

On Marxism, Synarchy, Plato's Republic, and The Omega Project

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The Special Christmas Issue of *The Economist* (December 21, 2002) contains an article entitled, "Marx after Communism" (pp. 17-19). It observes the rather surprising fact that although communism as implemented during the twentieth century dramatically failed to deliver on its promises (equality, freedom from exploitation, true justice), interest in Marx's philosophy continues strong. In a 1999 BBC poll, Marx was selected as the greatest thinker of the millennium, ahead of Einstein, Newton, and Darwin. Books on Marx continue to sell well, with new ones being written. The article notes that a search of Internet booksellers reveals that titles in print about Marx are outnumbered by five or ten to one by books on Adam Smith (advocate of liberal capitalism).

The BBC poll author wrote, "Although dictatorships throughout the twentieth century have distorted Marx's original ideas, his work as a philosopher, social scientist, historian and revolutionary is respected by academics today." The article goes on to note that significant economists, political philosophers and historians argue that Marx was misunderstood, and was right about far more than he is given credit for.

Given the dramatic failures of applied communism in the twentieth century, *The Economist* asks what can be of value in Marx's writings. This article summarizes the observations of "Marx after Communism," and compares the world-government views of Marxism to the planetary-management view presented in The Omega Project (i.e., a synarchic or Platonic-republic implementation of a minimal-regret global population of ten million people).

It should be noted that the terms "Marxism," "Marxist," or "Marxist-Leninist" are not particularly well defined. Marx himself was difficult to understand, and changed his opinions and definitions of terms over time. As noted in *The Economist* article, substantial portions of his work were edited, co-written or ghost written by Friedrich Engels. And Marx's philosophy has been added to by countless others, with the recent body of Marxist philosophy referred to as "late Marxist." This article shall compare the philosophy underlying The Omega Project to the core concepts of Marxism, as defined in the cited article in *The Economist*.

The Economist article summarizes four principal tenets of Marx's political-economic philosophy. "First, Marx believed that societies follow laws of motion simple and all-encompassing enough to make long-range prediction fruitful. Second, he believed that these laws are exclusively economic in character: what shapes society, the *only* thing that shapes society, is the "material forces of production." Third, he believed that these laws must invariably express themselves, until the end of history, as a bitter struggle of class against class. Fourth, he believed that at the end of history, classes and the state (whose sole purpose is to represent the interests of the ruling class) must dissolve to yield a heaven on earth."

It is explained that Soviet-style communism failed because it attempted to move directly from feudalism to socialism, without first passing through the capitalism phase. Marx's

thesis was that society would move successively from feudalism to capitalism to socialism after the maximum productive potential of each previous phase had been realized. But Russia attempted to move directly from feudalism to socialism, and such an endeavor was doomed to fail.

Marx, as many others of the nineteenth century, observed the growing economic globalization of the planet, a trend that continues at an ever increasing pace today. He saw that giant corporations would come to dominate the world, and he emphasized the importance of economic cycles. Marx recognized the tremendous productive potential of capitalism, and he argued that it would be the massive productivity of capitalism that would cause its end as a socioeconomic system by making socialism, followed by communism, both materially necessary and logically possible. Marx believed that capitalism would be transformed into socialism by means of class warfare.

Marx's concept that economic structure determines everything in human society, including morality, ethics, and the right to private property, is widely accepted today.

Because of the striking failures of Marxist-inspired communist regimes in the twentieth century, many argue that both Marxism and communism are thoroughly discredited, or "dead." But proponents of Marxism and communism point out that the implementations to date were fatally flawed and hence doomed (since they attempted to skip the material development of the world that is made possible by capitalism), and that the full process described by Marx (feudalism – capitalism – socialism – heaven on earth) has not yet occurred (since the world is just now in the process of full-scale economic/industrial globalization).

