

Ecologically Dangerous Patriotism

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A tragic aspect of world history in the last quarter-century has been the failure of the international conferences on climate change to promote any mitigation of it for the people who were children or were as yet unborn at the time of each conference. Political commentators like to blame powerful individuals and vested interests. They blame President George Bush for declaring in 1992 that “the American way of life is not negotiable”; they blame Republicans in the USA’s Supreme Court for awarding the presidential election of 2000 to his son (whereas the candidate preferred by the voters, Vice-President Al Gore, would have implemented a compromise which he himself had negotiated at Kyoto on how to address the problem internationally); they blame the fossil-fuel corporations and Fox News for preaching that the scientists’ allegation of climate change is a hoax; and so on. This article is about a deeper and less *ad-hominum* reason why governments have failed to do as much as they ought to have done to curb various dangerous kinds of current ecological degradation. The reason which we have in mind is that the nation state as a kind of institution came into existence at the same time (broadly speaking) as capitalism, and so it has been an historical role of nation-state government to render its citizens more productive per capita than people in other countries. Mr. Bush was not just promoting his family’s vested interest in oil wells. He was also applying a political corollary of a basic precept of classical economics: that it is about “wealth of nations”. The corollary is that each national government has a duty to promote the nation’s wealth, even in the face of competition from enterprise in other nations. Mr. Bush, patriotic leader of the 20th-century’s top dog, was serving notice that he would prohibit any compromise which might threaten that status for the USA.

The classical “wealth-of-the-nation” precept is characteristic of a stage of development in the history of economic and political institutions which must yield to a “welfare-of-humankind” precept if our young people and their children are to have a decent way of life. The next section of this essay will sketch out a panoramic view of four salient stages of that history and of some representative aspects of historical transitions between them. Then, after mentioning some features of 17th- and 18th-century economic theory which were to favour the flourishing of capitalism and of nation states, we will describe some aspects of that flourishing – and of some political and economic theories accompanying it – in the USA (which became during the 19th century the preeminent model of a nation state with a saliently growing economy) and in France, Britain and Germany. And finally we will, after calling attention to Gunnar Myrdal’s insight into a nationalist, neo-mercantile aspect of the welfare state, return to discussing (at some length) the late-20th and 21st-century ecologically dangerous trend which we have already mentioned and which is the occasion for writing this essay.

Four broad historical stages

(1) In the most primitive stage of human economic development, people would presumably get their food by hunting and gathering, and would produce quite rudimentary goods for their own consumption and to share with their companions; there would be as yet little or no commodification, i.e. little or nothing hunted, gathered or produced in order to barter or sell it. There might be a lot of mutual gift-giving, however. The following citation from an Indian historian and anthropologist explains the difference:

“The basic feature of primitive life in the stone age was a meagre and irregular supply of food, which could not be preserved for long. This means that it had to be shared on terms that involved no other obligation than reciprocal sharing at some future date. When the surplus first increased, the group as a whole would naturally ‘own’ it, and the exchange would be with some other group gathering perhaps some other special food.... [T]he mechanism of sharing was never a calculated transaction. The love of display, the potlach..., ceremonial feasts without number, and primitive generosity all play their part. There is no question of everyone having equal title to all produce, as some exponents of ‘primitive communism’ think.... Similarly for the exchange between groups, which is definitely not commercial barter. The exchange is of gifts, made voluntarily between partners in some definite relationship. No gift can be refused, but it implies an obligation to return the accepted equivalent in some other form, perhaps at some later date. No tally is kept.... Baskets, leather containers, pottery mark

stages in food preservation which ultimately led to barter, production of a surplus, and commodity production – in short to a new social organization.”¹

Before characterizing briefly that “new [kind of] social organization”, let us note that this pre-agricultural stage was by far the longest part of humankind’s existence – and indeed so much so that it may have had substantial sociobiological effects on human nature. The following citation is from a study of human reciprocity and its evolution:

“Our Late Pleistocene ancestors inhabited the large-mammal-rich African savannah and other environments in which cooperation in acquiring and sharing food yielded substantial benefits at relatively low cost. The slow [individual] human life-history with prolonged periods of dependency of the young also made the cooperation of non-kin in child rearing and provisioning beneficial. As a result, members of groups that sustained cooperative strategies for provisioning, child-rearing, sanctioning non-cooperators, defending against hostile neighbors, and truthfully sharing information had significant advantages over non-sharing groups....

“Our ancestors used their capacities to learn from one another and to transmit information to create distinctive social environments. The resulting institutional and cultural niches reduced the costs borne by altruistic co-operators.... Among these socially constructed environments, three were particularly important: group-structured populations with frequent and lethal intergroup competition, within-group leveling practices such as sharing food and information, and developmental institutions that internalized socially beneficial preferences.

“These culturally transmitted institutional environments created a social and biological niche favorable to the evolution of social preferences on which altruistic cooperation is based.”²

(2) In a somewhat more advanced stage, after the development of agriculture had rendered humans even more different economically and socially from the other higher animals (and more numerous than back in the Stone Age) but before the development of coinage and the establishment of states, people would produce not only for their own use and for sharing, but also for exchange of some kind or other. Towns and cities would emerge, extracting physical necessities from the countryside:

“Capacity to concentrate enough grain to support scores of thousands of city folk who did not raise their own food ... required ... a hinterland whose inhabitants were either compelled or induced to produce and part with a surplus of grain and other commodities.”³

And yet there would still be no government-issued coinage.

(3) States collecting taxes in cash and providing legal codes would characterize a further broad stage of economic and political development. But this could, for quite a while, happen without modern-type patriotism – without national anthems, for instance – and without national tariffs or other expressions of caution about international commercial arrangements. Very widespread commerce could flourish even though there would be as yet no capitalists investing in the development of productive techniques to be carried out by wage-labor. An historian of India and of China, taking into consideration the archeological findings of ancient Roman amphorae etc. in India, describes as follows the well-known existence of intercontinental trade some 2000 years ago, long before the rise of industrial capitalism and long before the human world could be regarded as a set of nation states competing with one another for advantages in trade:

“A pattern of east-west trade thus emerges. It is one in which the Indian ports served as entrepôts as well as termini and in which the voyage across the Arabian Sea was only one sector of a much more extensive network. Further information on this first global exchange, and on the vital role played in it by Indian shipping and Indian merchants, emerges from two very different sources: inscriptions in the great cave temples of the western Decan, and scattered archeological finds in south-east Asia....”⁴

1. Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay, 2nd edition, 1985, reissued several times later), pp.24-25.

2. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *A Cooperative Species: Human Reciprocity and its Evolution* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2011), pp.3 and 197.

3. William H. McNeill, *The Shape of European History* (New York, 1974), p.50.

4. John Keay, *India, A History* (revised edition, 2010), p.123. The analogous remarks in his *China, A History* (2009; pp.199 & 201) are as follows: “The Buddha had lived and taught in northern India around the fifth century BC, but not until 500 years later does a recognizable reference to him

Great temples are hallmarks of high culture which we can admire for its aesthetic and philosophical achievements. Yet the human population in those days is estimated to have been less than three percent of what it has now become (see Table 1, Column 2). There were wonderful cities and yet there was also plenty of good land beyond the horizon to be put under cultivation, plenty of fresh water flowing down from the watersheds for all of humankind, and plenty of places to dump safely the by-products – rubbish and heat – of civilized life and forget about them. This has now changed.

