

A Refresher Course in the State of the World

A Refresher Course in the State of the World (1992)

An ecocatastrophe is taking place on Earth. Local ecocatastrophes are everywhere. Increasingly, vast tracts of green and productive land are being paved to make way for buildings, roads and parking lots. Vast spaces turn to desert or are poisoned, made barren and unfit for living. Wind and water erosion wash the topsoil of the most significant grain reserves into the sea. Finite natural resources are on a clearance sale, while renewable resources like forests are being depleted at an ever-increasing speed. The gas balance of the atmosphere has been thrown out of kilter; seas have been polluted with oil and their food chains ransacked. The rapid warming of the climate poses insurmountable problems for natural plant life and crops. The amount of waste and pollution is growing uncontrollably.

The above was only a refresher course: a summary of everyday information. Most of mankind more or less ignores these mega-trends and their multifarious subdivisions, which are nevertheless familiar to inhabitants of so-called enlightened countries of the cooler part of the Northern Hemisphere. These trends and their causes are generally accepted as scientific facts in these countries; only numeric estimates are known to fluctuate within certain limits. I am not taking into account here all worldviews based on pure faith, including those held by the few thinkers who — even with sensible-sounding arguments — would deny that the biosphere is facing any emergency. To the end of the world, there will always be someone ready to claim that the sun rises in the west and sets in the east, that females impregnate and males give birth.

As for the public, the problem no longer regards the volume of information about the state of the world and its availability, nor the assimilation of this information. It is interesting to observe how well certain facts are understood, and how deep they have sunk into people's consciousness. However, what kind of connection is the informed person capable

A Refresher Course in the State of the World

of making between the state of the world, his own community, and his personal life? Ultimately, the essential question is whether awareness of this global situation — the distress of the biosphere — affects the individual's actions as a decision maker and citizen.

Man: an Irresponsible Thief

This interim report doesn't bring a glimmer of hope. In fact, there is no apparent difference between the behaviour of the communities and individuals that are part of mankind's unenlightened majority and that of the enlightened, aware minority. Everywhere, man remains a complete lout, a destroyer of the biosphere. The only difference is that among the enlightened portion of mankind there is more chattering to be heard and more rustling of papers thanks to things like the UN-appointed Brundtland Commission. The minimum demand of the committee was for industrial countries to reduce their energy consumption by half within a few decades. In Finland too, then, one would expect all construction work, industrial production, traffic, road maintenance, lighting and household appliances to have being reduced by 50%, and half of the power plants to have been shut down.

In reality, the Finnish producer and consumer, whether student or pensioner, farmer, metal worker or doctor, fiercely hangs onto the dreadful material standard of living that already, decades ago, had exceeded all rational boundaries, while in addition demanding that his purchasing power should continue to increase. Finns perceive economic stagnation as a stunning backlash, and its overcoming as a national mission, even though, as enlightened men, they should be praising it in all churches, praying that the depression might worsen tenfold. Luxury and glamour marked every aspect of the 1992 exhibition of medical science: tons of chlorine-bleached enamelled paper, amazing conference rooms, fabulous presentation halls, fancy flights and five-star hotels.

Will the Population Explosion be Averted — or Will Awareness of It?

Let us now return to the subject of this article. I apologise for the digression: the bitter ecologist got carried away again. I was meant to deliver a lecture on the population issue, the notion of value and medical ethics. We'll get to them, too.

It is worth stressing once more that the chief cause for the impending collapse of the world — the cause sufficient in and by itself — is the enormous growth of the human population: the human flood. The worst enemy of life is too much life: the excess of human life. A secondary cause that is accelerating the process of devastation is the increasing burden that each new member of the population brings upon nature. First and

A Refresher Course in the State of the World

foremost, in what follows, I will be discussing the fundamental problem of the population explosion.

Experience shows that the dire news about the population bomb, even in the enlightened world, is never allowed to spread far: here logic will dim and judgment stray in an imbalanced battle between optimism and realism. Optimism, that most wretched of all human characteristics, successfully projects the gravity of the population issue both forward in time and geographically away from home, to foreign lands.

For as long as I have actively been following demographic diagrams — say, forty-five years — population growth has been seen as a critical threat. It was then claimed that the Earth was barely able to cope with the population it had, and that further growth would have been unsustainable. This law of forward projection is generally still valid today. But what is really the case? Already millennia ago, man had caused irreparable damage in limited areas of the globe: where density in population had exceeded all boundaries, humans depleted green land and altered the biosphere by creating permanent deserts and semi-deserts. The most shocking and irrecoverable loss caused to the biosphere is the number of species that have become extinct: extinction, which centuries ago occurred at a natural pace, began spiralling out of control a few decades ago.

What is truly significant, however, is the fact that severe damage to the natural systems of the air, sea, and soil was first wrought when there were around two to three billion people on Earth who had significantly lower standards of living and represented far less of a burden for nature. It has been suggested that we are only still in existence because the chemistry and physics of the Earth react, change and absorb shocks rather rigidly: because they are slow to get going and slow in coming to a halt. The idea that the Earth could permanently bear the current burden of five billion people without a dramatic change such as the abandonment of the whole Western culture and way of life, is purely absurd: the faith a child or animal might have in the future. Just as it is certain that all fallouts always originate from somewhere other than one's own country, similarly any government, and the sophisticated people they lead, would claim that there is no overpopulation problem in their own country. Well, there are still two partial exceptions, China and India: the leaders and enlightened minorities of these countries admit that even their own populations are too large. China and India, however, are only exceptions: countries that, thanks to their ancient cultural traditions, are ahead of the majority of savages that inhabit the Earth.

