

On Saving the Environment, and the Inevitability of Global War

by

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In reviewing my book, *Can America Survive?*, a British correspondent asked what I proposed to do to "solve" the problem of human overpopulation. He observed that he would not kill a three-year-old human child to save the life of a rat, or even the last rat (i.e., the rat species, or any other species). The implication of his assertion is that (1) at some point, people will have to choose between the lives of human beings and the lives of other species in order to save the planet's environment from destruction; and (2) human beings will never sacrifice one of their own for any other species, even though they may be quite willing to kill other human beings for a wide variety of reasons (anger, rage, humiliation, jealousy, depravity, robbery, drunkenness, pride, excitement, rites, entertainment, overcrowding, religion, war, duty, defense, conquest) -- just not to save nature. In light of this observation, it would appear that the human population problem will not be solved, and the biosphere's biodiversity will in fact be destroyed. The world's political leaders are committed to continued, and even expanded, industrial production, and hence to more destruction of the environment. The world's religious leaders are committed to peace, and hence a continuation of a large human population, and hence to more destruction of the environment. In fact, many religious leaders believe that mankind has a God-given right to subdue and control and use the rest of nature for its own benefit.

Although western (industrialized) society declares that "racism" is no longer acceptable, it is totally committed to the ultimate form of racism -- the view that the human race is superior to all others, and that all of nature is to serve man. In comparing the worth of the life of a child and that of a rat, my British friend used a rather graphic example. The point is that a human being will not kill another human being to save the last whale, panda, rhinoceros, tiger, or whooping crane. And nothing can be saved unless we are prepared to kill for it -- not die for it, but kill for it.

So what is the solution? What is going to happen? What is going to happen is war, on a grand and global scale. Global war appears inevitable because, as mankind destroys the last of the natural environment, the time will come when it is finally accepted that there is not enough room on the planet for a large industrialized human population. A solution to the human overpopulation problem will never occur, however, at the individual level. Individual people do not want abortions. Individual people do not want infanticide. Individual people do not want "family planning" or "population control." The Catholic Church implores its millions of members to eschew birth control. Individual people do not want conservation (of resources, energy, etc.). A few do, certainly, and some will do these things under duress or for greed. Individuals want "the good life," and so too, therefore, do their political leaders. Americans now consume one-quarter of the world's energy. The planet is being destroyed and global warming threatens a quick death for the biosphere, yet virtually no Americans are willing to reduce industrial output to help address this situation. America's leaders are certainly not! The actions of a few individuals to restrict family size and consumption will prove futile (and are in fact inimical to) the goals of all nations to maintain large populations and high levels of industrial activity.

In recent remarks (May 2001), Vice President Dick Cheney recognized (as was emphasized in *Can America Survive?* several years ago) that conservation is not the answer to the energy problem. What is the point of cutting back in energy use by, say ten percent, when the population (of the US and of the world) will grow by that amount in another ten years?

The solution to the human overpopulation problem will occur, not at the individual level, but at the group, or societal level. And the solution will not flow from voluntary or even mandatory restrictions in fertility or individual activity. The solution will rest in war. War has always been the solution to the problem of limited resources, and it will be the solution in the future (when living space is the limited resource). And it will not be little wars, such as the dozens of wars that continue each year all over the planet. The world's population has exploded exponentially, and it will endure an explosive collapse. The pressure on natural resources is intense. Much of the world's forest has been destroyed, and most people can no longer rely on fuelwood for energy. The catch of fish from the sea has peaked. Petroleum and natural gas deposits will soon (by 2050) be exhausted everywhere. The planet is undergoing the sixth mass planetary extinction of species, this one entirely because of mankind's large numbers and industrial activity. China and India are calling for substantial improvements in the quality of life for their massive populations; this will accelerate the exhaustion of fossil fuels and the destruction of the global environment. The human population has "overshot" the capacity of the planet to sustain it and the rest of nature, and biospheric collapse is imminent. The planet's environment and diversity will be destroyed unless human population and industrial activity are reduced dramatically and immediately.

