



To Care for the Future of the Human Race*

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Abstract

Humanity can now destroy itself through the Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Pollution, the increasing Poverty of the poor nations, and the Population explosion (the four Ps). The urgent task is to minimize the risk of destruction of the human race. This cannot be done locally, only globally. It belongs to the new field of global politics. Hence, to rescue humanity we must institute a global coordination agency, known as world government or as world coordinator or by any other name. There is a reasonable fear that if such a central organization were instituted, some power may usurp and control it and thus increase the risk rather than reduce it. Hence, a world constituent assembly is urgently needed.

1. The New Situation

Of the many changes that humanity has undergone, the most traumatic one was World War II. In Auschwitz we have learned the enormity of our readiness to destroy, and in Hiroshima we learned the enormity of our ability to destroy. Together this led to a culture of living without tomorrow. This culture could not sustain itself physically as the many experiences of the sixties of the twentieth century testified to, and it could not sustain itself morally as many works of narrative art made tangible to those who experienced it. We may take as representative the 1957 novel *On the Beach* by Nevil Shute that was a bestseller for decades and made into a very successful 1959 Stanley Kramer movie. It displays the loss of all joy of life due to the loss of the future. Evidently, this and similar musings over the matter managed to change attitudes somewhat. Whereas early in the day Einstein reported with amazement that too many people did not care whether humanity will survive, today, though there is still too much indifference, there is much more concern and it is on the increase. The claim is now popular that we are living in a permanent global crisis, at risk of causing a global catastrophe that we should seek to reduce.

The problems of global politics are serious and in sore need for reasonable solutions. Thus far none has been offered. Unable to offer even a clue, let me make do with a preliminary discussion of the problem-situation in general. Let me begin with two rather obvious presuppositions. First, survival is always on the top of any agenda — personal, collective, national, or human. Second, today human survival is in grave danger: human life on earth may come to an end due to the four Ps: the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the pollution of the environment at large, the increased economic gulf due to the increased poverty of the poor nations, and the population explosion. These four dangers reinforce each other and there

* For more details see the author's 1985 book, *Technology: Philosophical and Social Aspects* <http://www.tau.ac.il/~agass/joseph-papers/technoln.pdf>

is no saying how much time we have before the threat of extinction becomes irreversible.

We should put the survival of humanity on top of every political agenda, global, international, national and party-political; we do not. However, the late Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess did.¹ He devoted the last years of his life exclusively to the discussions of human survival. This is admirable but not recommended: it is too radical. For all we know, the service of intellectuals as intellectuals, and of philosophers as philosophers, may be vital: they contribute to intellectual hygiene, helping to maintain some sense of proportion through the search for a comprehensive view, for clarity and precision, for the training to examine problems and get them as much in focus as possible prior to studying them, and to examine critically solutions to them.

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2. Facing the New Situation

Traditional philosophy includes some care about comprehensive matters — on the supposition that we need a broad synoptic vision that understandable but still regrettable specialization ignores, or even cautions against in the fear of superficiality. Yet we need a reasonable approach to global problems even if it will be superficial to begin with, if not even conducive to megalomania: we do need some bold speculations to guide us in our deliberations. In the 20th century at least two individuals tried their hands at this, Albert Einstein and Bertrand Russell, who both cared very much about the future of humanity. We should study their teachings as they are still relevant and useful today. Yet, clearly, what they have offered is insufficient. Also, our problems keep changing. New problems accumulate and old ones deepen. Hence, the hope that their teachings should suffice is unreasonable. Still, since the Cold War is over, a new air of optimism has spread. Now, how serious is our situation after the Cold War? Is the risk of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction bigger or smaller, now that the Soviet Union and its nuclear arsenal are no longer under much less centralized control? We do not know. To find this we need an improved synoptic view of the situation. Science should contribute to it, but it is insufficient. This assertion angers many scientists and analytic philosophers. Attempts at sweeping overviews are naturally speculative, and speculations are often not serious. At times they are not responsible. Speculative philosophers are often ignorant of details of contemporary science and at times they are even contemptuous of the details that they are ignorant of, perhaps in efforts to suppress a sense of inadequacy that may stifle efforts to do anything. So they ignore the details of relevant scientific information or, worse, they carelessly advocate outdated scientific information and theories. Without defending them one may appreciate their courage. The scientific tradition values the empiricist philosophy that shuns speculations as suspected of frivolity; it suggests that the safe ways to comprehensive ideas pass through small, serious researches devoid of megalomania. Ernst Mach denied that he had any philosophy, and declared that his comprehensive view of the world was the totality of science. Recently W. V. Quine advocated the same idea. Yet, science can instruct us only on details, not on comprehensive ideas. On questions of global politics, then, we have too little knowledge and little agreement about the way to proceed with the study of the broad outline of the situation.