A Refresher Course in the State of the World

The Reality of the Population Explosion

A while ago the president of the Finnish Centre for Statistics visited me, wishing to hear how a man could endure being aware of the aspects of global collapse. The president said that he had tried to avoid the inevitable conclusions in order to keep his peace of mind, but was afraid, being close to retirement, that without the bustle of work and meetings he would be left with too much spare time to think. The two of us had a very serious and personal discussion about depression and its causes, about cures and self-treatment, amidst the racket of a ceremonial reception. We agreed that indicators that the end of the world is approaching — matters I will soon be discussing — certainly belong not to the sphere of personal opinions or worldviews, but to that of statistics, facts, and arithmetics.

So, what do statistics tell us about how the population explosion will be divided geographically? For the next few decades — which is probably to say, for the remaining time allotted to humanity — the bulk of this explosion will take place in industrial countries: Europe, Japan, and the United States. These countries are highly populated and, most importantly, their citizens' lifestyles are environmentally very burdensome. According to the most positive estimates, individual energy consumption in these countries exceeds that found among the majority of non-industrialised humanity even by a factor of twenty. Of course, crucial indicators such as the use of food and the depletion of forests do not show such vast differences. Naturally, the threat posed by non-industrialised populations is increasing all the time, since they are growing at a significantly faster rate than the populations of industrial countries. But if the current disparity in living standards endures, these countries will only become major players in the destruction of ecosystems in a faraway future.

When making certain estimates, it is also important to bear in mind that a major share of the use of natural resources and perpetration of environmental damage in non-industrialised countries is in fact caused by industrial nations. This point is always brought up when discussing world economy or the Third World. By contrast, what is generally ignored is the fact that immigrants from poor nations, whose birth rate is at par with that of their cultures of origin (if not higher, thanks to the social care they now benefit from), dramatically increase the wealthy population and environmental burden of industrial countries. As Matti Kuusi once put it, there is no use counting the immigrants at the border: one should wait a while and look in their nurseries.

A Refresher Course in the State of the World

The Value-Basis of Protecting Life

From a philosophical perspective, the doctrine of the protection of life — or its basic message, which I have personally promoted for decades — is neither that ingenious nor new. In short, the doctrine is based on the notion of enabling the survival of life in order for future possibilities to be open. As such, the doctrine says nothing about the quality of life. Still, it is the most important of all messages: it represents the highest objective, all other goals being subordinate to it. Even the most beautiful of mankind's aspirations loses its meaning if there is no life or humanity on the planet. The protection of life is thus justified at whatever cost.

The guardian of life, however, does not derive all of his power and assuredness from reasoning and logic. The basic principle of life protection, the conservation of the Earth's life as a lush and diverse whole, is also perceived as being sacred: as something incomparably holier than anything man might regard as such (not that in this age of cynical despair much holiness is left!).

The diversity and richness of life is contingent on both a maximum number of species and of specimens — meaning that the greatest number of ecological niches might be populated as fully as possible. The number of species, however, is by far more important than that of individuals, particularly when the two clash: when a given species immoderately discriminates or even destroys another. The latest estimates regarding the current pace of extinctions caused by man suggest that 525,000 species of animals, plants and fungi are becoming extinct every year: one species per minute. The protector of life believes that man has no special right to act in such a way; that this is a horrendous sowing of death, in comparison to which the merits of humanity, its life and culture, are irrelevant.

One thing is certain: there will be no need to struggle to discover our place in relation to the natural world or to appreciate the right to life of man and other forms of life on the planet: for in the end, ecocatastrophes will prove perilous for humans as well. Even though humans will first destroy vast numbers of animals, plants and fungi, they will inevitably be crushed by the avalanche they have caused: humanity will ultimately consume itself. Even the most narrow-minded humanist, in the name of reason, must agree to the conclusions of a protector of life.

The Doctors' Burden of Sin

It is often stated that the greatest culprits of our drifting to the brink of destruction are engineers and doctors, who together have made the human flood possible. But what does a more specific analysis tell us about

A Refresher Course in the State of the World

the doctor's work and its justification? The matter is a two-fold one. Maintaining the population as physically and mentally healthy as possible is certainly a goal that withstands criticism. If mankind itself, this gang intent on robbing the biosphere, this species of tyrants, is sick, wretched and full of suffering, the sensibility of protecting its life might be questionable.

Anyhow, the most remarkable achievement of the medical profession has been the prolonging of human life. Given the present condition of the world, I have reached the conclusion that anything that even remotely fosters progress is to be seen as negative, for it pushes us further towards complete ruin. In a world where the keywords for salvation are stop, return and regress, old people are extremely valuable. Man has been formed in such a way that the little wisdom that certain individuals possess tends to gradually accumulate in the course of the years. One of the insanities perpetuated by the frenzied times we are living in is the trivialisation and marginalisation of the elderly. Only a small percentage of elderly people suffers from illnesses leading to dementia: most people are certainly wiser at the age of ninety than they are at that of eighty-nine. The young human being will always be an unripe fruit and crude specimen: both wisdom and sense of responsibility tend to develop in one's old age (if they were ever there in the first place, that is), while irrelevancies fade away. If the minimum age requirement for all the decision makers of mankind were, say, eighty, much would already have been achieved. Many harmful delusions would have been avoided, and destruction would now be advancing at a far slower pace.

Much of the positive work carried out by doctors, therefore, has been diverted by the miserable youth-worshipping Zeitgeist. It has ultimately been ruined, however, by doctors' stance on population growth, birth-rates and child mortality – to the foetus and child. Due to its key role, the medical profession should always have exercised a superior authority despite its being a tool of society: to a large extent, it could have determined the demographic policy.