Although the major organized religions condemn killing by individuals ("murder"), they justify and sanctify killing by the state, either of individuals or en masse, i.e., war. War is justified as defending or promoting the lives or condition of a country's citizens. War is a matter of *human* life and death; it is never waged to save other species from extinction. Global war will not be waged to "save the environment." Global war will be waged because the human race has "run out of environment."

The world political and economic system is committed to world peace and increased industrial production. The United Nations and World Bank press for increased economic / industrial activity. When small wars break out, the UN and other political / economic coalitions move quickly to suppress them. The result of this approach is that, when the global industrial system finally collapses under the strain (mass population, mass industrialization), it will collapse catastrophically. Every year that passes without a global war means that when it finally occurs, it will be even more massive in size and more nearly complete in its destruction.

The destruction of the planet's environment and biodiversity may coincidentally be halted by global war, but saving biodiversity or the environment will not be the cause of global war. Less and less of nature remains with each passing year of the current "global peace" of global industrialization. The longer global war is delayed, the less of nature (species, biodiversity) will remain after its occurrence. The large human population has been made possible because of access to fossil fuel. The planet can support only a small fraction of its current human population on recurrent solar energy (which includes hydroelectric, biomass, and wind power). Global petroleum and natural gas deposits will not be exhausted until about 2050 (and coal somewhat later), so the world's current fossil-fuel-driven economy can hypothetically continue for some time to come. If industrialized human society continues to destroy other species at the current rate (estimated 30,000 per year) until fossil fuels are exhausted, little will remain of the planet's natural environment as we know it.

Mankind is hurtling toward disaster -- the biosphere's and its own -- and there is nothing that will be done to stop it. Industrial development has sewn the seeds of its own destruction. The situation is out of control. The human population explosion has already occurred, and the resultant destruction -- first of the environment and then of industrial society and then, perhaps, of the human race itself -- is at hand. Mankind has chosen its destiny, and is well along the path to its realization.

So what is the individual to do? If the end -- complete destruction of the environment and collapse of mass industrial civilization -- is inevitable, what should the individual do? The answer to this question is the same as it always has been. He should lead, to the best of his ability, a rich, full life at the personal level. Discovery, recreation, work, family, friends, social relationships. Have all the children you wish. The population / environment problem will be solved by war, not by abortion or birth control or conservation. Lead, to the best of your ability, a life that is moral and interesting at the personal level. The world has a destiny that is little affected by individual lives.

Summary / notes.

1. It is commonsense that any species will promote itself over other species, so that killing of one species by (individuals of) another is "morally" acceptable.
2. In a low-population world, human beings are not faced with the moral dilemma that human beings must be killed in order to preserve the environment (other species).
3. In an overpopulated world, however, killing of other species leads to their extinction, to severe damage to the biosphere (current balance of nature), and ultimately, to the early extinction of our own species. (In the long run, since the solar system will last only five billion years more, extinction is inevitable for all species. In fact, natural planetary mass species extinctions occur every hundred million years or so. What we are talking about here is "extinction before our time.")
4. To stop the current anthropogenic (mankind-caused) mass extinction (30,000 species made extinct each year by large human numbers and industrial activity), an immediate and large reduction in human population (and industrial activity) is necessary.
5. Wars are not waged to save or defend other species, but only to protect or promote the immediate welfare of currently alive human beings (human society will not even sacrifice for a future generation!). The destruction of nature will continue as long as large human population and industrial activity continue, i.e., until (barring some natural catastrophe) the occurrence of global war. Action at the individual level (e.g., voluntary conservation, birth control) will not save the environment, in the face of globalization (large human numbers and industrial activity).
6. Global war is likely, since human population is exploding and the environment cannot support the current large human population. The likelihood of global war continues to increase as the global human population increases.
7. The time of occurrence of global war will determine what remains of nature (biodiversity, environment) following the industrialization / globalization of the planet. At present, the world is driven by economics, which will continue to press for more industrial activity, and hence more destruction of nature. If global industrial activity continues until fossil fuels deplete, the world will likely lose all of its large animals and much of its biodiversity. The sooner global war occurs, the more likely large animals and the present level of biodiversity are to survive. The longer world peace continues, the less of nature will survive when global war eventually occurs.
8. There is little that the individual can do to solve the population problem. Lead a meaningful life at the individual level.

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