Table 1:⁵

Year (CE)	Human population (millions)	Monetary value of production (billions of 1990 international dollars)
1	226	105
1000	267	120
1500	438	248
1820	1,042	695
1913	1,791	2,733
1950	2,526	5,337
2003	6,279	40,913
projected (in 2007 ⁵) for 2030	8,175	96,580

(4) It has changed because of the enormous growth of production (see Table 1, Column 3) achieved in the most advanced stage so far: the capitalist/mercantile-nation-state stage enabling the human population to soar to eight or nine or maybe even more billions – whereby humankind is beginning nowadays to experience a “full world.”⁶

We see these four stages as broad general phenomena with various more or less extensive historical transitions between them.⁷ (And there have been some regressions.⁸) It is well known, for instance, that there were early versions of cash long before the establishment of state-issued “legal tender”:

“In pre-imperial China, money took the form of cowrie, both originals and – increasingly – bronze imitations, tortoise shells, weighed gold and (rarely) silver bars, and most notably – from at least 1000 BC onward – utensil money in the shape of spade blades and knives made of bronze.”⁹

surface in Chinese history.... That the main missionary drive came ... by way of the silk routes is certain. Trade with the west [i.e. with people living west of China] had not been diminished by the later Han’s retraction from the Western Regions. Moreover, archeology is positively eloquent in the matter, with a long trail of Buddhist sites, inscriptions, sculptures, documented hoards and paintings extending from north-west India round or through the western Himalaya and then from Parthia, Afghanistan and Sogdiana (Samarkand) to Xinjaing, Gansu and Luoyang. In the second half of the second century ...ten missionaries [are] known to have been operating in the Jin capital at Luoyang..... Buddhism and long-distance commerce went hand in hand. In India merchants had derived encouragement from the Buddhist disregard of caste strictures on the freedom of movement; in China the Confucian contempt for traders and commerce in general disposed the mercantile classes towards Buddhism as a responsible alternative.”

5. Data taken from Angus Maddison, *Contours of World History 1-2030 AD: Essays in Macro-Economic History* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), p.70.
6. See Herman E. Daly, “Economics in a Full World”, at http://sef.umd.edu/files/ScientificAmerican_Daly_05.pdf, and “From Empty-world Economics to Full-world Economics: Recognizing an Historical Turning Point in Economic Development”, at www.science.duq.edu/esm/unit2-1.html, and Jan Otto Andersson, “International Trade in a Full and Unequal World”, at www.lucsus.lu.se/Jan_Otto_Andersson_Paper.pdf.
7. See Jan Otto Andersson, “Capital and Nation-State: A Theoretical Perspective,” in *Development and Peace*, vol.2 (Autumn 1981), pp.238-254, for a more ample account in English what are here described as the three stages after the invention of commodities – or else (better) his *Den förbryllande nationalstaten: Två essäer till temat nationalstaten i världsekonomin* (Nordisk Sommaruniversitet, 1982). Andersson observed that the dominant neo-classical economic theorists have tended to postulate first a national economy which would ostensibly adjust itself, after becoming established, to trade with other nations, and that this is an unhistorical viewpoint – whereas theorists like Friedrich List, Gunnar Myrdal, François Perroux and Immanuel Wallerstein would first posit the existence of a world economy and then examine the role of the nation states in it. Joseph Schumpeter’s *History of Economic Analysis* (Oxford, 1955) says remarkably little about the issue of nation states in a world economy.
8. The term “medieval feudalism” when used in reference to the history of Western Europe can readily imply regression from a higher level of political and economic organization in the Roman Empire.
9. David Schaps, “The Invention of Coinage in Lydia, in India, and in China,” XIV International Economic History Congress (Helsinki 2006), p.5. David Graeber, citing this remark on p.220 of his *Debt*,^[1] *The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn 2011), comments:

“These were most often used between people who didn’t know each other very well. For tabulating debts between neighbors, with local vendors, or with anything having to do with the government, people appear to have employed a variety of credit instruments: later Chinese historians

But let us not venture here into a treatise on transitions; let us instead say enough about the mercantile-capitalist/nation-state stage of economic and political evolution – the one which we are living in and which has now become vexed by a threat of environmental catastrophes of one kind and another – to explain some of its characteristics and to show that it is not an inherently durable human condition.

Early modern economic theory promoting international economic competition

The founder of classical economics, Adam Smith, was patriotic, and so were the eminent 17th- and 18th-century French economists whose ideas he improved upon. Those French theorists were “mercantilists” or else “physiocrats.” The most powerful of the mercantilists was Louis XIV’s *contrôleur général des finances*, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, who believed that “abundance of money” (government-issued coinage) within a state “makes the difference in its grandeur and power”¹⁰ and who therefore had tariffs enacted to protect French industry against foreign imports. The following statements attributed to Colbert in an ostensibly historical account published in 1693 (he had died ten years earlier) may be taken as representing fairly well the gist of French mercantile patriotism in those days:

“The kingdom [of France] has generally everything within itself except for very few things; but it is not the same for the states which are its neighbors: they have neither wine nor wheat nor salt nor hemp nor fruit-brandy, and they must of necessity have recourse to us to get them.... It would therefore be to profit badly from the good which God has done to us, if we were to give it [to other nations in trade] for things which we could easily provide ourselves. If it must be that foreigners get [some of] our money, this must be only for that which [can] not come [from] within the kingdom.”¹¹

(Reluctance to import is not *per se* mercantilist; the definitive elements of “mercantilism” in a strict sense of the term are (1) a striving for the monetary value of exports to be greater than that of imports and (2) a belief that the more the difference, the better. In this essay, however, the terms “mercantilism” and (in reference to political economy) “mercantile” are sometimes used in a broader sense to include any form of international commercial competitiveness that is neither benign nor as vicious as imperialism.)

The most eminent of the physiocrats was Louis XV’s esteemed personal doctor, François Quesnay, who in a famous *tableau économique* (1758) compared the circulation of money in a national economy with the circulation of blood in the human body, thus treating the nation as an economic organism. (He thought agriculture was the only source of real wealth.) Adam Smith not only regarded him as “a very ingenious and profound author” (though criticizing him for “representing the class of artificers, manufacturers and merchants as altogether barren and unproductive”),¹² but also set out his (Smith’s) renowned concept of the beneficent “invisible hand” – guaranteeing good social results from selfish actions – in the course of arguing, in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) in a chapter entitled “Of Restraints upon the Importation from Foreign Countries of Such Goods as Can be Produced at Home,” that a cautious reluctance by selfish individuals to invest in foreign enterprises would promote everyone’s wealth within their own nation:

“Every individual is continually exerting himself to find out the most advantageous employment for whatever capital he can command. It is his own advantage, indeed, and not that of the society, which he has in view. But the study of his own advantage, naturally, or rather necessarily, leads him to prefer that employment which is most advantageous to the society.... By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry... he in-

claimed that the earliest of these were knotted strings, rather like the Inca *kipu* system, and then later, notched strips of wood or bamboo. As in Mesopotamia, these appear to have long predated writing.

“We don’t really know when the practice of lending at interest first reached China.... [L]ater Chinese legends about the origins of coinage ascribed the invention to emperors trying to relieve the [economic] effects of natural disasters....”