Given this very abbreviated description of Marxism, some comments will now be made comparing Marx's theory to that associated with The Omega Project. To do so, it is helpful to present a summary of the theory underlying and leading up to The Omega Project. A brief summary follows:

1. Large human numbers and industrial production are destroying large numbers of species each year (estimated 30,000 made extinct each year, of the planet's estimated 10-15 million total).
2. When world oil supplies exhaust (estimated to occur by 2050), world human population will decline to the order of a few hundred million people or less, since that is all that can be supported on the planet's recurrent solar energy budget.
3. There several alternatives for future world population after world fossil fuels exhaust: (1) a destroyed biosphere, and extinction of mankind; (2) a global human population of a few hundred million and no other large animals; (3) a global human population of a few million people, and a biosphere similar to that prior to massive industrialization.
4. With a global human population on the order of a few million, the biological diversity of the planet, and human existence, can continue indefinitely (i.e., until the occurrence of a cataclysmic natural planetary event or the death of the solar system).
5. An example of a human population that preserves the biosphere and has a low probability of human extinction is the "minimal-regret" population consisting of a single nation of five million technologically advanced people and a globally distributed population of five million hunter-gatherers. (For readers unfamiliar with my earlier writings, the role of the technologically advanced group is to

maintain global human population at low levels. The role of the globally distributed hunter-gatherer population is to reduce the likelihood of human extinction from a local disaster that might destroy the technologically advanced group.)

6. An example of social structure for the minimal-regret population is a synarchic, or Platonic-republic planetary management organization.
7. The thesis of The Omega Project is that global industrialization will collapse, catastrophically (e.g., via nuclear war, plague, famine). At that time, it is planned that the survivors, having observed the total infeasibility of large human numbers and global industrialization, will implement a synarchic/Platonic planetary management organization. The purpose and objective of The Omega Project is to create an enabling environment so that this happens.
8. It is observed that if large human numbers and industrial activity continue for much longer (i.e., a few more decades), then there may be nothing left to save – at best, no other large animal species; or worse, the extinction of mankind; or worst, a biological death of the planet. For this reason, transiting to a minimal-regret population is preferable sooner rather than later.

There are some similarities and some differences between the theories of Marx and those underlying The Omega Project. These similarities and differences will be described for each of the four principal aspects of Marx's theories.

1. Societies follow laws of motion simple and all-encompassing enough to make long-range prediction fruitful. In a general sense, it is clear that the complexity of planetary life and organization increases over time. For all life forms, the dominant factor governing social behavior is the will to survive. For all non-human life forms, the basic desires/needs (survival, food, shelter, reproduction) are very short-term, and the ability to reason so limited, that it seems that long-term prediction is basically limited to Darwinian evolution, not to specific social outcomes. For human life, however, there are a number of other important factors governing behavior, including the desires to understand, to explore, to build, to conquer and to acquire. Human beings create goals for themselves, and have strong powers of logic and reason to enable their accomplishment. Given these inclinations and abilities, and the human characteristic of "discounting in time and space" (i.e., giving little value to other human beings that are far distant in space or time) it is rather obvious that mankind will attempt to utilize all fossil fuels, down to the last drop of oil, as rapidly as possible, with little regard for the long-term consequences either to the biosphere or environment in general, or even to later generations of human beings. It seems apparent that mankind will develop technology and utilize energy and develop material possessions to the maximal extent possible. Mankind was created to create, to build, to invent, to conquer, to explore, and to fight. Given these strong motivating factors, and given that mankind is a goal-setting and goal-seeking animal, it seems reasonable to posit that long-range predictions can be made about its development. With the knowledge of possible and likely paths and outcomes of social and economic development, goals may be set with respect to those paths and outcomes, thereby affecting their accomplishment. In conclusion, it would appear that long-range prediction of human social and economic behavior and activity and outcomes is possible, and, that, having an idea about what futures are possible or likely, making predictions would therefore be very fruitful. Since man has the ability to control or influence future events, it

follows that attempting to control or influence the future would also be very fruitful. As observed in *The Economist* article, Marx's predictive abilities were evidently very limited – time has shown that his record for predicting the path of social development is dismally poor. Although “laws of motion” may exist for societies, Marx's predictions about the path of social development did not happen, either as a general trend, or in particular cases. Society did not follow the path of feudalism – capitalism – communism – socialism – heaven-on-earth that Marx predicted, either overall or in particular instances. By the end of the nineteenth century, conditions for workers were already improving under capitalism, contrary to Marx's predictions. Russia and other countries attempted to go directly from feudalism to communism / socialism, and failed miserably and spectacularly in the attempt. So, although human society may follow predictable “laws of motion,” Marx was not successful in stating those “laws” correctly, and his prediction record was poor. In addition to predicting the feudalism – capitalism – communism – socialism – heaven-on-earth path, Marx was also very much an advocate for it. His current followers may assert that this path will still be followed in the large, or in some instances, but it is clear that there is nothing “cast in concrete” about the necessity or the desirability of this path.