Now, however, the medical profession is adopting no common strategy: as such, it can easily be divided into the 'good' and 'bad'. On the one hand, doctors can prolong the life of a wise old man with surgery and cardiovascular interventions; on the other, doctors are engaging in irrational and extremely destructive behaviour to save five month-old premature infants, regardless of the cost – that is, the cost in natural resources. As a side note, the cost of medical care can be seen to touch the conscience of all doctors alike. Certainly, the pills, intrauterine devices and condoms developed by medicine deserve our praise. But a huge burden of sin falls on the shoulders of a share of paediatricians and gynaecologists – and, by extension, the whole medical profession. The deep

A Refresher Course in the State of the World

drop that has been achieved in infant mortality alone should be deeply distressing to a biologist. Besides, every step forward in the pharmaceutical industry or national health system should at the very least have been accompanied by an effective programme of education with regard to contraception and family planning. Only as the leaders of a firm policy of population control could doctors have been acclaimed as the benefactor of mankind.

Tabula Rasa: a Clean Slate

Western culture has brought humanity to a state that has been described in various ways. We are living in the eleventh hour, at the edge of the abyss, on the verge of extinction, two minutes to midnight. One expression may be more eloquent than another, but unfortunately all are equally true. Most people take no stand: they either live their lives romping about like before, or drain even more material resources just in case these might run out. Even among the thinking minority many surrender: they simply give up, as if nothing could be done. This, I believe, is a coherent and realistic assessment of the situation.

Then there is this policy of fiddling: recycling, filters, catalytic converters, solar panels, electric cars... These aimless and misguided actions can be illustrated with the familiar metaphor of the leaking boat, which is tearing along two seams while the third is being sealed. People sink almost to the level of idiots when discussing the birth rates of developing countries: they argue that standards of living and education must be improved the Western way, like the condition of women, so that after five generations — a long time for man — birth rates may eventually halve and the pro-capita burden on nature increase twenty fold. These “environmentalists” are pretending to aim for the same goals as the protector of life, but they cannot grasp what even quitters have realised: how low Western culture has sunk. Its societal systems, with all their structures and legislations, have been directed towards the one objective of economic growth and global collapse: nothing in these systems is worth improving. The most stubborn believe that the boat of junk we are living in could after all be made waterproof by developing an entirely fibreglass canvas. Too bad the boat is worthless for sea travel to begin with: it will sink as soon as it is hit by the first waves. As a matter of fact, the boat will sink while still moored in the harbour, because it has been loaded full of rocks. If one seriously begins to ponder what kind of world might survive, he will soon realise that a tabula rasa is what is needed. We almost need to start from Adam and Eve again.

A Refresher Course in the State of the World

The Protection of Life and Humanism

I am particularly interested in humanist thinkers who have reached conclusions similar to those contemplated in biology with the doctrine of survival. Among Finns, Georg Henrik von Wright — along with Matti Kuusi — is the most notable thinker seriously to consider — albeit in cautious academic tones — the possibility that humanity might become extinct. In his public statements, von Wright, like Kuusi, puts his prestige at stake in an exemplary manner. I will now quote von Wright's personal letter of gratitude for a book I wrote two years ago: *Johdatus 1990-luvun ajatteluun* [*An Introduction to the Thought of the 1990s*]. Von Wright was struck by the metaphor I used in the opening section of this book:

What to do when a ship carrying a hundred passengers has suddenly capsized, and only one lifeboat is available for ten people in the water? When the lifeboat is full, those who hate life will try to pull more people onto it, thus drowning everyone. Those who love and respect life will instead grab an axe and sever the hands clinging to the gunwales.

I should point out that a personal letter may be the product of a momentary state of mind and is not meant to be turned into a public lecture. Nevertheless, the honest confusion of such lines should have a heuristic value. Von Wright writes:

As you may know, I hold you in high regard as a thinker. At least in this country, you are the most lucid and profound among truthful prophets. As to what practical conclusions to draw from realising the truth, this is a different matter. Perhaps I too would strike at the hands that are clinging to the boat, but hardly for the love of life: rather, out of fear, in an attempt to save my own skin. Perhaps, it would be a better solution for all of us to drown, a final proof of the human species' inability to survive.

The above letter proves how difficult it is for a great humanist to let go of the overemphasis on the value of human life. I think I can sense some fear between the lines, something I have previously encountered when discussing the issue of overpopulation. I call it the fear of breaking loose and of disgrace. People fear that if any actions are taken to limit the world population, the situation will spiral out of control and human life will somehow lose its value forever. It is also thought that after similar actions mankind will forever lose its sense of self-worth by sullyng its ethical values, and will be unable to restore any norms and conventions. This fear endures, regardless of how elegantly the reduction of the

A Refresher Course in the State of the World

population might take place, were it even to occur more artlessly and discreetly than with the German gas chambers during World War II — possibly by limited nuclear strikes or through bacteriological and chemical attacks against the great inhabited centres of the globe (attacks carried out either by some trans-national body like the UN or by some small group equipped with sophisticated technology and bearing responsibility for the whole world).

In the light of human history, I find this fear to derive from an obvious misconception. Whenever wars and mutual slaughter have ceased, societies have returned to their ordinary routine after only a brief period of transition. The massive depopulation operations of Stalin and Hitler, even the most gruesome tortures perpetrated by secret police forces, when described to the world audience in detail, have not overturned our ethical norms. It is often the case, in these scenarios, that in the block next to the secret police people are writing poetry, philosophising or helping their elderly neighbour.