10. Jean-Baptiste Colbert, cited in Michel Vergé-Franceschi, *Colbert*, *La politique du bon sens* (Paris 2003), p.442.

11. “Le royaume a tout généralement en soi-même, si l’on excepte très peu de chose; mais il n’en est pas de même des États qui lui confinent: ils n’ont ni vin, ni blé, ni sel, ni chanvre, ni eau-de-vie, et il faut de toute nécessité qu’ils aient recours à nous pour en avoir. Ce serait donc profiter fort mal du bien que Dieu nous a fait, si nous le donnions pour des choses dont nous pouvons nous passer facilement. S’il faut que les étrangers aient notre argent, ce ne doit être que pour ce que ni vient pas dans le royaume.” Cited in Aimé Richard, *Colbert et le colbertisme* (Paris 1997), p.162, from *Testament politique de messire Jean-Baptiste Colbert* (The Hague 1693). Colbert’s own French was more elegant than this. Richard suggests that the book was written by Gatien de Courtilz de Sandras, an author of several semi-fictional historical accounts.

12. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776 and later editions), Book IV, Chapter 9, the 12th- and 10th-from-last paragraphs.

tends only his own security, and by directing that [domestic] industry in such a way that its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain; and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.”¹³

The USA, France, Britain and Germany developing as nation states and competing economically

Intensely felt patriotic ideals motivated the “Founding Fathers” of the USA. Three of them – Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson and Albert Gallatin – may be said to have laid the institutional groundwork for the USA to become the outstanding model, for most of the 20th century, of economic growth and prosperity.

Hamilton, after serving as General George Washington’s chief of staff during the war for political independence from Britain, was President Washington’s Secretary of the Treasury from 1789 to 1795 and saw to the establishment of various governmental institutions, including for instance a national bank, to make the USA successful in commerce and manufacture.¹⁴

The third president of the new nation, Thomas Jefferson, who had drafted the Declaration of Independence back in 1776, added more than two million square kilometers of land to it in the “Louisiana Purchase” of 1803.¹⁵ (France sold that vast treasure of natural capital to the USA in order to help pay the current expenses of a patriotically competitive war against England.) Albert Gallatin, Jefferson’s Secretary of the Treasury, advocated more *laissez faire* (governmental non-interference in business affairs) than Hamilton had, but retained nevertheless most of Hamilton’s fiscal apparatus and agreed with him that the federal government must encourage manufacture by lending money to domestic start-up enterprises. The following remarks written by Gallatin in 1810 illustrate the fact that American governmental patriotism meant providing the USA somehow with a decisive edge over other countries in international economic competition:

“[T]he progress of America has not been confined to the improvement of her agriculture, and the rapid formation of new settlements and States in the wilderness; but her citizens have extended their commerce through every part of the globe, and carry on with complete success even those branches [of ‘commerce’, i.e. of buying and selling] for which a [government-protected] monopoly had hitherto been considered essentially necessary.

“The same principle has characterized the introduction and progress of manufactures; and must ultimately give in that branch, as in all others, a decided superiority to the citizens of the United States over the inhabitants of countries oppressed by taxes, restrictions and monopolies.”¹⁶

Later in the 19th century came the government-supported construction of the transcontinental railways and the establishment of public schools providing a literate population employable in a flexible variety of wage-earning jobs (an essential feature of capitalism) – and then some American-invented technological utilities, such as the telephone and electric current, with great economic consequences. Instead of describing how government promoted the economic competitiveness of the nation by supporting the adoption of these techniques, let us note here that because vast amounts of land which could be put to productive agricultural use (the soil and the climate were superb in those days) were taken away from the native American “Indians,” and because so many immigrants arrived to cultivate that land or to work in the factories (mainly in the northeast in the 19th century), the USA set a great example of economic growth well before the 20th-century development of the assembly line for mass-production factories. Politicians in many countries today call for growth of Gross National Product (GNP) and consumption; the USA was economically all about such growth already in the 19th century.

Government policy in regard to international tariffs (tariffs between states within the USA were always forbidden) was a persistently important political issue. A basic fact about them is that if one nation sets them

13. *Op. cit.*, Book IV, Chapter 2, 4th and 9th paragraphs.

14. See <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch4s31.html> for the text of Hamilton's 1791 “Report on Manufactures”, outlining his views on economic policy, especially on trade.

15. In pointing this out, we don't mean to obscure the fact that leaders long before the 19th century had sought on many occasions to enlarge their territory and/or power and prestige. We only mean that Jefferson by means of the Louisiana Purchase enlarged the USA's territory vastly (making it fit to welcome millions of immigrants) in one stroke and without having to fight wars with European powers. (There remained only the war with Mexico and then the wars against resistant native American Indians.)

16. Albert Gallatin, “Report on Manufactures” (Washington 1810).

high, other nations are likely to retaliate tit for tat. In the 19th century there was political tension in the USA between (a) factory owners and workers favoring high tariffs so that their products (such as, in the early part of the century, textiles, candles and nails) could compete successfully against foreign manufactures and (b) plantation owners favoring low tariffs so that they could buy cheaper imported manufactured goods and their agricultural produce (cotton, tobacco) could readily sell in the international market. The ups and downs and the corresponding political disputes were too elaborate to be charted here, but a statement published in 1888 by William McKinley, who in due time went on to serve as president, may suffice to show – again – how readily nationalism could, with the historical development of factories and wage-earners, entail economic competition among nations:

“Free foreign trade admits the foreigner to equal privileges with our own citizens.... It gives our money, our manufactures, and our markets to other nations to the injury of our labor, our tradespeople, and our farmers. Protection [by tariffs] keeps money, markets, and manufactures at home for the benefit of our own people.”¹⁷

After World War II, representatives of the USA took a leading role in drafting the 1947 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) to ensure “substantial reduction of tariffs and other [international] trade barriers.” The reductions were declared to be “mutually advantageous” to all nations, but were in fact competitively advantageous at that time to the industrially advanced nation whose infrastructure and social fabric the war had damaged the least: the USA.

It is noteworthy that the French concept of the nation was influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s notion, set out in the 1750s and ‘60s, of a “general will” of the citizens,¹⁸ for the sake of whose benefit the government would thus presumably exist (whereas mere “subjects” would not be so privileged).¹⁹ A famous lecture given by Ernest Renan at the University of Paris in 1882 and entitled “What is a Nation?” included a mystically soulful elaboration of the concept of a national general will. Renan said that nations like modern France, England, Germany and Russia were “unknown in ancient times”:

“Egypt, China and ancient Chaldaea were by not, in any degree, nations.... There were no Egyptian citizens, any more than there are Chinese citizens.²⁰ Classical antiquity had its municipal republics [and] confederations of local republics [and its] empires; it hardly had ‘the nation’ in the sense that we understand it. Athens, Sparta, Sidon and Tyre were small centers of admirable patriotism, but this was [just a matter of] cities with relatively small territories. Gaul, Spain [and] Italy before their absorption into the Roman Empire were assemblies of hordes, often in league with one another but without central institutions or dynasties.²¹ Nor could the Syrian empire, the Persian empire [or] the empire of Alexander point to any mother country. There were never any Assyrian patriots, nor was the empire of Persia anything but a vast feudal estate....”²²

17. William McKinley, “A Protective Tariff,” in John Davis Long, ed., *The Republican Party: Its History, Principles and Policies* (New York 1888), p.247.

18. See apropos the next-to-last citation in this essay. As far as we know, the first time Rousseau made use of his concept of a “general will” was in an essay “on the form of the republic.” (The full title was *Du contrat social, ou essai sur la forme de la république*. A later version of the essay had a different subtitle.)