2. These laws (governing long-range behavior) are exclusively economic in character: what shapes society, the *only* thing that shapes society, is the “material forces of production.” In an economic system, it appears rather clear that this premise is true. In an economic system, every other aspect of human behavior, including morality, is governed by economics. The goal to increase material production becomes all-important and all-consuming. Every action is governed by its potential effect on production. The gross national product (GNP) and GNP per capita become the most important measures of national status, and personal income and wealth become the most important measures of individual status. Even though continuing to ship oil via tankers will certainly mean more oil spills and more destruction of the environment, this will absolutely continue, because it makes money. No world leader is calling for a reduction in production or in population, although this is necessary to prevent further damage to the environment / biosphere and continuing mass extinction of species. Countries in which the birth rate falls below replacement level immediately and invariably call for more children. Failing this, they call for immigration from other nations having “surplus” population, even though this will ultimately mean the death of their own culture. A major factor behind the singularity of importance of economics in human society is the fact that the survival of a nation in a community of nations depends crucially on its economic status. In a finite-resource world, as long as there is more than a single nation (clan, tribe, etc.) on earth, they will all strive to produce to assure that they are not conquered by another nation. What is *not* true, however, is that human society must be run by economics. Economics comes to the fore when resources become limited relative to human population size, i.e., when population grows to the point at which the resources needed for survival or desired development are no longer free. Economics provides methodology for enhancing production in the face of resource constraints. Economics is not a significant factor in hunter-gatherer societies, where survival is dependent mainly on the whims of nature. In the minimal-regret population mentioned earlier (single high-technology nation plus hunter-gatherer population, both of sizes that are very small relative to the planet's size), there are essentially no resource constraints, and hence no significant economic decisions to be made, and there is no need for and no place for economics as the basic

philosophy governing the social system. In conclusion / summary, Marx's assertion that economics governs all aspects of human social activity is true in the multi-nation, overpopulated world to which he was relating (and in the world of today). This assertion is not true, however, in a world consisting of a single small nation plus hunter-gatherer population, operated by a rational planetary management organization. Mathematician John Maynard Keynes observed (in his 1930 essay, "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren") the fatal limitations of economics as a long-term basis for human society: "Some day we may return to some of the most sure and certain principles of religion and traditional virtue – that avarice is a vice, that the extraction of usury is a misdemeanor, and the love of money is detestable. But beware! The time for all this is not yet. For at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to every one that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not. Avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little while longer." Economics as a basis for society is a powerful system for exploiting natural resources and producing material goods. But it is an amoral system that, when let loose and applied in the large scale, grows without limit, destroying nature and planets – and, ultimately, itself. In an economic system (i.e., a society run on economic principles), economics will indeed control all aspects of society, including morality, ethics, literature, and the rest of the humanities and social sciences. It will determine the evolution of society, and, because "more is never enough," lead society to the path of total destruction. To promote the survival of the biosphere and mankind, mankind must stop using economics as the basis for running its society. Only then will it stop the destruction of the planet, avoid its own destruction, and allow for social and spiritual development that is not dictated by economic considerations. (Note: In describing the minimal-regret population of ten million people, the high-technology population of five million has been referred to as a "nation." This is perhaps not the best term. The term "nation" is best used to distinguish one large group of people (having a particular racial, linguistic, religious and cultural composition / identity) to another large group. The word "organization" may better describe the high-technology part of the minimal-regret population. The hunter-gatherer population will consist of many races, languages, and other attributes, but subgroups of the hunter-gatherer population would be considered at most to be clans or tribes, not nations in the usual sense of the word. The word "nation" has been used to distinguish the high-technology population from the hunter-gatherer population, but other terms also come to mind, such as "city-state.")