Our age has witnessed the gas chambers and many other atrocities. On a global scale, the main problem is not the inflation of human life, but its ever-increasing, mindless over-valuation. Emphasis on the inalienable right to life of foetuses, premature infants and the brain-dead has become a kind of collective mental illness. The same phenomenon can be observed in the absurd history of capital punishment: when there were five million people on Earth, it was a self-evident fact that the death sentence might be enforced upon the most twisted members of the human community. Now that there are five billion people, one society after another is shirking away from the execution of even the most diabolical criminals. Amnesty International bitterly complains about the few countries that still endorse capital punishment. Unrelentingly, new means of rescue are being developed, so that helicopters might be able to fish out every raving mad fisherman who has ventured into a storm with a boat made of bark, thus salvaging another unique and irreplaceable individual from the embrace of the waves. The mind boggles.

In themselves, legalising euthanasia, re-instating capital punishment and abolishing overzealous rescue services would not have any significant impact on the population growth. Yet, as a matter of principle, these actions would be extremely important. As long as distorted practices prevail, an insane respect towards human life will reign: thus, even the possibility of a solution to the population explosion will be lost, and all life-boats will sink into the depths of the sea.

A Refresher Course in the State of the World

Unless Man Grows Humble...

It is somewhat peculiar that so few thinkers have questioned the philosophical foundations of our culture. Most of those who try to observe the world receive a bad shock, after which they do their best to maintain a sense of solidarity with their own species, and values like human rights, individual freedom, equality and democracy. These people refuse to acknowledge that the world has not gone to ruin regardless of them, but because of them. The old saying, that thinking is unavoidably dependent on values and very rarely genuinely free, fits this case perfectly. It should be obvious, logically speaking, that the underlying values of a society ought to be questioned, when such a society is headed to its doom.

In this respect, I find myself to be an exception among contemporary thinkers. It is not difficult for me to envisage man returning to his place in a harmonious biocoenosis. Might this be due to a greater clarity on my part regarding the notion of man? In my eyes, humanity is an infinitely grand species: I too fight for its survival. Yet, I believe that human brilliance manifests itself only in flashes, among rare individuals. For this reason, humanity as a whole is enormously destructive: the creation of something as devastating as Western culture, which is now allowed to spread throughout the world, offers sufficient proof of this fact.

I find it almost inconceivable that, despite all contrary evidence, an intelligent individual might still have faith in man and the majority, and keep banging his head against the wall. Why won't such a person admit that the survival of man — when nature can take no more — is possible only when the discipline, prohibition, enforcement and oppression meted out by another clear-sighted human prevents him from indulging in his destructive impulses and committing suicide? How can such a person justify democracy? Does he not see that unless man, unless all of Western culture, grows humble and takes a deep bow of submission, it will assuredly ransack the whole Earth and strip it to the bone, no matter how it might manage to change some chemicals into others or switch to alternative sources of energy? How can such a person not perceive that if we maintain man's rule over nature and preserve the value of human life as it is conceived in Western nations, what remains is but a straight path leading to the pothole of extinction? How can anyone be so crazy as to think that all human life has the same value and all humans the same morality, regardless of numbers? It is clear to me that every time a new child is born, the value of each human on the Earth slightly decreases. It is obvious to me that human morality during the population explosion is wholly unlike that adopted when in the beginning man was a sparse and noble species.

A Refresher Course in the State of the World

A Protector of Life is Forced to Compromise

Harsh reality suggests that the thoughts of neither the public nor decision makers in Western countries come even close to addressing the aforementioned problems, which is to say: to reducing the present population, at least by curtailing its rights. The little debate we are capable of only concerns the basic level of birth control.

In the furthest outposts of ignorance, people have started pondering about the rights of a newly inseminated ova or foetuses. I am so dumb-struck by such an idea that I cannot even enter the debate on such matters: as a protector of life, I simply won't retreat all the way back to the last defensive trench — I'd rather surrender. At gunpoint, perhaps, I could be persuaded to discuss restrictions on childbearing. "If I can't get a life-jacket, then maybe a life-vest, and if not a vest, then maybe at least a cap." In an emergency, the guardian of life parts with demanding an end to extinction, and explores the possibility of delaying it by prolonging life. Everything is bound by time, even though the time estimated until the diminishment of the sun's energy and the inevitable quenching of the globe's biosphere, ten billion years, is difficult to differentiate from the idea of eternity.

The perspective of the protector of life with regard to birth control is simple enough: given the present condition of the world, under no circumstance can procreation be a family decision in the hands of parents or individuals. Of all the actions of man, procreation should most evidently be a matter regulated by society and, ultimately, a world council. How child quotas are to be divided among families and mothers should be a matter of family social policy. It may be that large families have to be supported as well; it is of paramount importance that we do not give in to the idea of equality, which will never bring anything about but misfortune. The average quota of children, anyhow, must certainly — everywhere and for some decades at least — be limited to one child per fertile woman. If the human population across the globe then settles to a suitable size, it will be possible to return to a quota of around two children per couple.

Other unequivocal ideas include making free contraceptives and abortion available. The fine-tuning of the system would decide whether the child quota would be controlled by forced abortions — which would still enable the conception of new children in case of the first one's death — or forced sterilisation of either or both sexes. It will be advisable to make controls as stringent as possible, in order to avoid killing babies already born — although infanticide has commonly been practiced even in recent times.

A Refresher Course in the State of the World

All this, perhaps, is but mere speculation. However, I would like to apologise again to my audience: I am afraid I forgot that man can neither limit the birth rate nor reduce overpopulation — and ecocatastrophe is around the bend. Man, with his technical talents, is an ingenious creature, yet a mindless animal in all other respects: driftwood in the merciless and capricious stream of evolution. Few realise how many individuals man is treading upon. We are heading for extinction, as one species among millions of others that have become extinct.