19. We are writing this essay in the modest hope of helping to arouse an *international* general will for humankind to minimize, insofar as possible, the environmental catastrophes of the 21st and 22nd centuries.

20. A typical privilege of citizens is to choose by vote the governmental CEO and legislators. (And yet Renan called 19th-century Russia a nation. It is problematic.)

21. According to Ernest Gellner, a recent student of nationalism, “Political units of the agrarian age vary enormously in size and kind. Roughly speaking, however, one can divide them into two species, or perhaps poles: local self-governing communities, and large empires. On the one hand, there are the city states, tribal segments, peasant communes and so forth, running their own affairs, with a fairly high political participation ratio... and with only moderate inequality; and on the other, large territories controlled by a concentration of force at one point. A very characteristic political form [at such a stage of social and technological development] is, of course, one which fuses these two principles; a central dominant authority co-exists with semi-autonomous local units.” In such “fusions,” the big unit would exact tribute of some kind from the smaller ones without providing very much governmental service.

22. Ernest Renan, *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?* (Paris 1882), pp.3-4: “...l’Égypte, la Chine, l’antique Chaldée, ne furent à aucun degré des nations. C’était des troupeaux menés par un fils du Soleil ou un fils du Ciel. Il n’y eut pas de citoyens égyptiens, pas plus qu’il n’y a de citoyens chinois. L’antiquité classique eut des républiques municipales, des confédérations de républiques locales, des empires; elle n’eut guère la nation au sens où nous la comprenons, Athènes, Sparte, Sidon, Tyr sont de petits centres d’admirable patriotisme; mais ce sont des cités avec une territoire relativement restreint. La Gaule, l’Espagne, l’Italie, avant leur absorption dans l’empire romain, étaient des ensembles de peuplades, souvent linguées entre elles, mais sans institutions centrales, sans dynasties. L’empire assyrien, l’empire persan, l’empire d’Alexandre ne furent pas non plus des patries. Il n’y eut jamais de patriotes assyriens; l’empire persan fut une vaste féodalité....”

He held that geography, race, language, religion, and community of interests could each be important, but none of them definitive, because:

“A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle.... Two things... make up this soul or spiritual principle. The one is the possession in common of a rich heritage of memories; the other is actual agreement – the desire to live together, the will to continue to give value to the joint heritage.”²³

Quesnai’s organisms thus equipped with souls might well, in the context of late-19th-century Social Darwinism, choose to compete against each other more drastically than by mere tariffs. And indeed Charles Darwin’s concept of “natural selection” by means of the “survival of the fittest” was, as he himself acknowledged, influenced by the notion of an overpopulated world as envisaged *ca.*1800 by Thomas Malthus.²⁴ The chapter entitled “Natural Selection” in Darwin’s treatise (1859) on the evolution of biological species includes the following remark:

“[A]s all organic beings are striving to seize on each place in the economy of nature, if any one species does not become modified and improved in a corresponding degree with its competitors, it will be exterminated.”

A notable aspect of Britain’s emergence as a very successful mercantile nation state was that her “Navigation Acts” in effect from 1651 until 1849 prohibited foreign merchants from participating in English domestic trade (and from Great Britain’s domestic trade after 1707). The nation aggressively sought colonies, and regulations were imposed allowing the colonies to produce only raw materials and to trade only with Britain. According to an eminent 20th-century English historian,

“Behind our [British] Industrial Revolution there lies this concentration on the colonial and ‘underdeveloped’ markets overseas, the successful battle to deny them to anyone else. We defeated them [the competing European colonizing nations] in the East: in 1766 we already outsold even the Dutch in the China trade. We defeated them in the West: by the early 1780s more than half of all slaves exported from Africa (and almost twice as many as those carried by the French) made profits for British slavers. And we did so for the benefit of *British* goods.”²⁵

But once Britain had become the most advanced nation in terms of industry, trade and finance, she shed her mercantilism and adopted a free-trade ideology. Her “Corn Laws” (imposing strong restrictions on the importation of foods) were repealed; other nations – for instance China in the Opium Wars of 1839-42 and 1856-60 – were obliged to accept free trade; and it was thus that in the middle of the 19th century a new world economic order, the “Pax Britannica,” was created. (One of its lingering hallmarks is a patriotic song, “The British Grenadiers,” which many of her citizens still today enjoy singing and which concludes with a couplet celebrating her (former) dominance of maritime trade: “Rule, Britannia! Britannia rules the waves. / Britons never, never, never shall be slaves!”²⁶) The ensuing wave of globalized free trade was successfully contested by the USA and Germany in the latter half of the 19th century,²⁷ and then, from the end of the century until the onset of World War I, by nationalist and protectionist forces in other parts of the world.

In Germany, the opening lines of a favorite patriotic song which became (in 1922) her national anthem were “*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, / Über alles in der Welt!*” (“Germany, Germany above all, / Above all in the world!”). These lines had originally, in the mid-19th century, referred to an imagined nation, senti-

23. *Op.cit.*, p.26: “Une nation est une âme, un principe spirituel. Deux choses constituent cette âme, cette principe spirituel.... L’une est la possession en commun d’un riche legs de souvenirs; l’autre est le consentement actuel, le désir de vivre ensemble, la volonté de continuer à faire valoir l’héritage qu’on a reçu indivis.” Renan observed diligently that “To forget and, I will venture to say, to get one’s history wrong, are essential factors in the making of a nation; and thus the advance of historical studies is often a danger to nationality.”

24. Malthus in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (London 1798) said that “The power of population is so superior to the power of the earth to produce subsistence for man that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race. The vices of mankind are active and able ministers of depopulation. ... [If] they fail in this war of extermination, [then] ... epidemics, pestilence, and plague [will do it, or else] famine.” (Chapter VII, next-to-last paragraph; see www.econlib.org/library/Malthus/malPop.html#.)

25. Eric John Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: An Economic History of Britain since 1750* (1968 and later editions), p.37

26. This is the late 19th- and 20th-century version of the lyrics. The original version (1740) had “Britannia, rule the waves!” The change was due to the fact that the British when they actually did “rule the waves” no longer needed an exhortation to do so.

27. See Note 29.

mentally holier than the numerous principalities and free cities inhabited by Germans.²⁸ A *Deutsche Bund* (German Confederation) had been formed after the collapse in 1815 of the “Holy Roman Empire”;²⁹ the *Zollverein*, a German customs union, was established in 1834; and the *Vereinsthaler*, a monetary currency valid throughout the union, was introduced in 1857. These were all steps towards the establishment in 1871 of a German nation state.

A leading theorist behind these developments was Friedrich List, the founder of “*Nationalökonomie*”. (This word is still today a standard term in German for “economics”.) List held that a German national economy and national state had to be established together in order to industrialize Germany and enable her to stand up to the leading European powers of his day, Great Britain and France. He had lived in the USA in the late 1820s and early ‘30s, and, influenced there by the writings of Hamilton and of the leading contemporary American champion of high tariffs, Henry Clay, had published in 1827 a pamphlet entitled “*Outlines of a New System of Political Economy*.”³⁰ His ideas were further elaborated in *Das nationale System der politischen Ökonomie* (1841),³¹ spelling out how nations might – *after* developing mature national economies – constitute a universal international confederation in which “the consideration of independence and power drops entirely away.”

