

For the First Time in 30,000 Years

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Till now, mankind has either taken it as a matter of course that it is going to survive, or, alternatively, assumed that its destiny will be decided by forces beyond human control: the gods or God or Nature. We have now woken up to the truth that, today, we are in greater danger of extinction than we have been at any time since the date—perhaps 30,000 years ago—at which our ancestors gained the upper hand over all other forms of life on this planet except microbes and viruses. In the present age we have discovered and conquered the microbes, and we have hopes of getting the better of the viruses. But our recent victories over non-human menaces to human life are far outweighed by new threats to us from ourselves. These threats have no precedents; for man, armed with the power of science applied to technology, is a vastly more formidable enemy for man than any non-human enemy that man has yet encountered.

The present human threats to mankind's survival are notorious. The three principal current man-made menaces are nuclear weapons, the pollution of mankind's habitat on this planet, together with the using up of the planet's irreplaceable natural resources, and the population explosion produced by a reduction in the death-rate without a simultaneous corresponding reduction in the birth-rate.

Taken together, these man-made menaces threaten mankind with extinction, because they threaten to make the surface of our planet uninhabitable, and this limited area is the only habitat we have or are likely ever to have. At least this seems to be the lesson of the progressive increase in the range of astronomical observation and of the recent feat of breaking out

into the nearest reaches of outer space and the Moon-landing. The expenditure for this feat has been prodigious in terms of skill, manpower and wealth, not to speak of the heroic daring of the handful of astronauts who have been catapulted this distance at such fantastic cost per head.

The Moon is by far the nearest of the other stars to our planet. Like all those more distant stars of which we have any knowledge, the Moon is uninhabitable by man; and, though the astronomers guess, reasonably, that in the vast physical Universe there may be numbers of invisible planets in other solar systems in our own galaxy or in other galaxies that would be habitable for us if we could reach them, the same astronomers also warn that the nearest of these hypothetical habitable new worlds may be thousands or millions of light-years from the Earth. The outlay that has been required for excursions to Earth's nearest satellite tells us that, even if it became practicable technologically to identify and reach another habitable planet, the cost would exceed the utmost resources mankind could ever mobilize for expenditure on this enterprise.

This means that we have to reckon with the probability—indeed, the virtual certainty—that man's habitat will be limited forever to its present and past confines, that is to say, to the habitable portion of the surface of the Earth. This is, of course, an infinitesimally small area by comparison with the probable aggregate area of the surfaces of other habitable but unreachable planets, which may or may not exist. A more practical, and also more urgently relevant, measure of the smallness of man's habitat on Earth is that it is so small as to be now in danger of being made uninhabitable for man by man's own action, particularly by the cumulative effect of the three threats mentioned above. Measured in human terms, the size of the Earth's surface is proportionate to the degree of man's technological ability to exploit it and to pollute it.

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On this criterion, the surface of the Earth has been unlimited, and its material resources inexhaustible, for its human inhabitants throughout all but the most recent age of human history. It is only within living memory (my own memory, for instance) that any Westerner has penetrated some parts of the interior of Africa and of South America, and that any human being has reached the North and South Poles. It is also within living memory that certain potential natural resources, e.g., plutonium, have been made actual by science's discovery of a practical human use for them and by technology's discovery of the means of harnessing them for human purposes. Yet, within the same short span of time, man's ability to affect the Earth's crust and its air-envelope has increased so enormously that it has suddenly come within our power to make life on Earth impossible for our children and grandchildren, and perhaps even already for ourselves in our own generation.

In this unprecedented situation with which we have been confronted abruptly by our own scientific and technological prowess it is surely clear that the first business on mankind's agenda ought now to be securing its own survival by making sure that its habitat on Earth, which is mankind's sole patrimony, should continue to be habitable by human beings. It is also surely clear that, since the whole habitable and traversable and exploitable and pollutable part of the Earth's crust and air-envelope has been knit together, for technological purposes, into a global unity, the necessary effort to conserve it for human use must be a united and concerted effort by the whole human race. The menaces of nuclear armaments, pollution, prodigality, and overcrowding threaten us on a global scale. They cannot be dealt with effectively by a cooperative human effort of less than global comprehensiveness.

The technological unification of our habitat is now an accomplished fact. Its economic unification is hardly less complete, and even its social and cultural unification has been accomplished at some levels. This is the result of the global radiation during the last five centuries of West European technology, trade, investment, government, population, institutions, ideas, and ideals. For the non-Western majority of mankind, these West-European exports were originally alien imports, intrusions, and impositions, but gradually they have begun to become common possessions of all mankind. From being something specifically Western, they are turning into something generically modern, to which the living non-Western civilizations are making increasingly important contributions. On the cultural and professional planes, there are now people who are already citizens of the world—for instance, the members of the medical profession, and of university faculties and student bodies. The global bond of feel-

ing that unites people in these walks of life is stronger than their juridical segregation from each other as citizens, in the political sense, of the planet's present 140 local sovereign states.

