

Introduction

The Greatest Adventure in Human History

A *Adaptive Society* explains how humans, who evolved to live in nature, can adapt themselves to live in an artificial civilization built with technology. Successful adaptation, for the individual and for the human species, will mean obtaining a good “fit” with every aspect of the habitat, which is necessary for well-being. “Fitness” was first given its biological meaning by Charles Darwin in his 1859 book, “*The Origin of Species*,” which showed us that, when individual members of any species fail to adapt to changes in their habitat, their survival and reproduction is jeopardized; if a whole species fails to adapt, it may become extinct.

When humans lived in nature, they were uniquely successful. The first truly modern humans left Africa within the last 100,000 years, and gradually migrated across the vast regions of Eurasia. Eventually, people reached the Australian continent, and others walked across the Bering straits to the Americas, and even up to the Arctic Circle, where they became the ancestors of modern Eskimos and Inuit peoples. This extraordinary feat was achieved using human brainpower and early technologies such as stone weapons, clothing, and fire. No other species on the planet (except, perhaps, human parasites such as head lice and fleas) could have left their African home and lived comfortably in such diverse worldwide habitats within such a short space of time.

Today, unfortunately, the fit between people and their artificial habitat is failing, and that means a reduction in well-being for all humans. Almost every systematic human problem that arises – warfare, starvation, great differences in wealth, unemployment, most diseases, obesity, pollution and destruction of nature, to name a few – can be seen as failures of fit between humans and their habitat.

It is widely perceived that evolution cannot adapt humans to the harmful side-effects of technology. Darwin showed us that evolution

changes humans to adapt them to new conditions by the “natural selection” of individuals whose traits are best adapted to the habitat. But this biotic evolution is very slow and it cannot prepare people for the fast-changing conditions in industrial civilization that have never previously been encountered. Therefore, modern humans appear to be trapped – we cannot live without advanced technology, but neither can we fully adapt to living with it.

This popular explanation for the problems of modern society is often supported by scientists, but it is really only a fragment of the full explanation for the current human problems of maladaptation. At the same time that the general public has learned about the importance of Darwin’s evolution of the species, scientists and thinkers have been piecing together a completely new and different kind of evolution. It is now being realized that many parts of human society, such as language, the learning process, economic markets, the dissemination of ideas, and the rapid advancement of technology, are subject to a “trial and error” process of evolution that has much in common with biological evolution based on genes.

For people in an industrial civilization, adaptation no longer depends upon biotic evolution, but rather upon the evolution of civilization itself. Most scientists call this “cultural evolution” but this description may mislead some people as to what it is that is evolving, and I therefore prefer to use a more inclusive term: “evolution of the artificial human habitat,” or for short, “habitat evolution.”

In Darwinian evolution, all species, including humans, are subject to genetic inheritance, variation, and natural selection, that result in adaptation to the habitat. In habitat evolution, the whole human habitat, comprising knowledge, learned behaviors and all the artifacts of civilization, evolve to create an adaptive relationship with the human population. This means that the evolution necessary to create adaptive “fit” between humans and their habitat has been inverted.

If the evolution of our habitat is allowed to operate naturally, it should rapidly remedy all maladaptive aspects of the environment, including not only major sources of injury and death, such as inequitable access to food and water, pollution and warfare, but also less tangible challenges to the quality of life, such as the psychological stresses of unemployment, repressive enforced schooling, excessive materialism and the increasing marginalization of family and community. All these

“systematic” problems of civilization are, ultimately, harmful side-effects of technology, and humans who are clever enough to invent new technologies are also clever enough to remedy their defects.

But there is a problem. Modern government is itself a technology that has harmful side-effects, because it centralizes human society, transforming the social organization by imposing a monopoly of force, and thereby disrupting the evolution of the habitat. All current governments comprise elite groups that acquire a monopoly of force over their societies and are therefore parasitical in nature. Humans need to understand and to remedy this catastrophic accident of history in order to retrieve their normal social organization and to fully thrive as a species.

We know that the evolution of civilization is a powerful force that should support a thriving human community. In fact, during the evolutionary period, humans who lived in small bands of about 50 people did solve the problems of adaptation as they created early technologies. All the adult members of each band constantly discussed the problems facing their group and made consensual decisions to improve the fit between the group and its natural environment. Wise men and women were chosen as leaders, but they were not permitted to overrule the members of the group. In the rare cases when consensus proved impossible, and conflict was threatened, disaffiliated members could leave and join other bands, or form their own.