“[Just] as the individual [person] can attain spiritual education, productive strength, security and well-being mainly through and in the nation, so also the civilizing of the human race is conceivable and possible only by means of the civilizing and educating of the nations. It is the task of the national economy to implement the economic ripening [*Erziehung*] of the nation and to prepare it to enter into the future universal society.”³²

For Germany this process would include the creation of a national market, a common currency and a unified state using its resources to create a national system of production and innovation. A *Zollverein* (customs union) was an essential first step whereby “the German nation attained one of the most important attributes of her nationality.”³³ The dispersed local and regional economies would gradually be united under the lead of a strong, interventionist state:

“The economy of the people builds up to a national economy, where the state or federation embraces a nation, summoned to independence and qualified to maintain endurance and political prestige by means of an ample population, possession of territory, civilization, richness and power. Then the people’s economy and the national economy become one and the same. They constitute, together with the fiscal economy of the state, the political economy of the nation.”³⁴

The data in Table 2 summarize in a nutshell the fact that the German *Reich* (established right after the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71) and the USA overtook Britain and France as the economically most dynamic nations before World War I.

28. The words were written in 1841. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deutschlandlied>.

29. Although it is beyond our scope to outline a comprehensive view of the history of nationalism, let us note that patriotism and the nation-state institution grew from a need for a basis of nationhood when nobility and royalty lost their political grip over populations. We thank our anonymous referee for pointing this out: When being personally committed or bound to King X or Earl Y was no longer psychologically sufficient to justify taxation, legislation etc., then the sense of being part of a nation took its place. (I am a part of my culture; my culture is a part of me.)

30. Alfred Marshall, the leading late-19th and early 20th-century British economist, appreciated List’s insight and the strength of his influence in the USA. The following is from Marshall’s *Principles of Economics* (1890 and later editions; we cite from the 8th edition, 1920), Appendix B, “The Growth of Economic Science” (see www.econlib.org/library/Marshall/marP57.html#Appendix%20B), the 39th and 40th paragraphs:

“While recognizing the leadership of Adam Smith, the German economists have been irritated more than any others by what they have regarded as the insular narrowness and self-confidence of the Ricardian school. In particular they resented the way in which the English advocates of free trade tacitly assumed that a proposition [i.e. that free trade is good] which had been established with regard to a manufacturing country, such as England was, could be carried over without modification to agricultural countries. The brilliant genius and national enthusiasm of List overthrew this presumption,,, [H]e showed that in Germany, and still more in America, many of its indirect effects were evil...

“American manufacturers adopted List as their advocate: and the beginning of his fame [i.e. in the Anglophone world], as well as of the systematic advocacy of protectionist doctrines in America, was in the wide circulation by them of a popular treatise which he wrote for them.”

31. A preliminary version was published as a series of letters to the Augsburg *Allgemeine Zeitung*.

32. Friedrich List, *Das nationale System der politischen Ökonomie*, ed Artur Sommer (*Volksausgabe auf Grund der Ausgabe letzter Hand und Randnotizen in Lists Handexemplar*, Basel and Tübingen, 1959), pp.175-79.

33. *Op.cit.*, p.176.

34. *Op.cit.*, p.190.

	GNP	Population
USA:	4.3%	2.1%
Germany:	2.9%	1.1%
Britain:	2.2%	0.9%
France:	1.6%	0.2%

Since then, several other countries have emulated Germany, using state power to advance from a semi-peripheral to a core status in the capitalist world economy. The first non-European nation to do so was Japan, which after the Meiji restoration (1868) adopted the slogan “Enrich the country, strengthen the military”. In the second half of the 20th century, Taiwan, China, and South Korea were able to adapt the European nation-state concept more gainfully than the majority of the less developed nations (such as in Latin American and Africa).

The neo-mercantilist aspect of the welfare state

In some of the most successful nation states, advancements in regard to civil rights, social security and internal regional policies have served as means for establishing a kind of “people’s home” in which the citizens can willingly affiliate themselves with the state and consent to high taxes and other national obligations. As the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal has noted, the social harmony characterizing the best-developed democratic countries is to a large extent a “created harmony”, and thus “The welfare state is nationalist.”³⁶ We may thus understand the economic strength of nation states as stemming from a “List-effect” and a “Myrdal-effect”. For List, the nation state should function as a warm greenhouse promoting the development of the national economy; for Myrdal, the modern welfare state, by using its fiscal resources to temper class conflicts within the nation, would strengthen the homeland vis-à-vis other states – and would thereby aggravate economic inequality between rich and poor countries.³⁷

One might be tempted to ask whether it was historically *inevitable* that nation states in the late 20th and early 21st century would have mercantile tendencies of such strength that George Bush would sabotage the conference at Rio in 1992, and then no top leader of any big nation would attend any such conference after that, and then a Chinese delegate to the “Rio+20 Conference” in 2012 would state that “In order to eradicate poverty [in China], to try to improve the living standards [in China], certainly we [in China] need to develop [further] our economy; so the [polluting industrial] emissions will need to grow for a period of time,”³⁸ and meanwhile such policies would be championed also by India’s most eminent turn-of-the-century economist (Amartya Sen) and by leading economists in the other nations seeking to “catch up” with the USA. There is no need, however, to know what may or may not have been inevitable. What really needs to be done is to accept some tough realities about the 21st century.

The one prompting us to write this article is that the kind of patriotism exemplified by the sabotaging of those conferences on climate change will almost certainly, during the course of this century, cause severe devastation in most of the countries whose representatives attended those conferences. It has become an insane kind of patriotism; a new kind is needed.

35. Data taken from Angus Maddison, *Economic Growth in the West: Comparative Experience in Europe and North America* (Twentieth Century Fund, 1964), p.28. (The GNP data for Germany and the USA refer actually to the period from 1871 to 1913.) An average rate of 2% would result in doubling the amount in 35 years. The remarkably low rate of population growth in France reflects a cultural fact: birth control became widespread there sooner than in the other countries.

36. Gunnar Myrdal, *Economic Theory and Underdeveloped Regions* (G. Duckworth, 1957), p.72. A recent book on an inherently related topic is Richard G. Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better* (London and New York, 2009).

37. Germany already under Bismarck enacted state-supported safety nets to keep the social peace, and thus enabled the nation to pursue economic development all the better.

38. Associated Press report, 28 November 2012; see <http://www.ktvu.com/news/news/arctic-sea-ice-larger-us-melted-year/nTHmh/> (a report entitled “Arctic sea ice larger than US melted this year”). See also Judith Shapiro, *Mao’s War Against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

And now?

Many 21st-century ecological problems call for substantial international cooperation to address them.³⁹ Let us offer here a few comments on how the kind of patriotism which motivated President Bush (apart from gratuitous greed, as his personal wealth was already beyond ten million dollars⁴⁰) might perhaps be overcome in the USA and in some other leading nations.