The present situation and, still more, the current tendency on the political plane presents a disturbing contrast to the situation and tendency on other planes of human activity. On these other planes, the history of human affairs during the last five hundred years has resulted in at least a beginning of the process of unification which is the outcome that we should expect. On the political plane, on the other hand, there has so far been little discernible progress toward unification.

Indeed, there has been a quite marked accentuation of political disunity, both in fact and in feeling. This increasing disharmony between politics and other human activities has now reached a degree at which it is manifestly threatening mankind with catastrophe. Why are we exposing ourselves to this fearful risk? Why, in our political life, are we so allergic to the unifying tendency which has prevailed in other fields? It is important to try to identify and understand the causes of this political misfit. To lay bare the causes is the most promising first step toward finding a cure.

The most obvious cause is the persistent disunity of the Western civilization, since it is the Western peoples who, within the last five hundred years, have initiated the global unification of mankind on a number of non-political planes. Since the collapse of the Roman Empire in its western provinces in the fifth century, the new Western civilization that has sprung up out of the Roman Empire's ruins has been disunited politically, though united culturally, technologically and to some extent also economically.

This initial combination of political disunity with unity on other planes is not peculiar to the West. Other civilizations—for instance, the Sumerian, the "classical" Greek, the Chinese—have started life with the same cultural and political configuration. The peculiarity of the Western civilization's political disunity has been its persistence. Its predecessor, the "classical" Greek civilization, was eventually unified politically in the Roman Empire, and similarly the Sumerian civilization in the Akkadian Empire and the Chinese civilization in the Chinese Empire—a political union that survives today, in the form of the People's Republic, nearly 2,200 years after its original establishment in 221 B.C. Moreover, when the Roman Empire disintegrated in its western provinces, it survived in its Levantine heartland; and when, in the seventh century, it broke down here too, it was quickly re-established, first as the Byzantine Greek Empire and then as the Ottoman Turkish Empire. The Ottoman Empire maintained itself till within living memory; it was not till after the First World War that it was extinguished by the youngest of its national successor-states, the present Turkish Republic.

These examples indicate that normally a cultural unity becomes a political unity as well—in course of time. But, if this is the normal rule, the political history of the Western civilization has been a conspicuous exception to it so far. In the West, the Roman Empire was replaced first by a number of local successor-states carved out by invading barbarian war-bands; and here, in contrast to the Levant, the attempt to re-establish the Roman Empire was a failure. The so-called “Holy Roman Empire” of Charlemagne and his successors never embraced the whole of the contemporary domain of the Western civilization, and its authority became more and more ineffective. The “Holy Roman Empire” was defeated by the medieval Papacy, but the Papacy’s apparently promising attempt to unify the West under ecclesiastical auspices failed in its turn. In the Western Middle Ages, the most effective forms of political organization were the local city-states in Italy, Flanders, and Germany. In the modern age of Western history, the nation-state has supplanted the city-state as the standard form of Western polity. The global unification of mankind on the non-political planes within the last five hundred years has been accomplished through a competition between half-a-dozen rival West European nation-states—each of them expanding its trade, planting its settlers, and annexing territory all around the globe in chronic warfare with each of the others.

This political division of the modern Westerners into a number of mutually hostile nation-states has now been imitated by the non-Western majority of mankind. During the two centuries and a half that ended in the two world wars, the West was manifestly dominant in the world. Consequently, Western institutions acquired prestige. Non-Western peoples who revolted against Western domination adopted the Western political ideology of nationalism because they believed this had been the source of the West’s strength. The dissolution of the West European national states’ colonial empires during and since the Second World War has resulted in a doubling of the number of the world’s local sovereign independent states. Each formerly subject territory that has recovered its political independence has set itself up as a national state in imitation of the Western national state whose rule it has shaken off.

The tendency to increase the number and to reduce the average size of local sovereign states has been stimulated, both in the West and elsewhere, by the nineteenth-century Western political doctrine of self-determination. The oldest Western national states—e.g., France and England—came into existence within the framework of kingdoms imposed on populations that were not linguistically homogeneous. Though a majority of the citizens of the French national state are French-speaking, France also includes minorities who speak Breton, Basque, Flemish, and German, while there are French-speaking popu-

lations in Switzerland and Belgium, outside France’s frontiers. Similarly, the British national state includes Celtic-speaking minorities in North Wales and in the Scottish highlands, besides the English-speaking majority in England and in the Scottish lowlands.