3. These laws must invariably express themselves, until the end of history, as a bitter struggle of class against class. *The Economist* article observes that in the modern world, "class as an idea which has become blurred to the point of meaninglessness." In the nineteenth-century concept of class, it appears that Marx may have been wrong on this point (since the "class" concept to which Marx referred appears to be fading away). Since history is not yet over, however, it is not possible to conclude this with much certainty. If the concept of class is made broader, to include opposing groups such as the haves vs. the have-nots, or the globalists vs. the anti-globalists, or the East vs. the West, or the materialists vs. the non-materialists, or the environmentalists vs. the non-environmentalists, or atheists vs. theists, or secular vs. religious, or the synarchists vs. non-synarchists, then his point may be well taken. At some point in time, it will be very clear that economics (as a system for operating society) has destroyed the natural world and the large-scale industrial civilization that it

spawned, and that it is not a viable long-term system for managing a planet, once technology is “out of the bottle.” At that point, when those who wish to adopt an alternative, long-term-sustainable system (such as a synarchic/Platonic minimal-regret population of ten million), there will indeed be conflict – bitter, life-and-death struggle for the control of the planet and its future. If “class struggle” is viewed in this broader framework, Marx may be considered to be correct on this third point.

4. At the end of history, classes and the state (whose sole purpose is to represent the interests of the ruling class) must dissolve to yield a heaven on earth. In my view, there is no point to “heaven on earth,” in a comprehensive sense. The term “heaven on earth” is, in general, an oxymoron. The purpose of earth is to enable an interesting existence subject to physical laws. Earth was created for its own purposes, and they differ from those of heaven. If God had wanted a “heaven on earth,” He would have simply created it so (or not bothered to create it at all). Life on earth – on the material plane of existence – is significant and meaningful only because there are limitations and constraints and difficulties and problems and challenges and conflict. If and when all challenges and conflict are gone, there would no longer be any point to earthly existence. The Garden of Eden – heaven on earth – existed only so long as Man did not possess the knowledge of good and evil. The Garden of Eden – heaven on earth – was useful only as a prelude – a setting of the stage, so to speak – to human existence in a resource-limited world containing both good and evil. There is no more point to returning to a “heaven on earth” than there is in reversing evolution and turning human beings into amebas. The next “heaven on earth,” if interpreted as a world of no strife or sin or conflict, will be dead world, devoid of human life. So, if Marx conceived a world of human beings living together in peace and harmony, with no challenges, he is surely wrong. Human beings create challenges, when none exist. And no challenge is as exciting as life-and-death conflict. A story with no plot is no story at all. In that sense, when history (the “story” of Man) has ended, there will indeed be heaven on earth. In this sense, he is surely correct.

In summary, there is no fundamental conflict between some of Marx’s core concepts about the evolution of human society and the theory associated with The Omega Project; moreover, there is much general agreement. There are also, however, some strong differences. On the key point that capitalism will eventually destroy itself (and perhaps the entire biosphere in the process), there is complete agreement. On the issue of class war, which was also a core concept of Marx, there is agreement that the transition from capitalism (i.e., a high-population industrialized world) to the next system of government will very likely involve conflict (plague, famine, and war as the industrial world collapses when fossil fuels exhaust), albeit perhaps not a “class war” as envisioned by Marx. Marx envisioned that capitalism would be replaced by communism and then socialism. On that point, The Omega Project and Marxism are quite at odds. A synarchic or Platonic-republic form of government is not communism and it is not socialism. It is synarchy or Platonic society.

Marx conceived that socialism would be followed by “heaven on earth,” where he was referring to a world of equality, freedom, and justice. The objective of The Omega Project is to establish a world in which the biosphere is essentially the Garden-of-Eden paradise in which the human species evolved. In the restricted sense of returning the biosphere to its status of a few hundred years ago (once again flourishing, with only the species loss of a hundred years of global industrialization), the Omega Project is

oriented toward reestablishing “heaven on earth.” But it will still be Earth, not Heaven, and it will still contain challenges and conflict. The war against economics, which has jeopardized the planet and brought it to the brink of extinction, will continue.