We can start by noting that the revolutionary Marxists' way of supposedly eliminating the evils of capitalism did not work out very well.⁴¹ On the one hand, an unfortunate aspect of violent revolutions is that if they succeed, they create, because they have been based on violence, new ways for the strong (in the new political order) to oppress the weak, who are likely still be the majority. On the other hand, Stalin upon attaining dictatorial power in the 1920s set the USSR on an intensive and brutal pursuit of industrial growth for "socialism in one country" (Marx had not envisaged such a thing) by way of state capitalism.⁴²

There may be a good deal of revolutionary upheaval in the 21st century (the "Arab Spring" may prove to have been just one wave of it) owing in part to the effect of some problematic aspects of 20th-century capitalism which this essay does not treat: for instance, a steep increase of economic inequality⁴³ (along with an increase in the capacities of the poor to know how much worse off they are than a large number of rich people⁴⁴). Whether those revolutions and the analogous protests stopping short of bloodshed will express direct concern about the severe ecological degradation – humankind's current relation to the Earth – is another matter. Such aspects of poverty as hunger and filth are immediately apparent, but ecological degradation is often insidious and more difficult to apprehend. The environmental disasters of the next few years will be due mainly to human agency in the past; action taken now cannot undo them but can only reduce somewhat the rate of ecological degradation. As environmental disasters become more frequent and more intense during the 21st century, political pressures from the bottom up,⁴⁵ from the scientifically educated part of the top down, and eventually also from the middle out – especially from the parents of young children – would be the most likely way of prompting humankind to discard the mercantile, more-is-better kind of patriotism which will have done so much to cause the disasters.

It has been said that a nation is only an "imagined community":

"It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each [individual member, there] lives the image of their communion."⁴⁶

39. A schematic outline of such problems is available at http://independent.academia.edu/MarkLindley/Teaching-Documents/Some_Looming_Scarcities_in_SpaceShip_Earth.

40. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_States_Presidents_by_net_worth.

41. For an interesting account of this, see Saral Sarkar, *Eco-socialism or eco-capitalism?* (Zed Books, 1999), Chapters 2-3.

42. Stalin explained this policy with remarks in the following vein (in a speech delivered on 19 November 1928 to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; see www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1928/11/19.htm): "In order to secure the final victory of socialism in our country, we must... overtake and outstrip... [the advanced capitalist countries] technically and economically.... This applies... also to upholding the independence of our country in the circumstances of the capitalist encirclement. The independence of our country cannot be upheld unless we have an adequate industrial basis for defence." He thus framed the issue patriotically in terms of a choice between catching up and losing out.

43. According to a cautious study of data and conclusions from a variety of relevant studies (Bob Sutcliffe, "A more or [a] less unequal world? World income distribution in the 20th century," Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2003; see http://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1041&context=peri_workingpapers), "The recent tendencies of global distribution are clearly difficult to establish and depend very much on the insufficiently discussed quality of different types of data. But the change in inequality over the last few decades is a comparatively trivial question compared with the actual degree of that inequality during all of the modern period. Inequality in the distribution of income in the world in the modern epoch as a whole is higher than in any previous period of world history; and it is greater than the inequality which exists in any single one of the world's component countries. Those are the important and undeniable facts."

44. See Mark Lindley, "Current links between globalization and violence," *Journal of American Science*, vol.3/1 (2007; German translation, "Globalisierung und Gewalt," in *Aufklärung und Kritik*, vol.28/2 (2007).

45. For a hopeful and historically well informed essay, see Joan Martinez-Alier, "Environmental Justice and Economic Degrowth: An Alliance between Two Movements," in the journal *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, vol.23/1 (March 2012), pp.51-73. This can be downloaded from www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10455752.2011.648839#.UfbXnm3N7Bg.

46. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (revised edition, London and Brooklyn 2006), p.6.

The same is true of all groupings larger than one's immediate family and community.⁴⁷ The largest imagined community of humans is all the current people and their proximate ancestors and descendants. If a future generation of that group is threatened, then so also are all the other imagined communities, including the nations. And yet to transform an ecologically devastating kind of patriotism into a sane kind of love for one's homeland is quite a challenge. It would entail taking seriously all of the following concerns expressed by three experts with quite different points of view. The first is the famous British economist John Maynard Keynes, writing in 1930:

"[T]he needs of human beings ... fall into two classes – those needs which are absolute in the sense that we feel them whatever the situation of our fellow human beings may be, and those which are relative in the sense that we feel them only if their satisfaction lifts us above, makes us feel superior to, our fellows. Needs of the second class, those which satisfy the desire for superiority, may ... be insatiable; for, the higher the general level, the higher still are they."⁴⁸

The second is an equally profound American economist, Kenneth Boulding, writing in the 1960s:

"Primitive men, and to a large extent also men of the early civilizations, imagined themselves to be living on a virtually illimitable plane. There was almost always somewhere beyond the known limits of human habitation, ... some place else to go when things got too difficult either by reason of the deterioration of the natural environment or a deterioration of the social structure in places where people happened to live.... The closed earth of the future requires economic principles which are somewhat different from those of the open earth of the past. ...I am tempted to call the open economy the 'cowboy economy,' the cowboy being symbolic of the illimitable plains [of the American midwest] and also associated with reckless, exploitative, romantic, and violent behavior, which is characteristic of open societies. The closed economy of the future might similarly be called the 'space-man' economy, in which the earth has become a single spaceship, without unlimited reservoirs of anything, either for extraction or for pollution, and in which, therefore, man must find his place in a cyclical ecological system which is capable of continuous reproduction of material form even though it cannot escape having inputs of energy. The difference between the two types of economy becomes most apparent in the attitude towards consumption."⁴⁹

The third is a notable anthropologist and philosopher, Ernest Gellner, writing in the first decade of this century:

"Mankind is irreversibly committed to industrial society, and therefore to a society whose productive system is based on cumulative science and technology. This alone can sustain anything like the present and anticipated number of [human] inhabitants of the planet, and give them a prospect of the kind of standard of living which man now takes for granted, or aspires to take for granted."⁵⁰

In the 20th century there was a widespread ideological belief in the feasibility of "win-win competition" among the nation states. But in the environmentally "full world" of the 21st century it is more likely than ever

47. The following remarks are from a recent academic discussion of how large such immediate human communities, i.e. in which everyone relates directly to everyone else, may feasibly be (Richard Dunbar, *How Many Friends Does One Person Need?*, Harvard University Press, 2010, pp.25-28): "Most hunter-gatherers live in complex societies that operate at a number of levels. The smallest groupings occur at temporary night camps and have between thirty and fifty individuals. The largest grouping is normally the tribe... typically number[ing] between five hundred and 2,500.... In between these two layers... is a third [kind of] group[ing] often discussed [by anthropologists], but seldom numerated. Sometimes it takes the form of 'clans' ...based on common ownership of a hunting area or a set of water holes. For the twenty-odd tribal societies where census data are available, ... all but one of the village- and clan-like groupings... fall between one hundred and 230.... A rule of thumb commonly used in business organisation theory is that organisations of fewer than 150 people work fine on a person-to-person basis, but once they grow larger than this they need a formal hierarchy to work efficiently. Sociologists have known since the 1950s that there is a critical threshold in the region of 150 to two hundred, with larger companies suffering a disproportionate amount of absenteeism.... [T]he basic fighting unit of the Roman army during the Republic... was of similar size, containing roughly 130 men.... Neolithic villages from the Middle East around 6000 BC typically seem to have contained 120 to 150 people, judging by the number of dwellings.... The Huttites and the Amish, two groups of contemporary North American religious fundamentalists who live and farm communally... have average community sizes of around 110, mainly because they split their communities once they exceed 150. What is interesting is the reason the Huttites themselves give for splitting communities at this number. They find that when there are more than about 150 individuals, they cannot control the behavior of the members by peer pressure alone."

48. John Maynard Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren" (1930; we have taken this from *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes* (30 volumes, 1972-89), vol. ix, p.326.

49. Kenneth Boulding, "The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth" (1966; see <http://dieoff.org/page160.htm>).