The French and British national consciousness is a consequence, not a cause, of the existence of the French and British states. In each of these cases, the state came into existence first and the national consciousness was then incubated within this pre-existing matrix. But this pertinent historical fact was overlooked by the nineteenth-century Italians and Germans. These two peoples had found themselves divided up politically among a number of local sovereign states. The Italian and the German people each sought to match its linguistic unity with a political unification by establishing a nation-state on the French and British scale, and they succeeded; but they united on the strength of the new political doctrine of self-determination—meaning a claim, made by people speaking the same language, to be entitled to have a single sovereign state of their own. This doctrine was an innovation. It has spread, since 1914, from Italy and Germany to Eastern Europe and to the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent, with political consequences that have been disruptive in both these regions. By contrast, the achievement of self-determination by the Italians and the Germans in the nineteenth century was not disruptive but unificatory. It had consolidated a number of small states into two bigger states. Moreover, neither Cavour nor Bismarck carried to extremes the doctrine that the speakers of the same language ought to be united politically in the same state. For instance, they had not dreamed of seeking to incorporate the Italian-speaking or the German-speaking Swiss in the new national states of Italy and Germany.

In Eastern Europe and in the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent, linguistic nationalism has been carried to further extremes than in Western and Central Europe; the results have been tragic because, in Eastern Europe and in the subcontinent, peoples speaking different languages were previously intermingled with each other geographically. They have now been sorted out into homogeneous blocs by eviction and by genocide, and the linguistic minorities that have survived have been reduced politically to the status of second-class citizens. The subcontinent was first split in two by the religious hostility between Hindus and Muslims, and has now been fractured further by linguistic nationalism. Religion proved strong enough to break the British Indian empire up into three successor-states—India, Pakistan, and Burma—but religion has not proved strong enough to hold the speakers of different languages together. The boundaries between the states of the Indian Union have been redrawn on linguistic lines, with results like those of the similar remapping of Eastern Europe.

In Pakistan, linguistic differences are one of the

factors that have alienated the Bengali-speaking Eastern Pakistanis from the Western Pakistanis. Here the results have been catastrophic. An overwhelming vote in Eastern Pakistan in favor of autonomy or independence has been answered by the Western Pakistanis by a military conquest, accompanied by atrocities, and this, in its turn, has led to a full-scale war between Western Pakistan and India. This has put an end to a state of affairs, created by the West Pakistan Government, which was outrageous and intolerable. Bangla Desh has been liberated, but this necessary act of justice and mercy has been achieved only at the cost of further destruction, suffering and reprisals. It is grievous, and also terribly ominous, that a local war was—as it undoubtedly was—the only means available for cutting this Gordian Knot. The inability of the United Nations to impose justice peacefully without waiting to see it imposed by local military force is an alarming reminder that we are living in a world that is completely anarchic and is bristling with lethal weapons poised to strike.

Nationalism is the most potent of the causes of the political disunity of the present-day world. Another cause is a revulsion from the impersonalness of modern life. Today, human beings feel that they are being dehumanized; they are being reduced to ciphers, to serial numbers, or to clusters of holes punched in cards made for "processing" through a computer. People recognize that this dehumanization is a consequence of the increase in the number of persons and things, e.g., in the size of the populations of states. They know by experience that personal relations between human beings are more satisfactory than impersonal relations. They infer that life would become more human in a state in which it was possible for all the citizens to be acquainted with each other personally, and they argue from this premise that the breakup of states into smaller and smaller pieces is to be welcomed.

The premise is correct, but the conclusion drawn from it is fallacious because the objective is unattainable. A sovereign independent state small enough to become a family affair would not be viable. No state—not even a non-sovereign component of a federation—has ever been as small as that. In the smallest of the historical city-states, the political relations between the citizens have always been impersonal. They are inevitably impersonal in a population of, say, as many as 10,000 men, women, and children all told; when once this figure is reached, it makes no difference if it is increased to one million or to ten million or to five hundred million. Present-day Scottish and Welsh nationalists dream that they would find life more cosy in a separate Scottish or Welsh sovereign national state. In truth, they would find themselves no less depersonalized in a state of this smaller scale than they find themselves today as citizens of the United Kingdom.

What are the prospects of the present tug-o'-war between the forces of political fission versus those of political consolidation?

The fissiparous tendency revealed in Welsh and Scottish nationalism in Britain today is even more sharply pronounced in Canada, Belgium, India, Pakistan, and Nigeria. On the other hand, in Nigeria and in each of the other African states that have become independent since the Second World War, the age-old tribal attachments seem, on the whole, to be proving less potent than the attachment to the new states. If this is the truth, it is remarkable, for the new African states are each identical in area with a former African possession of some European power. These ex-colonial territories are not only very recent creations but their frontiers are quite arbitrary, frequently partitioning tribal domains or embracing the fragments of a number of different tribal domains.

