possibility that Japan might attack the United States was very real, yet the US military allowed its entire Pacific Fleet to remain concentrated and essentially unguarded at a single location (Pearl Harbor, Hawaii). The Japanese did indeed attack, and the fleet was destroyed. It is even rumored that President Franklin Roosevelt had advance warning of the attack, and chose to ignore it, because he believed that the isolationist US population would not enter the Second World War without great provocation. If this be true, then there is a rational explanation for why the US would risk the destruction of its entire Pacific Fleet. Otherwise, it would appear that the US had assumed the position of an ostrich with its

head in the sand, completely refusing to admit the possibility of an attack from Japan, simply because it did not like that picture.

There are many examples of this phenomenon of denial of the possibility of unpleasant occurrences, and of unexplained failure to take action to avoid the unpleasant situation, or at least reduce the likelihood of its occurrence. A partial explanation is risk and greed. Many wars are started by countries that hope for victory and the spoils of conquest, even though they realize that there is a risk of defeat. Consider, for example, Napoleon, or Germany and Japan in the Second World War. These nations went to war willingly, anticipating victory but certainly aware that they might lose. The risk of defeat was, in their view, worth the possibility of the gains from victory. This was a rational choice.

But why would a nation such as the US deliberately adopt policies that make it impossible to defend the country from even the simplest attack? Why would the US allow millions of immigrants – both legal and illegal, from all cultures – to enter the country? Why would it choose to adopt a policy of open, porous borders? And then, incredibly, why would it claim that an attack by terrorists was totally unanticipated? In my view, Dr. Wilken's explanation does not fully explain these situations. In the case of the shuttle disaster, an unexpected incident (the falling of the insulation) had occurred. No one deliberately caused this to happen. It was a wholly unexpected event. But when it happened, the people in charge of the operation – and there are many – should have reacted quickly and diligently to investigate the incident and to take steps to ensure that it would not lead to problems. They simply chose not to do so (for whatever reason, such as Dr. Wilken's explanation). In the case of the terrorist attacks against the US, however, the US deliberately adopted a suicidal policy of mass immigration from anywhere in the world, even though virtually no other country in the world does such a thing. (If you call up the embassies of most countries – particularly those of countries / cultures that have existed for a long time (e.g., Japan, India, China, Germany), they will laugh in your face if you tell them you wish to immigrate to their countries.) And it cannot be argued that this policy was adopted because it was better for the US – the quality of life has dropped dramatically in the US since the 1950s (the Immigration Act of 1965 is the legislation that allowed mass immigration to the US). Responsible people, such as Senator Sam Ervin of North Carolina, argued strongly that these policies would destroy the US' cultural identity, to no avail. The country is headed down a path to balkanization and disintegration, for no good reason.

America's suicidal immigration and environmental policies will destroy it, but even as it falls, you will hear its leaders exclaim, "Why, we could not have possibly anticipated that we would be destroyed by terrorists." Fifty years ago, a foreigner stood out clearly in our population. His culture, language, religion, and often his race were clear markers of his foreign status. We were, to a large degree, a culturally homogeneous nation (e.g., as Japan) of 150 million people. When Japan declared war on the US, it was a simple matter to round up all Japanese living in the US and place them in internment camps. Now, it is impossible to tell aliens from citizens, and there are millions of foreigners on our soil and working in our businesses and government. The US population is now almost three hundred million, and half of them are from recent immigration. Through its mass-immigration and open-border policies, America has deliberately made itself highly vulnerable to total annihilation by a few hundred suitcase bombs containing nuclear weapons.

In my view, the explanation in such cases is *hubris* – overbearing pride, arrogance, self-confidence – that leads a person or nation to think that it can do anything that it wants and will not have to pay the consequences. And the greatest example of hubris in our era is the view that the industrial nations can continue to pollute the biosphere without end, and not suffer dire consequences. Each year, global industrialization causes the extinction of an estimated 30,000 species, yet the leaders of all of the world’s nations are calling for more industrial production in toto and per capita. They refuse to consider that the end result of continuing to destroy the biosphere is their own extinction, or the relegation of millions of future generations of human beings to life on a ruined planet.

No one wants to hear that world population will soon fall from over six billion to well under one billion, as global fossil fuels exhaust. No one wants to hear that continued industrial production is causing the extinction of tens of thousands of species each year. No one wants to hear that the only way to save the biosphere from the loss of all large animal species is to stop global industrial production now, not in a half-century when the world’s oil supplies run out. No one wants to hear that the current generation of mankind is ruining the environment and ecology for all of the millions of future generations of mankind (and other species as well). No one is willing to make the hard choices that will stop the destruction that has been underway for several decades, and which will soon result in catastrophic destruction of the biosphere. No one, it seems, is willing to cause the loss of life of a single human being to save a butterfly, or a rat, or an orangutan, or a panda, or a whale, or even the countless billions of human beings who might have followed us on this fabulous planet, had we saved it from destruction at our own hands.

Why? Is it the collective denial that Dr. Wilken describes? Is it “discounting in time and space” that Garrett Hardin talks about? Is it a trade-off between greed and risk? Or is it hubris? It is probably all of these. It is very clear that America’s suicidal policies will lead quickly to its demise. And it is very clear that the continued global economic development and industrial production will destroy the biosphere. Yet, despite the growing chorus of people warning of the danger, the collective denial continues.

I will close with a quote from my book, *Can America Survive?*:

In his book, *The Affluent Society*, John Kenneth Galbraith quotes Robert Browning, “Jove strikes the Titans down, not when they set about their mountain-piling but when another rock would crown their work.” In his book, *Proverbs*, John Heywood quotes the English colloquial saying, “Pryde will have a fall; for pryde goeth before and shame commeth after.” Behold how the mighty have fallen.

And from Arnold Toynbee’s *An Historian’s Approach to Religion*:

Self-centeredness is thus a necessity of Life, but this necessity is also a sin. Self-centeredness is an intellectual error, because no living creature is in truth the center of the Universe; and it is also a moral error, because no living creature has a right to act as if it were the center of the Universe. It has no right to treat its fellow-creatures, the Universe, and God or Reality as if they existed simply in order to minister to one self-centered living creature’s demands. To hold this mistaken belief and to act on it is the sin of *hubris* (as it is called in the language of Hellenic psychology); and this *hubris* is the inordinate, criminal, and suicidal

pride which brings Lucifer to his fall (as the tragedy of Life is presented in the Christian myth).