Or are we? Do we still have one chance in a million? Might the enlightened minority hold a joker up its sleeve after all? Will there be enough individuals to prove that man can have free will? Individuals who fully commit themselves to opposing the grey majority, while simultaneously fighting for its survival? Individuals with a powerful heart ruled by crystalline logic?

Can We Survive? A Model for a Controlled Future

Can We Survive? A Model for a Controlled Future (1999)

Mankind, the human species, seems to have reached its end. We are in the midst of ecocatastrophes, in the eye of the storm. No natural scientist or serious futurologist believes we have more than thirty or — at the most — one hundred years left. Researchers hired by the fanatical business world spew out their data for money and contradict the views of true scientists. The human language makes it possible to formulate any twisted claim to be formulated: it is easy to say that the sun rises in the west and sets in the east.

Plenty of severe warnings can be found: individual biologists, population scientists, philosophers and thinkers have issued terrifying warnings to the public; a hundred Nobel laureates have signed a declaration calling for an immediate end to economic growth.

The most wretched of all current trends is of course the mass extinction of organisms, which has been escalating for decades and is still increasing in magnitude.

While doomsday omens can be said to be old news, in the present century they are based on something other than intuition or revelation: modern forecasts are founded on scientific facts, data, calculations and figures. This kind of news is no more than a century old.

The point, however, is that neither mankind nor the nation — I am here referring to Finland — are reacting to this information in any way at all. In the media, news about the impending end of the world is drowned amid thousands of other news items. Even though news concerning the gradual suppression of life is really the only significant news, which all other human aspirations are subordinate to, it never really makes the headlines.

The most striking titles and the most enormous amount of space is reserved for unbelievably uninteresting nonsense: Diana, Clinton, Sundqvist, Vennamo and so on. Political and business leaders speak and act as if there were no threat to life. A man aware of what is actually happening wouldn't know whether to compare the behaviour of a minister, president or general manager to that of a lunatic or an ignorant

Can We Survive? A Model for a Controlled Future

brat. When asked about the current endangerment of life, ordinary citizens will stutter in bewilderment. All signs of collective suicide are perceptible in our society.

Many are the ecocatastrophes that threaten land, water and sky, or are already occurring, and which amplify one another. I will here mention only one among many possible examples: climate change, a phenomenon that is unfolding before our very eyes at an even faster rate than what was predicted.

To put it briefly, what follows the warming of the climate is the submerging of wide, fertile coastal plains under the sea level, and, most importantly, the destruction of the essential cultivated areas around the world because of drought. Then again, in the north — in places like Finland — harvests seem to be increasing, although the lack of direct sunlight may balance the rise in temperature. Yet, the massive increase in rainfall will prevent harvests from being gathered either mechanically or by hand. According to a different scenario, the Gulf Stream will change its course, and Finland, along with its neighbouring regions, will turn into tundra. No other scenarios than these two are possible.

The supposed awakening of governments to the reality of climate change has produced shows like the conferences of Rio and Kyoto. Despite all the buffoonery, business-making and cynical swindling, climate researchers and ecologists have calculated that to actually stop climate change it would be necessary to cut emissions by ten percent. Other plans to end various ecocatastrophes also yield similar estimates. Naturally, overall consumption in industrial countries would have to be reduced by over ninety percent.

All these programmes, figures and percentages are remodelled in such a way as not to call for the most essential thing, an end to the extinction of organisms, by forcing the human species to retire from the domineering position it has acquired. Such a step would mean a return to the so-called natural frequency of extinctions, which is one thousand times smaller than the present one (or something close to that — I cannot recall the exact figure). Undoubtedly, human population would also have to be reduced to about ten percent of what it is now.

In drafting a few guidelines, I will here limit myself to a less ambitious programme that only aims at the preservation of mankind and its few companion species. I will provide a brief outline of what changes in society would really be needed to stop climate change.

It is possible that even this more limited objective would require lightening the intolerable burden of human population — although the present population would in this case not be reduced to one tenth, but only stripped of around two billion people. The resulting figure would roughly be equivalent to that of the world population just over half a century ago,

Can We Survive? A Model for a Controlled Future

when the great ecosystems of the world began to waver and collapse. A reasonable hypothesis can be formulated: that the globe could handle a demographic load of such a size, provided that the levels of material consumption do not rise to what they are today.

In my presentation, I will be even less ambitious: I wish to begin by outlining a reckless attempt to lessen the present demographic strain by the sole means of controlling human birth-rates. This policy is deeply humane – and, precisely for this reason, probably too soft. Whatever the case, what is required is a radical turn, under the guidance of reason, away from the stray path of Western culture.

I will proceed in such a way as to first suggest some practical solutions, and only at the end address philosophical and psychological questions.

A Demographic Plan

The cornerstone of any population platform is the dismantling of the freedom of procreation, the most senseless form of individual freedom. Puzzlingly, this policy has only been implemented so far in the country with the oldest culture of the world: China.

Procreation should be licensed: on average, every woman should be allowed to bear only one child. This policy should be followed for several generations, until a sustainable population is reached. The quality of the population must in all cases be taken into account as well: procreation licences would be denied to homes deemed genetically inadequate or unsuitable for the raising of children, whereas families capable of providing a stimulating environment for children would be granted several licences.

Various means of contraception and abortion would be made freely available anywhere.