The things that Marx deplored about capitalism were inequality, exploitation and alienation, and he believed that world society would evolve to a state in which equality, freedom from exploitation, and true justice would prevail. Marx was not concerned with the destruction of the biosphere and extinction of human and other species. The Omega Project conceives a world that is long-term-sustainable, in which the human species can continue to exist for a very long time in the Garden-of-Eden biosphere in which it evolved. The Omega Project is concerned primarily with long-term survival (of mankind and the biosphere), rather than with equality, exploitation of the worker, and “true justice.” The evils that Marx saw and fought were the evils produced by a world system founded on economics. The Omega Project directs its efforts toward a system of planetary management that does not involve economics – and hence does not create the evils that so bothered Marx. It is a system of planetary management similar to running a ship (in this case, Spaceship Earth). An economics-based system is used for a laissez-faire world of many nations and uncontrolled exploitation of nature. It was a phase of Earth’s development that was an exciting, swashbuckling adventure, but it is soon to be finished.

Marx did not tell how to implement the social development process that he predicted and advocated. As noted in *The Economist* article, Marxism is “not a program for government; it is a program for gaining power, or rather for watching knowledgeably as power fell into one’s hands.” Marx provided no insight into details of how to implement communism or socialism or heaven-on-earth. He did not even define exactly what he meant by some of these terms (e.g., heaven on earth). He simply asserted (predicted and advocated) a particular developmental path, described in rather vague, loosely defined terms. He lectured strong on the evils of capitalism, without recognizing or admitting that many significant evils exist under communism and socialism. As noted, he was very wrong in asserting that social development would follow the path feudalism – capitalism – communism – socialism – heaven-on-earth, and he was very wrong in advocating that it should do so. The world does not have to follow this path, and it absolutely should not follow this path if it is to avoid extinction of mankind. Following this path does not help address the fundamental and crucial problem facing the world at the present time – the mass extinction of species, the destruction of the biosphere, and the extinction of mankind. Marx was obsessed with the perceived evil of private ownership of property – the inequity associated with the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few individuals. He viewed this as the fundamental evil in capitalism, and he was looking for an alternative system that avoided it. He fixed on communism and socialism. Unfortunately, simply changing the form of ownership of the means of production does nothing at all to stop the biospheric destruction caused by large human populations and industrial production. And it is clear that Marx intended for industrial production to continue full steam ahead under socialism just as under capitalism. The solution to the planet’s mass extinction problem is not to be found capitalism, or in socialism, or in communism, or in democracy, or in any other of the traditional forms of government, as long as large human numbers and industrial production continue. It is to be found in a new form of government (planetary management, spaceship management), such as synarchy or a Platonic republic, with a low human population.

Socialism operating in an economics-based system is every bit as destructive to the environment and biosphere as capitalism. Marx assumed that the productive capacity of capitalism would carry over into socialism, and provide material benefits for all people. But what he did not perceive is that the biosphere will be just as destroyed under socialism as under capitalism, if it supports the same number of people and produces the same level of material lifestyle. In fact, the destruction to the biosphere would eventually be worse under socialism than under capitalism, since it attempts to provide a high level of living for everyone, no matter how many their numbers. Changing the form of ownership of the means of production does not solve the problem of destruction of the biosphere and extinction of mankind. Without a drastic reduction in human population and industrial production, Marx's "heaven on earth" will be an earth extinct of mankind. Marx was aware of the tremendous productive capacity of capitalism, but he was evidently unable to see, to predict, that it would quickly devour the planet and destroy the biosphere. He did not see that the final step of his development path – heaven on earth – was a planet extinct of many species, including man. (It is hard to believe that Marx anticipated the destruction of the planet by large human population and industrial production, and that his "heaven on earth" was a planet devoid of (physical) man. On the other hand, Marx was surely aware of Malthus.)