50. Ernest Gellner, *op.cit.* (in Note 20), p.38.

before that even if all of them may be able to compete, not all of them can win; some have to lose out disastrously; some of the big losers may be able to cause no end of trouble (e.g. terrorism) for the winners; and the processes of winning and losing the GNP-per-capita competition may entail severely destructive ecological damage to the planet as a human habitation. The competitive-nation-states issue – the main theme of this essay – is thus ancillary to the issues of (a) the incorrect capitalist premise of eternal and unlimited economic growth and (b) the potentially “insatiable” needs of the middle classes in the nations winning the competition.

The authors of *The Communist manifesto* mistakenly attributed the following characteristics to mid-19th-century humankind:

“The workers have no country.... National differences and antagonisms between peoples are more and more vanishing already, with [i.e. owing to] the development of the bourgeoisie, the freedom of commerce, the world market, the uniformity in the mode of production and the corresponding [social] relations of life.”⁵¹

Still today it is not so much the urban and rural workers and the small entrepreneurs as the very rich capitalists who “have no country”: the CEO’s of the big banks and of the multinational corporations, and the financial sharks adept at “hostile takeovers,” at creating and selling “derivatives” and at split-second speed in buying and selling securities.⁵² Perhaps most of them have no patriotic concern for the welfare of the nations where they were born and raised, and certainly the multinational corporations have displayed a ruthless disregard for ecological concerns and have corrupted government officials not to interfere with the spoiling of the environment. It has been first of all for those very rich folks that this has become an era of massive globalization; but now, more and more of the less wealthy people as well are communicating with one another internationally (via the internet), and these people may yet, with luck, exert effective political pressure to develop a sane kind of patriotism with due acknowledgment of the need for Boulding’s “spaceman economy” on this our Earth. Whether they choose to do so depends on which of two incompatible kinds of rationalism will prevail: (1) people rationally abandoning the insane type of patriotism described in this essay, or (2) allegedly “autonomous” individuals striving to get as rich as possible as soon as possible, with no regard (as Adam Smith acknowledged) for public welfare.

This latter ideal is embodied and celebrated in the market economists’ concepts of rationalism and “economic man”. Market economists of the 20th and 21st centuries have claimed that for all practical purposes their concept of “economic man” may be taken as a scientifically valid postulate about the eternally unalterable character of human nature. The claim is implicit, for instance, in the warning in Lionel Robbins’s textbook (1932) against the “dangerous misapprehension” that “the generalizations of Economics are essentially ‘historico-relative’ in character”⁵³ – a warning presumably occasioned by the Bolshevik concept of the “New Soviet Man” (see Illustration 1) supposedly “endowed ... with a new ethical outlook”.⁵⁴



Illustration 1

51. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (London 1848 and later editions), about halfway through Chapter 2 (“Bourgeois und Proletarier”): “Die Arbeiter haben kein Vaterland.... Die nationalen Absonderungen und Gegensätze der Völker verschwinden mehr und mehr schon mit der Entwicklung der Bourgeoisie, mit der Handelsfreiheit, dem Weltmarkt, der Gleichförmigkeit der industriellen Produktion und der ihr entsprechenden Lebensverhältnisse.”

52. A traditional capitalist ideal would be that when some money (“\$”) which has been somehow accumulated is invested in the production (by wage-labor) and sale of commodities (“C”), the result for the capitalists would most likely be more money, S^1 , which would then be invested in the production and sale of a more valuable batch (market-wise) of commodities (C^1), and so on, with $C^1 \rightarrow S^2 \rightarrow C^2 \dots \rightarrow S^n \rightarrow C^n$. But with the financial sharks nowadays in the too-big-to-fail banks and operating at split-second speed in the stock markets, we have, according to a telling description in John McMurtry, *The Cancer Stage of Capitalism* (London 1999), p.121, a “pure, unproductive $S^1 \rightarrow S^2 \rightarrow S^n$ circuit” with the following pair of characteristics: “(1) There is no use-value production between the transformation[s] of money into more money; and (2) This pure $S^1 \rightarrow S^2 \rightarrow S^n$ circuit has become for the first time in history the dominant form of capital investment.”

53. Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (London 1932; quoted from the 1948 printing of the 2nd edition, p.80.)

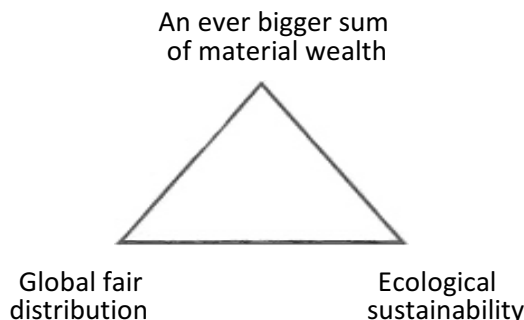
54. This phrase is cited, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Soviet_man, from a book attributed to Bernard Byhovsky, entitled “The New Man in the Making” and published in Moscow by the Novosti Press Agency. Our illustration shows a famous, 24½-meter-tall stainless-steel statue made by USSR sculptress Vera Mukhina for the 1937 World’s Fair in Paris (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worker_and_Kolkhoz_Woman).

Behavioral economics is nowadays building up a scientifically valid medium between the idealistic extremes of the Bolsheviks and the dogmatic market economists. Some of the findings are synthesized in the book by Bowles and Gintis cited near the beginning of this essay. The research suggests that there *may* be reason to hope that the vast and swiftly increasing number of economically middle-class people in the world could, if convinced of the need to do so, outgrow the wasteful status-competition – the gross consumerism – characteristic of their 20th-century forebears. According to Bowles and Gintis,

“It would ... be wise to resist drawing strong conclusions about cooperation in the 21st century solely on the basis of our [i.e. the authors’] thinking about the origins of cooperation in the Late Pleistocene.... But the fundamental challenges of social living and sustaining a livelihood that our distant ancestors faced are in many respects not fundamentally different from those we face today. Modern states and global markets have provided conditions for mutualistic cooperation among strangers on a massive scale.... In a world increasingly connected not just by trade in goods but also by the exchange of violence, information, viruses, and [environmentally polluting] emissions, the importance of [altruistic and moralistic] social preferences in underwriting human cooperation, even survival, may now be greater even than it was among that small group of foragers that began ... 55,000 years ago to spread this ... particular cooperative species to the far corners of the world.”

Such “social preferences” may yet enable humankind to wean itself gradually from a salient feature of capitalism – the ever-expanding levels of production and material consumption – which is now becoming incompatible with ecological sustainability. Figure 1 represents schematically a basic trilemma in current economics.⁵⁵ We have focused in this essay on the role of nationalism in the historical background to the unprecedented opportunity-cost crunch between (a) worldwide growth of production and material consumption, and (b) macro-ecological sustainability. Economists whose top concern is with social issues (rather than with ecological issues) are also beginning nowadays to recognize that it is a mistake to regard increase of the gross domestic product of one’s nation as the overriding desideratum.⁵⁶

Figure 1



A Turkish economist, Dani Rodrik, has described another trilemma: We cannot have deep economic integration, national sovereignty and democracy all at the same time.⁵⁷ This has been clearly seen in the euro-crisis, the effects of which have included a dismantling of social-security systems and democratic institutions in the countries most affected by the crisis. It may be difficult also to reconcile (a) globalized responses to macro-ecological problems with (b) democracy in nations where people don’t care about ecological issues.