We have hardly any tradition to go by. As Heinrich Heine, Bertrand Russell and John Maynard Keynes have noted, leading political ideas are those that philosophers had developed earlier. The global problems that demand urgent attention are so new, they can hardly have sufficient ancestry. Traditional religion can hardly offer anything beyond the invitation for good will. Science often serves as a substitute religion, if upheld somewhat dogmatically. Nevertheless, for efforts to cope with current global problems to succeed, we must shun science worship; they must appeal to the good will of all, including the good will of the vast populations of the poor parts of the world that are not prone to consider science as a religion. Even what western people deem commonsense is sufficiently imbued with science to be often extremely hard to spread. We have nothing much to go by, then, and have to make do with presenting the best ideas relevant to the problems at hand around as best as we can, and examine their insufficiency as solutions for the problems. There is no other way, and in particular we must discourage the idea that some great thinker will emerge and solve our problems for us. At least on this we have some idea: great solutions come in the wake of small ones.

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Hardly anyone can claim even minimal credentials for the task of developing good, comprehensive ideas. This task is very urgent: it is becoming increasingly difficult to be sanguine about the near future, let alone the distant future. We should face the uncertainties of the future as a matter of responsibility: if responsible people neglect the task of caring for the future, and the ancillary task of developing some comprehensive ideas about it, then this task will be left to irresponsible people. And then, when action is demanded, they will lead: in emergency, when drastic action is called for, if only one plan of action exists, it wins regardless of all objections to it. What then is required of the responsible but not qualified? They should present as best and as clearly as they can the problems and the backgrounds to them in efforts to engage in them as many people as possible. What this demands most is to be as critically minded as possible.

3. Some Preliminary Rules

The required action in global politics must be global: it is futile to perform it locally. The practice of population control in one country, for example, leads to increased immigration from poor countries where this facilitates population growth. And the current practice of shipping toxic waste from rich countries to poor ones, for another example, is going to hurt us all.²This is not to discourage local moves in the right direction; these may be of some practical value even though they fall short of the target, and they always have educational value.

Global action requires global coordination. This is achievable by international bodies designed to help such coordination. These are now used by representatives of member nations to defend their nations' policies. What is missing then is a sufficiently broad, if not quite unanimous, agreement on the need to seek ways to act in the right direction. And unanimity cannot be imposed, especially not on educated, democratic publics. This holds for all ideas, no matter how obvious they look.

Unanimity within science is insufficient. Even within science, only the well examined information commands some measure of unanimity; it functions as a challenge to theoretical researchers to explain it or as a basis for acquiring licenses for practice. To be useful, applied science often needs coordination. Regarding global matters this is wanting, since the coordination we need is global. So the task is to spread the comprehension of the available information that requires a movement towards global coordination for controlling the risk of global destruction.