The opulent excess of fat, even obesity, which is widespread in our present society, would be decreased by regulating, controlling and normalising the nutrition, vitamin and hormonal levels of adolescents. A drop of twenty centimetres in the average height could realistically be achieved; the same goes for a drop of twenty kilos in the average weight. This is a very important step to be taken – and among one of the most humane ones – in order to reduce the demographic burden.

Energy

Fossil fuels, including peat, will be abolished on the first day the programme is implemented. Even the production and distribution of electricity – the harnessing of which should probably be seen as a great misfortune in the history of mankind – will largely be brought to an end.

Can We Survive? A Model for a Controlled Future

Electricity may continue to be used as a source of energy by the media and to illuminate rooms (strict quotas would have to be set in this case); but street lights and other external lighting would be banned. Households, as well as businesses, will have to switch to manual labour.

Firewood will be used in heating and its use will be tightly regulated. Fireplaces will be made as efficient as possible. Within walls, bodies will first be warmed by clothing rather than air.

The necessary electricity will be produced by wind power — yet with the awareness that the construction of wind power plants, with the transportation of resources it entails, and their use represent a considerable drawback in environmental terms.

Other power plants will be demolished. The worst kind of plants, energy dams, will be the first to go. Indeed, waterpower has caused the third great ecocatastrophe alongside the clearing of fields and the forest economy: the faltering of our whole marine economy. The new policy will restore our waters to their natural state.

The Collection of Carbon Dioxide

The only large-scale method of removing the colossal surplus of carbon that has already been released into the atmosphere is by absorbing it with vegetation: firstly with trees, then with bushes. In Finland the mean volume of living trees on growing forestland now amounts to 70 cubic metres per hectare. This figure will be increased to about 400 cubic metres, which corresponds to the natural density of forests. Additionally, a significant amount of carbon is stored in fallen trees: this increases the more north the woodland is and the slower the decomposition. Fallen wood also transfers a part of the carbon into peat, if the tree is left alone.

It will take about one hundred years to reach the suggested figure of 400 cubic metres. In the meanwhile, the forest industry will largely have to be shut down. Still, in order to deliver orders and announcements to the population, to maintain the media and literary culture (all of which must be preserved in order to sustain society), the production of paper will continue. Paper, however, will become the most strictly regulated of commodities: perhaps two percent of the current amount of paper will then be produced.

A remarkable obstacle to trees' absorption of carbon and a corresponding source of carbon emissions into the atmosphere will be the use of firewood, even when controlled as described. Firewood will be harvested from fast-growing deciduous trees in small, carefully outlined areas. For a long time we will survive by burning the waste wood of Suicidal Society.

Can We Survive? A Model for a Controlled Future

When binding carbon, there will be no room for forest fires: fire-fighting troops will be trained to carry out efficient actions on terrain devoid of forest roads.

An increase in woodland acreage will also be necessary. All wastelands, banks and fields that absorb little or no carbon will be forested. In different phases of the programme, the forest acreage will progressively be incremented in a multitude of ways.

Reforestation a significant portion of field acreage is the most notable step that will be taken. This will be made possible by replacing grain with mostly animal protein for nutrition. The resources of inland and coastal waters, vastly under-utilised in Suicidal Society, will be put to good use: annual profit will be reaped from all species of fish, including fish species that have been dubbed “junk fish” because of fashion whims or popular prejudice, although they serve equally well as food. The fish catch can sustainably be increased a hundred fold, so that it will be possible to replace a third or even half of the nutritional content of grain and other plant-food with first-class animal protein. A corresponding percentage of fields will be forested to contribute to the binding of carbon.

Hunting will also be rendered more effective, although it is a less profitable activity than fishing. Small mammals and highly prolific rodents — and perhaps invertebrate animals too — will be added to the list of game species. With detailed research, care will be taken to keep food chains intact and functional through both hunting and fishing: both activities will take account of the natural growth rate of species.

Agriculture

Farming will be organised in small units, while machines will be abolished and a major portion of the population will be made to practise light agricultural work. Once methods of transport become limited, the population will have to disperse in order to live closer to raw materials and sources of sustenance: close to farming, fishing and gathering. Almost everyone else will have at least a plot of vegetables, and a garden with fruits and berries in the south. A comprehensive network of advisors will operate in order to secure sufficient harvests.

Depots, cleared of machines, and the inner road network of farms will either be added to the cultivated area or forested. Half a million horses will have to be reintroduced onto farms to perform heavy duties — even if this will mean that many hectares of land will be devoted to the production of fodder.

The collection, transportation and use of human and animal manure will be organised on a local basis.

Can We Survive? A Model for a Controlled Future

Greenhouses will operate — when at all — exclusively by solar energy during the warm season. Fresh vegetables, fruits and berries will be available only in their natural ripening seasons. Food will be preserved in each household — either by drying, souring or salting. Forest berries and mushrooms are of great nutritional importance because they provide valuable vitamins and minerals. The lingonberry will be preferred to other berries as it keeps for years, when turned into purée. On good berry years hundreds of millions of kilos of this berry will be gathered and stored safely for many years to come. The same applies to mushrooms in good years.

Finland will be more than self-sufficient in its food production: some quantities of food will be reserved for export. Research into plant cultivation — like that into fish and game economy — would be greatly subsidised in order to develop subspecies that withstand moisture.

Traffic

Traffic conditions will change radically. The main rule will be for people to live in their native areas and home districts. Services will be provided that are reachable on foot, by skiing, cycling, rowing and paddling. Public means of transport on roads and water will be available for long trips. The old system of guesthouses will be restored.