The Omega Project intends to take a different social-evolution path from the one first predicted and later advocated by Marx. That path is from capitalism to something quite different from capitalism (or socialism, or any of the other traditional forms of government) – synarchy or a Platonic republic, with a low human population. The evolutionary path of society predicted and then advocated by Marx is feudalism – capitalism – communism – socialism – heaven-on-earth. The evolution proposed by The Omega Project is feudalism – capitalism – synarchy (or Platonic republic), with the synarchic society living in a Garden-of-Eden biosphere in which mankind evolved.

A key issue that Marx did not address is: what is the purpose of the heaven-on-earth phase of human social evolution. The goal of The Omega Project is to establish a long-term-sustainable planet. With all of the resulting time on mankind's hands, it is reasonable to ask, what is the point (for mankind) to long-term-survival of mankind and Earth. As I have remarked earlier, that new phase of social evolution will provide man with the time and conditions under which to further his spiritual development (sorely lacking at the present time). Synarchic government of a small human population will provide the time and conditions under which this will occur.

The Economist article concludes with the observation, "Antiglobalization has been aptly described as a secular religion. So is Marxism: a creed complete with prophet, sacred texts, and the promise of a heaven shrouded in mystery. Marx was not a scientist, as he claimed. He founded a faith. The economic and political systems he inspired are dead or dying. But his religion is a broad church, and lives on." What *The Economist* failed to add was that the god of this religion is economics, and that this god is destroying the biosphere and mankind. It is responsible for the mass species extinction, and for the billions of people living in dire poverty and misery. The god, "Econom," is never satisfied. No amount of production is sufficient. The planet's biosphere will not return to good health until this god is destroyed, and economics is no longer the basis for planetary management.

Economics is defined as: "The social science that deals with the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services and with the theory and management of

economies or economic systems.” Even this definition is misleading. It has been said that “social science” is “non science” (pronounced “nonsense” by some). There are certainly scientific aspects to economics (e.g., econometrics, a branch of statistics; optimization), but the salient aspect of economics today is that it is the philosophical and operational basis for planetary management on Earth. And this basis is truly a religious one. There is blind faith in economics, that it will cure the planet's ills. How ironic, when it is the primary source of those ills – as has been remarked, tell a big enough lie, and people will believe it! As Marx observed, economics is controlling all aspects of human society. Anything that is economically inefficient is bad; all that matters is increased production, both in absolute and per-capita terms. Anything outside of economics is dismissed as an “externality.” It holds out the promise of salvation for mankind, yet it is inexorably driving the planet's biosphere and mankind to complete annihilation.

In summary, Marxism provides some insight into the evolution of society, but the social system or social evolutionary path that it promotes leads to the destruction of the Earth's biosphere. As *The Economist* observes, in spite of its very evident inadequacies, Marxism is alive and well today as a religion. Its precepts will not solve the cataclysmic mass-species-extinction problem that the Earth is currently facing – it is in fact the principal cause of those problems. At best, as a philosophy for understanding some aspects of social evolution, Marxism is irrelevant to the catastrophic problem facing Earth (mankind and the rest of the biosphere); at worst, as a religion or advocacy program for more industrial production (first under capitalism and then under socialism), it will lead surely to the extinction of countless more species and a ruined biosphere, and if carried on for a sufficiently long time (several more decades), to the extinction of mankind. Synarchic or Platonic government of a small global population (on the order of ten million) will solve the species-extinction problem facing Earth. Marxism (capitalism / communism / socialism, or any other system based on economics) will not.

As noted earlier, mathematician (/ economist) John Maynard Keynes pointed out the fatal limitations of economics as a long-term basis for human society. In 1930, he predicted that it would not last another hundred years. Others who have examined the situation reach the same conclusion (see, e.g., <http://www.dieoff.com> or <http://solutions.synearth.net/2003/01/13> (“The Fossil Fuel Depletion Crisis”)). If nothing is done to change things, the industrial age will end (in a few decades) with a ruined biosphere, and the extinction of many species, perhaps including man. With positive action, this sorry end can be avoided. Under a Platonic / synarchic government, a world containing a population of a minimal-regret population of ten million people can last for a very long time, in a Garden-of-Eden biosphere. The time for action is now – tomorrow (i.e., a few decades from now) will be too late.