The required broad comprehension is unattainable without some scientific literacy. Facts are easier to comprehend than the theories that explain them, but not sufficiently easy. This invites efforts to facilitate comprehension of relevant scientific information. Discussing the reliability of information (of the question, how well examined it is) is easier than discussing the reliability of theories (whatever this means), yet theories are vital for discussing forecasts and their reliability. Unfortunately, people with much good will advocate good causes poorly as they exaggerate the reliability of their information and theories and they even blow up information and prefer extreme forecasts without saying so, in efforts to scare the public in order to mobilize public interest in important issues.³ This is irresponsible, and it causes damage.^{4,5} Perpetrators of inferior advocacy assume that the public is too ignorant to see through it; but it is easy to expose dishonesty to the public, and all the more so when scientific literacy grows and democratization opens new channels for free public discussion. The proper democratic procedure seems exceptionally frustrating whenever a huge and urgent task is at hand, and this raises hopes to achieve better results by replacing democracy with technocracy. It is suggested that experts will do things more quickly and efficiently if they are exempt from the democratic process, especially if they comprise an amalgamated team of scientific and managerial experts. There is some reason to this idea: already the ancient Roman Republic practiced it. A number of guarantees were instituted there to prevent the temporarily strong leader from becoming permanent. Julius Caesar, we remember, broke them. This was no historical necessity as the case of Churchill illustrates: he was the strongest leader ever, yet after the war he was defeated in elections. Only active democratic education made the difference between Caesar and Churchill. And active democratic education includes training for coordination.

Training for coordination is best achieved in practice, like swimming, so that possibly the best democratic education is in the democratic movement, and then it should begin from the start. If so, then the recognition of it should perhaps lead to the democratization of schools, and on all levels. Whether this is so or not is irrelevant here. For, the global crisis requires urgent solution and we hardly have the time to reform education and apply its fruits to the crisis. What is needed most, then, is a modicum of scientific literacy, grass-roots democracy and individual autonomy. Putting these in minimal form on top of the public agenda may suffice for developing quickly a forceful synoptic view. One small item may illustrate this. Today a new social philosophy is afoot: communalism. Like many buzzwords, it is not clear what it is. Some people who speak in its name oppose individual autonomy; others only play it down. It is important to confront them all and ask them, is their communalism helpful for the cause of saving humanity from itself? For, this holds generally: the task of putting global politics on the map, it seems obvious, requires mobilizing local politicians. They will not necessarily be thrilled with the idea, so they have to be won over or replaced in the political

arena by democratic means. Yet it is very important to notice that cynicism is easily misplaced here: cynics will say that it is too idealistic to expect local power seekers to give in for the sake of global politics. This need not be so. After all, the same story occurred when nationalism evolved, when local feudal potentates gave way to central authority, and at times voluntarily, understanding that it was also in their own interest to give in a little. World security is in everyone's interest. This is not such a difficult idea to comprehend.

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Why then is it so difficult to mobilize people for this great cause? Evidently because no one wants to be the only volunteer for the cause that can be profitable only if it gains momentum. This is true of all mass movements, yet some of these did succeed. The analysis of their success may be crucial. The success need not happen at random: we can try to engineer it. For example, we can ask, why do people participate in harmful activities like the transfer of toxic waste from rich countries to poor ones? This conduct depends on the understanding of an important and dangerous fact. If the persons involved in the act will desist, others will take their place and have their cut in the profit. The situation will drastically alter were such conduct illegal. Why is it not? We must investigate this question and deal with the situation according to our finds.

4. Final Remarks

In conclusion of this preliminary discussion, let me notice that it is on the trite side — as it should be if it is to summarize what everyone concerned with the future of humanity must agree upon. All this is tentative, of course, to be scraped when someone comes up with a smashing revolutionary idea that should reopen the discussion. In the meantime, we are only able to seek hints at sketches of possible comprehensive views that may stand behind some future solutions. Everyone who is concerned who has anything new to say on the matter should present it publicly in the hope that others will succeed in developing ideas further, or in criticizing them, and thus opening the road to hints of better ideas. We are facing a tremendous intellectual and practical challenge. Many universities in many countries have already instituted a number of new departments to meet this challenge. Most of these departments are devoted mainly to ecology, leaving it to older departments to discuss the other new global issues. It is the coordination of all efforts within global politics — academic, political and other — to work together without exaggeration and stressing the great need that may create a genuine mass movement and push it to become a grass-roots democratic-scientific movement. To that end we should seek ways and means for helping existing organizations whose official tasks would be to seek ways to prevent global catastrophes to do a better job: to seek ways for creating an umbrella organization for them all, one that should have powers to

push things forward as much as possible, and to seek ways to turn this umbrella organization into a constituent assembly for a world authority for the purpose of reducing the risk of the self-destruction of humanity.

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