Private car and motorboat traffic will cease. The only road traffic will be that of public transport vehicles and a small number of cars that will be used to transport goods. Most heavy transport will operate via railroads and on water.

Since metal, plastic and rubber junk will be in little demand in the future, the majority of cars, household appliances and other metal and plastic waste will be pressed into solid blocks and transferred to the unproductive rocky grounds of junkyards; the first places to be filled will be mine shafts. Most of the road network will be cleared and reforested, starting from forest roads and those roads built near holiday resorts.

Foreign Relations

After all international trade agreements will have been revoked and all trade coalitions abandoned, foreign trade will drop to a minimum. What will mostly be imported will be metals not found in our country and salt, as the use of salt will rise sharply due to food preservation. After some decades, when railroad and bus equipment will probably cease functioning despite all attempts at repair, equipment and mechanical parts that cannot be manufactured domestically will probably have to be imported as well.

Can We Survive? A Model for a Controlled Future

Products of handicraft, woodwork and foodstuff such as fish and berries will be used as exchange currency.

Mass travel will end and will be replaced by hiking in one's home area. Only professional correspondents, negotiating officials, and individuals or delegations practising cultural exchanges will travel abroad. Ships will travel at sparse intervals to carry both these people and the mail. Most of the transport will be on open waters. Ships will not sail against the wind.

Foreign visas will be issues to hikers moving on foot and by bicycle. Presumably, they will survive on packed lunches and by working in the countries they visit. Customs will be able to inspect the backpacks and bags of these travellers without any hassle.

All air traffic will cease. Related equipment will be scrapped, while airfields and terminals will be reforested. Most ships, icebreakers and structures in most coastal harbours will be demolished, with the exception of what is left for inland traffic. Consideration will be given to preserve basic ice-breaking equipment, to be used in emergencies.

Industry and Wares

Industrial manufacturing will be subject to licensing: no product will be manufactured unless there is a buyer in real need of its use. In all cases, ecological balance will be a central factor in evaluating whether to issue a permit for industrial manufacture.

Most business enterprises will come to an end. Only a handful of large corporations will be maintained: for instance, those linked to the production of equipment used for public transportation, bicycles and paper. These industries will be in the hands of the state. Long-distance hauling will be avoided in the case of small production units and firms: many people will work in local handcrafting trades.

Only sturdy, well-built equipment will be used, which will last several generations. The mending and maintenance of objects will be central to society: the intentional abandonment of usable objects will be punished.

Construction

The construction of new buildings will cease. Once people dispense with electrical household appliances and excess furniture, more rooms will be available to inhabit. The number of currently uninhabited houses in rural areas would be sufficient to meet the needs of the population, provided a few repairs are made here and there. Most buildings in the suburbs will be demolished, along with construction sites, parking lots and streets, which will all be forested.

Can We Survive? A Model for a Controlled Future

A small number of public buildings will be left intact to be used as schools and conference halls or to host cultural events. Smaller gatherings will take place in private households. Sports will be practised in the open in the appropriate season.

Holiday resorts will be demolished and replaced by tents, as holidays will take place in the wilderness. The wooden parts of these demolished buildings, like all wooden material gathered from elsewhere, will be stored and protected from damage by moisture and decay, to be later employed as firewood, in such a way as to save living trees.

Education

The school system will be cherished as the most precious aspect of society. Foreign languages will be removed from the syllabus of elementary schools (and transferred to that of the more specialised schools for the training of future workers in the field of foreign relations); less mathematics will also be taught. The greatest emphasis will be placed on all-round education (natural sciences, history, Finnish), sports, arts and, most importantly, civil skills (which the adult population will also be taught). Throughout the year camp schools will be set up in the wilderness.

Civil skills include responsibility towards one's neighbour, nature and mankind; social skills, behavioural education and practical abilities. Every citizen will learn how to mend, patch, handle the most common tools, build axe shafts, file saws, gut fish and skin animals. The handling of food will be painstakingly taught: everyone will learn how to bone a fish in such a way that only the largest ribs are left and to use their teeth in mincing food in such a way that the skin, innards, fat and bone marrow will not be wasted.

Right from the start, the school system will root out all competition from society.

Universities will be maintained whatever their cost. However, as universities will be investing in spiritual capital, their buildings and tools will be modest. Basic research will focus on the humanities, philosophy and natural sciences. Those fields of science and research requiring the most expensive equipment will be removed. Applied sciences will concentrate on research and the fine-tuning of the new economy (the development of soft technology, repair of buildings, production and preservation of foodstuffs). Commercial sciences will come to an end as society will shift away from materialism and trade will be reduced to a minimum.

While art and music will be widely practised and taught, heavy or bulky equipment and buildings specifically devoted to the practice of the arts will be abolished. In the literary field, the ministry of education will

Can We Survive? A Model for a Controlled Future

grant permissions to print only fictional and non-fictional works of high quality: trashy novels will vanish. The inherited capital of public and private libraries will be carefully managed. Afternoon newspapers and pulp literature will be abolished. The number of pages in newspapers will be reduced by removing all advertising, making all announcements consist only of text, and banning the repetition of any item of news in the same publication. News, events and trends will still be thoroughly investigated.

The school system, like the whole of society, will be extremely prejudiced against technology. Suicidal Society has taught us that every new phase of technological advancement is more destructive than the previous one. It has also taught us that technology is never a servant, but always a master. Tested solutions will be kept for decades, preferably centuries. Discoveries unrelated to the repair or preservation of technology will not be allowed.

Law and Order

The people most responsible for the present economic growth and competition will be transferred to the mountains and highlands to be re-educated. To be employed for this purpose will mostly be ex-sanatoriums with a healthy climate located on pine ridges.

