

The Challenging Future of Civilization and the Human Species

Three Major Zones Requiring Attention

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We are bombarded regularly about the daunting and very expensive challenges of adequately addressing any one of the major global challenges that confront us as humans living in our complex societies in our developed civilized state: energy, food, water, air, climate change/global warming, disease/epidemics, and essential mineral resources to support manufacturing and building, etc. For any one of these matters the numbers are always many trillions of dollars that must be committed over the next generation [30 years] if we are to stave off dire shortages and/or devastating health or environmental consequences. It would take a Marshall Plan at worldwide scale to address each of these challenges, with the cost for the combination totaling nearly the entire GNP of the world.

On several of these challenge fronts the world human community is rapidly heading for collapse. And we are not just talking depression; we are talking the degree of demise that can threaten the civilized, industrialized condition of humankind itself. Considering that the developed, and supposedly “advanced” countries of the world cannot even seriously commit to addressing one of these challenges – energy, the prognosis for humankind making progress on these combined fronts is dire indeed. This is the first major Zone that Requires Attention, but there is another Zone of related and equal importance.

There are three underlying drivers which, if left unchecked over the next generation, will vastly complicate and aggravate each of the individual major challenges: human population increase [to over nine billion] and continued commitment to both an expanding worldwide economy and an ever increasing standard of living across 85% of the world population. Each of these drivers [population, economy, standard of living] puts significant additional pressure and demand on available resources and compounds the potential negative effects to human health and the ecology of the planet. Among these drivers, only population receives any attention, but with no consequential planning or serious implementation. The world economy continuing to expand and the standard of living increasing across a broad spectrum of the population are both applauded for their assumed positive consequences rather than being questioned for their sustainability and potentially negative impacts. These last two major drivers are not even on the potential planning horizon to be addressed. These three drivers constitute the second major Zone that Requires Attention, and it is mostly off the radar of consideration.

The Third Zone of Attention is the fundamental state of worldwide social relations. Humankind can no longer afford the negative effects of all the variables that are allowed to promote conflict among different groups – at all levels. Whether these conflicts are over control of territory or resources, or over differences of race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, politics or economy, the opportunity for continued development of the human species is under threat from these sources of conflict – individually and in any combination. Humans in all of these categories of distinction are on the verge of possessing weapons of mass destruction, and some, with their apocalyptic views of human destiny, are unrestrained in their potential use of such weapons. We are no longer just having to put up with the effects of competing groups throwing spears at one another!! The use of nuclear weapons at moderate scale between any two groups can so poison the world environment that the house of all humans collapses.

What can we do in this world where our advancement in technology has so far outpaced our progress in our social relations? We can make at least three moves. First, we can put women in the decision making lead of society at all levels. At one time, testosterone driven men with their knee jerk tendency to react and strike out in defense of their “clan” were essential to human survival. No longer is this the case; instead, these are the very tendencies that now put civilized humanity at risk. The argument can be made that both biologically and culturally, women – on average – incline to nurture and to compromise, the very basic tendencies needed by the present human community. Now, there will be those who claim this is a sexist statement and that there are women who are as aggressive as men. Yes, there are aggressive women, but on average, women do not resort to violence to resolve conflicts at anything like the rate of men, even in the very few cultures where women adopt an aggressive and leading role. So, I say, put the talent of women to cooperate and compromise at the head of decision making in our societies as the first move to assist our social relations to catch up with our technological capabilities. With the successful example provided of women, maybe men can “get it” and play catch up. Second, the nations of the world have to commit to a truly authoritative and empowered United Nations, not just a “let’s try to work together” organization. An empowered United Nations can require arbitration in all situations of significant conflict where violence threatens and resolve these conflicts through a truly Supreme court. As the human community moves ever more toward a worldwide integrated economy, it must also move to a more integrated polity and justice system. The golden age of competing independent nations is at an end, if we expect to be able to advance to the next level of potential for the human species. Third, humans of all persuasions need to release the strangle hold of religion, and rediscover, reactivate, and reorient their intuitive/spiritual

dimension. In so doing, all people can find meaning and sustenance in a sacred understanding of self and reality that is socially inclusive rather than exclusive. Religion is a divider and a very significant source of conflict among human groups; spirituality is a uniter and is a base level source of respect, responsibility and cooperation among all humans. Spirituality offers humanity the core value of religion without its problematic dogma. For those who are not familiar with the case for spirituality in this regard, I have made an effort to outline this case in Dynamic Humanism (2007).

Yes, what I have suggested as necessary above is idealistic at the present time. But, progress begins by identifying goals, and, in this case, critically important goals. Something has to give in our worldwide, current societal situation if we are to avoid putting the developed, civilized state of our species at risk of collapse with the potential consequence that humans see their numbers decline precipitously [as in the boom and bust cycles of rodents] and their societal state return to tribal conditions. It is my view that only the emergence among the developed nations of both an enlightened citizenry and leadership, which are both committed to seriously address all three of the above Zones of Attention can forestall the potential collapse that is on the horizon for the human species.

Currently there is little evidence for a commitment of any kind in any of the three “Zones of Attention” that I have identified. It is the awesome fact of our overwhelming “failure to attend” [avoidance and denial] that is truly alarming. As we fly ever faster toward the edge of the cliff for the potential development of humankind, we are mostly electing to ignore the consequences of the course we are traveling.