These frontiers were, in fact, drawn without regard to the ethnographic map of Africa; they were the product of diplomatic compromises between competing European colonial powers whose governments had tacitly agreed with each other that each would seize as much African territory as it could without running a risk of falling into war with others over the division of these African spoils. In other words, present-day African nationalism has had the same history as French and British nationalism. In Africa too, the establishment of the frontiers has come first; the growth of a sense of common nationality, within a pre-established geographical matrix, has followed as a consequence.

The tendency toward political consolidation has declared itself, since 1945, in postwar Western Europe as well as in postwar Africa. In the course of the fifteen centuries that have now elapsed since the disintegration of the Roman Empire in the West, there have been a number of attempts to re-unite this area politically by conquest. Each of these successive attempts has been defeated; but, since 1945, for the first time in Western European history, six local sovereign states have entered spontaneously into a voluntary association, the European Economic Community, and the original membership of six states is now in process of being increased to ten. The E.E.C. seems likely to continue to expand, and unlikely to dissolve.

It is also noteworthy that the former Russian Empire has survived in the form of the USSR, side by side with the former Chinese Empire, which survives, as has already been noted, in the form of the People's Republic. The United States, the third giant among the local states of the present-day world, has likewise survived the ordeal of the Civil War of 1861-65. The survival of these three superpowers—Russia, China and the United States—is a victory for the tendency toward consolidation which has to be set against the successive disintegrations of a number of other em-

pires—for instance, the Spanish Empire of the Indies, the Second and Third German Reichs; the Danubian Habsburg monarchy, the Ottoman Turkish Empire, the British Indian empire, and the colonial empires of Germany, Italy, Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium.

On the whole, it looks as if the tendency to preserve and enlarge existing local states is prevailing over the tendency to split them up. However, even if this impression were to be borne out by the future course of events, this would not give us the answer to the question with which the present article is concerned. Our question is whether or not mankind is going to achieve, in time to avert a catastrophe, the minimum necessary degree of political unification on a global scale.

We have to ask ourselves whether the global political unification which is the alternative to a catastrophe is likely to be helped or to be hindered by partial political unifications on a less than global scale. Even the domains and the populations of the present three superpowers and of an expanded E.E.C. are small compared to the size of mankind and of mankind's total habitat on the surface of the Earth, large though the superpowers' domains and populations are by comparison with those of France, Britain, Italy, and each of the two Germanys, not to speak of Scotland or Wales or Iboland or Wallonia or the French-speaking part of Canada. Moreover, the three superpowers have been much more concerned so far to compete perversely with each other than to cooperate for the constructive purpose of putting the world in order and securing the survival of mankind. The present superpowers have been repeating, in a larger arena, the narrowhearted and shortsighted behavior through which the competition between earlier sets of rival powers brought previous civilizations to grief.

In most previous cases, political unity has been imposed eventually by military conquest. The cost, psychological as well as physical, of this barbarous method of unification has proved, again and again, to be prohibitively high. Unification by conquest has sometimes postponed the dissolution of a civilization, but it has seldom averted it and, insofar as the disso-

lution of a forcibly unified civilization has been postponed, the civilization has been preserved in most cases only in a state of petrification. However, in the age of atomic weapons by which mankind has now been overtaken, the traditional violent method of unification is no longer practicable anyway. A world war fought with atomic weapons could not unify mankind; it would only annihilate it. In the atomic age, the only possible method of unification is some form of voluntary association.

It has been noted already that since 1945—the year in which the Second World War culminated and ended in the invention and use of atomic weaponry—some of the sovereign national states of Western Europe have taken the radically new departure of entering into a voluntary association in the E.E.C. This is a good augury, considering how deeply ingrained is nationalism in the tradition of Western European peoples and how often one or other of them has tried to subjugate the rest by force. If the Western European peoples can unite with each other voluntarily, as they are now demonstrating they can, a voluntary union of all mankind, on a global scale, is not a utopian objective.

The objective is not utopian, but will it be achieved? That is to say, will it be achieved in time to avert the catastrophe which is the alternative to it? This question will be answered by the three present superpowers; their answer is still unknown—probably even to themselves. Will the superpowers' governments and peoples recognize in time that the winning of successes in their competition with each other is not the paramount interest of any one of them? Will they recognize that their paramount interest is the preservation of the human race; that this interest is common to them all and also to the rest of mankind; and that the pursuit of this objective is not only their interest but their duty, both to themselves and to their fellow men? If and when the views and intentions of the superpowers become clear, we shall be better able than we are today to forecast the future of mankind. Today we know only that mankind's future is once again in doubt for the first time, perhaps, within the last 30,000 years.