The supervising staff, whose function shall include the tasks and mandates of both educators and police officers, shall be purposefully trained to have a clear sense of direction and to be goal oriented. Enough staff will be found locally throughout the country, both in uniform and civilian clothing.

Property crimes will be punished harshly. Sentences will generally become harder.

From an economic perspective, society would not be able to endure the health damage and disruptions wreaked by drugs. Hence, society will forbid the consumption of drugs, including tobacco. Through pricing, the consumption of alcohol will be limited to only the largest festivities. With the population adequately under control, no home distilling will take place. Borders will be closed to prevent smuggling.

Subsistence Economy

Subsistence economy will penetrate the whole of society. Most commodities will be rationed: rationed foodstuffs will be allotted according to the age, body build and profession of each citizen. In such a way, even the bulkiest performers of heavy work will be guaranteed sufficient nutrition; but then again, obesity will be unknown. On the other hand, domestic cultivation and gathering of food will not be regulated. Attempts

Can We Survive? A Model for a Controlled Future

will be made to avoid any wastage of food during the phases of transport, distribution and consumption. Not a crust of bread will be wasted.

The hysteria about freshness and hygiene that has caused such waste and frantic traffic will come to an end. From childhood, citizens will be made to develop immunity to the most common strains of bacteria (such as salmonella). In other ways too, the medical science will leave the path of Pasteur to embrace practices more in accordance with Darwin's teaching.

Money

Monetary transactions not aimed at immediate material acquisition will come to an end. Stock markets will be shut down; investments will stop.

The only function of banks will be to store currency, allow small-scale withdrawals and lend money. Payments will be made face-to-face, as automated systems of money transferral will only be seen in museums.

Information Technology

When human life and society will have made their way back from their most ghastly odyssey yet, from virtual reality to concrete, material reality, we will do our best to move all information technology into the trash bin of history. It might be the case, however, that the present bubble will burst, and nothing will remain at the bottom of the bin.

A reader who is contently living in the absurd world of modern delusions may think that what has been presented above is only a form of humour — dark humour. The thought is not altogether absurd, for anguish may give birth to humour, for all we know.

The programme I have outlined is truly born of agony: agony and fear of collective death, the dread of extinction. This fear, however, does not result in dark humour, but in an absolutely serious plan. Hardly any of the points I have listed could be ignored in drafting a country's policy — provided different applications of these points will be sought in different societies — if our aim is that of preserving human life on Earth. The figures and ratios suggested, of course, must be verified.

The above programme is based on a number of assumptions: firstly, that faith in humanity is the greatest of all follies. If man knew what was good for him, would history be full of wretchedness, war, murder, oppression, torment and misery? Would mankind have driven itself to the brink of total destruction by following millions of false beacons?

The programme also assumes that very few — perhaps one in a thousand or a hundred thousand individuals — are capable of being first-class mechanics, trapeze artists or pilots; and that similarly only very few are

Can We Survive? A Model for a Controlled Future

capable of solving national and worldwide problems. Only rare individuals are capable of seeing the greater picture and ascertaining the causes and consequences of given phenomena.

At this moment in history, in this part of the globe, we are madly clinging to democracy and parliamentarianism, although we are all seeing that these are some of the most irrational and hopeless experiments of mankind. It is in democratic countries with a parliamentary system that world destruction, the sum of all ecocatastrophes, has reached its most advanced stage — and not by chance. The sole glimmer of hope lies in a centralised government and the tireless control of citizens.

I will stress this point yet again: the underlying error that is leading us astray is a political system based on indulgence. Our society and ways of life are based on what man desires rather than what is best for him. The two things — desire and necessity — are as far from one another as east and west.

In moving towards a conclusion, I wish to add a rather amusing observation. Besides guaranteeing its main goal, the preservation of life, the suggested model of society would also secure an incomparably better standard of living. What are the sweet, cherished traits of the modern world that man would lose? Record suicide rates, exhausting competition, unemployment, stress, job insecurity, alienation, desperation, the need for psychological medication, bodily decay, individual arrogance, quarrel, corruption, crime...

What would be left, then, would be: an endless spectrum of arts and hobbies (singing, music, dancing, painting, sculpture, books, games, plays, riddles, shows...); numerous museums; the study of history, local customs and dialects, genealogy, the countless pursuits related to biology; handcrafts and gardens; clear waters, virgin forests, marshlands and fells; seasons, trees, flowers, homes, private life... — in other words: a genuine life.

Why, then, is a strict central government needed? I have already referred to the shameful history of mankind. If ordinary individuals, the people, masses, are given the chance to choose, like magpies they will again and again go for the shiny things, leaping like butterflies into the flames. A government led by a few wise individuals is necessary to protect the people from itself.

Power

As the reader may surmise, I will leave open the question of how those few wise individuals might rise to power and how the programme for the preservation of life might be implemented: I simply do not know the an-

Can We Survive? A Model for a Controlled Future

swer. Will salvation come at the last moment, after massive catastrophes? (Is there anything left to save?) Or will this happen suddenly, without notice, through some collective flash, like the utterly unpredictable collapse of socialist systems? Or will it perhaps not come to pass at all? This is by far the most plausible scenario. Despite its horror, extinction does not strike the biologist as something exceptional, for it is an ever-present possibility.

What I wanted to emphasise is how distant the life of Western man, of Finns, is from a reasonable existence; how hopelessly deep we have sunk into the mire. I also wanted to outline what kind of options are available, what kind of debate should be articulated in society, and what kind of questions politicians should address, given the present state of the world. All other actions are nothing but a way of playing with fire, waiting to get burned.