This form of government was much stronger and more “intelligent” than any government known today, for several reasons. First, decision-making by consensus meant that the brains of every man and woman contributed to decisions, so that more options could be explored and major blunders of judgment were less likely. Second, all members of the band would be motivated to support a consensus, ensuring that decisions would be implemented with enthusiasm, in great contrast to the political infighting that constitutes, for example, modern democracy. Third, hunter-gathers lived in communities based on the extended family, so that everyone took it for granted that decisions had to be compatible with the interests of the tribal elders and the infants, as well as the parental generation. Contrast that with modern societies, in which groups representing different generations greedily lobby to maximize their share of the state resources taken by force from productive individuals and companies. Fourth, human bands were small, so that the mistakes that each band made could only affect a few people. In contrast,

when modern governments make mistakes, millions of people may become physically or psychologically ill, or be killed.

Humans need to live in small face-to-face communities and to govern their own affairs as they did in evolution. One reason for the persistence of religious communities in the scientific age is that most people wish to live in a small community with a strong moral system. Scientists constantly criticize religion, without realizing the powerful truth that religious groups reveal in their intuitive choice of lifestyle. Conversely, scientists can teach religious adherents about natural evolution and the unchanging laws that govern the universe. There is an opportunity for collaboration.

Even if humans re-created the small autonomous communities that supported their success in the past, could they really adapt to the modern technology-based city life? The answer is “yes,” because evolution took care of that by helping humans to create an extremely sophisticated culture that supports collaborative behavior. In a human society without a coercive state, culture evolves alongside technology and continuously supports the adaptive fit between humans and their artificial societies. Natural human societies could easily handle the problem of achieving fitness within the technological habitat.

Currently, however, ordinary people, with their inherited morality and intelligence, supported by their families and their community, have been largely displaced as the source of government by the machinery of the nation state, based solely on conquest and the dictatorship of an elite that has achieved access to the social instruments that control monopoly force.

For 10,000 years, the governments of sovereign states have existed in mutual insecurity with one another. The ruling elites of each state have dominated their subjects with unnatural coercion and continually resorted to warfare. Rape, looting, torture and slavery – things that are mostly alien to normal human societies – became commonplace in most states. Today, sovereign states are still the norm, causing more warfare deaths in the 20th century than in previous history combined, more slavery in the 21st century than in 19th century Africa, and the greatest enforced hierarchies on Earth since our chimpanzee-like ancestors brutalized one another.

That is why it is essential that humans must muster the intelligence and the resolve to demand better government. We must move on from dictatorships, from communism, fascism, and democracy (which is “the

dictatorship of the majority”). We must, above all, move on from the “sovereign state” which always yields absolute power to a tiny ruling elite. We need real civilization, so that humans can achieve an excellent fit with their artificial technology-based habitat. That is only possible if we have normal social organization that supports the cultural evolution that we inherited from nature, and that made early humans so magnificently successful.

Only Natural Government can Create fully Civilized societies

Most people, when asked to support the reform of government, tend to shake their heads in disbelief that such a large task can be achieved. Yet we have seen in the 20th century alone, the fall of great coercive governmental systems such as communism and fascism. Ultimately, such changes occur as a result of natural forces that are irresistible. If humans do not create an efficient and appropriate form of government, the natural laws of the universe will do the job for them, and the experience may be one of “tough love.” The ultimate alternative to adopting proper government and social organization will finally be extinction; humans may disappear from the face of the Earth.

If you believe that I exaggerate, consider the fate of the Japanese and European communities, both of which have reproductive rates of little more than one child per family. As the populations of these great and successful human groups halve in size in each generation, they are threatened with rapid extinction, according to demographers. What could more clearly indicate that “natural selection” – the evolutionary process that made humans what they are and sustains them – has been massively damaged by the coercive, parasitic system of state power that emerged from the brutal conquest of early warfare?

In the 21st century, humans must restore the normal social organization of their species and extend it to encompass all peoples by the creation of global natural law that will outlaw the initiation of violence, and implement the “non-aggression principle” that is favored by all people who believe in peace and justice.

The re-creation of human autonomy, together with the creation of a great global free market and a universal system of law that will protect human rights for every member of the human species, is a breathtaking project, perhaps the most important ever conceived.

To realize this dream, the global population needs to study its own history and prehistory. Societies need to guarantee to every human the

autonomy that evolved in nature, and thereby release the full intelligence of whole communities to express adaptive preferences and remedy the harmful side-effects of technology. In the 21st century, it will become a competitive necessity for human communities to re-create the habitat conditions to which all humans are adapted by evolution.

In *Adaptive Society*, I describe precisely how humans have arrived at their current precarious situation, and outline the educational task needed to galvanize the human species towards the great collaborative effort required to build a peaceful, and fully adaptive civilization. Enormous though this task is, it is well within the ability of the seven billion women and men on Earth. If you are a thinking person and you care for your fellow humans, prepare to take part in the “Greatest Adventure in Human History.”