It is natural and good to love one’s community, town or city, and nation (except in certain absurd cases). And yet humankind also needs now a “patriotism of the species”,⁵⁸ a feeling of planetary citizenship and custodianship, complemented by political and economic institutions fostering adequate responses to the 21st-century social and ecological global challenges. This is why the nation states’ economic rivalries have to be tamed. There is now a burgeoning literature on “post-growth”, “degrowth”, “steady-state” and “downscaling”.

55. This diagram is adapted from a similar one devised in 2003 by Jan Otto Andersson; see www.lucus.lu.se/Jan_Otto_Andersson_Paper.pdf, p.1.

56. See Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and Jean-Paul Fitoussi, *Mismeasuring our lives: Why GDP doesn’t add up* (New Press, New York and London, 2010).

57. Dani Rodrik, *The Globalization Paradox* (2011). The subtitle of the British edition (Oxford Univ. Press) is “Why Global Markets, States, and Democracy Can’t Coexist”, but the American edition (Norton) is subtitled “Democracy and the Future of the World Economy”.

58. François Perroux, a distinguished French economist of the post-World-War-II era, called for a *patriotisme de l’espèce* (“patriotism of the [human] species”) in his *L’économie du XXe siècle* (Paris 1961), p.304.

One recent book (2012) of this kind envisages a set of eight international institutions intended to help “ensure survival of the human species”;⁵⁹ the new institutions – including a “Resource Board” and some alternatives to the WTO and IMF (developing ideological premisses quite different from those of the WTO and IMF) – would deal initially with a small number of socially and ecologically progressive member states (perhaps some Nordic countries, perhaps Switzerland, perhaps New Zealand, Malaysia, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Bhutan, Tunisia...):

“[T]his could be a major step toward a more stable and peaceful global society with a multitude of small states focused more on cooperation than on competition.”⁶⁰

Such grand institutional changes may well seem utopian to those of us who are steeped in the mentality of worldwide capitalism. But the alternative to such changes is likely to be, alas, an ecological overshoot which would lead not only to a decline in production but also to ruinous environmental and social consequences.

The United Nations is in many ways the most adequate organization today for dealing with global problems. Thanks to the UN it is possible to speak of an international community and to promote human rights and international laws. However, the effort to establish in the 1970s a “New International Economic Order” failed miserably. The new order would have given member states the right to control and develop their national economies according to their own aspirations. Instead, in the 1980s – and even more after the collapse of the Soviet empire – the neoliberal Washington consensus secured the rights of transnational corporations and banks to organize production, trade and finance globally.

A United-Nations “Economic and Social Council”, ECOSOC, was established in 1945 to deal with the economic and social problems of the world. But ECOSOC’s complex and fragmented multilateral governance (with 54 states serving overlapping three-year terms) has limited its capacity to influence international policies; the G8 and G20, together with the IMF and the World Bank, have taken over the tasks of steering the world economy. It is undoubtedly true that 8 and 20 are less unwieldy numbers than 54 and 193 (the number of UN member states) for an organization seeking consensus. But the G8 and G20 are even more permeated than the UN by economic rivalry among their constituent nation states: all the members of the G8 and G20 are so proud of their historical achievements in regard to expanding production that they don’t know when to be content with a socially reasonable and ecologically feasible sufficiency. A stronger global arrangement is needed to perform the tasks which ECOSOC was originally supposed to perform.

One imaginable way – though not very easily implemented – of improving the international world order would be via a moderate number of cultural and economic entities on a quasi-continental scale, perhaps as follows: (1) most of Europe (except for the Russian part), (2) North America, (3) Latin America, (4) Sub-Saharan Africa, (5) North Africa and West Asia, (6) South Asia,⁶¹ (7) East Asia,⁵⁶ (8) Australia and the Pacific, and (9) Russia and Central Asia. Each such group of countries would strive to implement norms appropriate culturally and economically to the region. The European Union is already developing such coordination, based on people’s awareness of a shared history (including a modern history of very destructive wars) and of certain deep cultural similarities among the member states. There have indeed been problems of implementation (evidenced by the euro crisis and certain other difficulties impeding agreement on some quite important issues). To synchronize the various interrelated strands of unity has proven so difficult that it’s now clear that the EU will never become an integrated political entity – and yet it has been able to consolidate peaceful cooperation (with considerable economic benefits gained from not maintaining armed forces on such a scale as the USA, China and India are doing), and has thus been a very worthwhile venture. We hope that the example which it provides of regional international cooperation may inspire other regions to develop mechanisms promoting peace and trustful cooperation based on regionally shared cultural values and historical memories.

With bad luck, quasi-continental regional entities might become disposed to compete with one another somewhat as Britain, France and Germany did in the 19th and early 20th centuries. (For instance: one purpose of the unfortunate US invasion of Iraq was to impede European access to Iraqi oil.⁶²) But with good luck a better

59. Ross Jackson, *Occupy World Street: A Global Roadmap for Radical Economic and Political Reform* (Green Books and Chelsea Green Publishing, 2012), p.206.

60. *Op. cit.*, p.294.

61. In South Asia and in East Asia the implementation would have to be piecemeal (to curb Indian and Chinese regional hegemony).

62. See www.globalpolicy.org/political-issues-in-iraq/oil-in-iraq.html.

kind of rationality might prevail among the regions than did, say, between Britain and Germany a hundred years ago. Such rationality is more likely to emerge in meetings where the delegates can all sit at one table than in a vast international forum such as the U.N. Face-to-face talk may more readily promote cooperation in confronting humankind's forthcoming, greatest-ever enemy in common: an increasingly "angry" Mother Nature.

Everyone knows that the League of Nations failed (before the macro-ecological crisis began to emerge) and that the UN and EU are imperfect. But if ideas for fostering a modicum of global international cooperation are basically good, then the proverb "Third time lucky" may become applicable. A basis for hope may be found in Rousseau's argument that "the general will is indestructible"; he said:

"As long as several men in assembly regard themselves as a single body, they have only a single will which is concerned with their common preservation and general well-being.... [If this general will] is subordinated to other [e.g. individual] wills which encroach upon its sphere, [then] each man, in detaching his interest from the common interest, sees clearly that he cannot entirely separate them [and] yet his share in the public mishaps seems to him negligible beside the exclusive good he aims at making his own. Apart from this particular good, he [nevertheless] wills the general good in his own interest, as strongly as anyone else."⁶³

Summary

This essay is not intended to address all the problems of present-day capitalism. Instead, it makes a point which we believe is clearly true but has seldom been stated: that a traditional, persistently mercantilist tendency of nation states⁶⁴ has recently prevented them from cooperating sufficiently on macro-ecological problems of unprecedented urgency in the 21st century. We have argued that the strength of this tendency is due historically to the fact that nation states, and the kind of patriotism which they engender, emerged together with internationally competitive capitalism. We put this fact in the context of a theory of four broad historical stages of economic and political development.

In pondering how a macro-ecologically benign kind of patriotism might be fostered, we have mentioned hopefully some evidence from recent research into the historical origins of human reciprocity. We have also said that some international institutional innovations are called for, and that one such innovation might be the establishment of a moderate number of regional international economic entities.

International cooperation would be helpful in regard to various social as well as ecological issues. There is, however, a basic difference between the two kinds of issues, since Mother Nature is not equipped with rationality:

"We can negotiate working conditions, consumption patterns, tax structures, production regulations and all sorts of elements which determine our social and economic lives. We cannot negotiate with plant and animal species about their extinctions, or with radioactive waste about its half-life, or with global climate about its change. In human society, we can determine the rules about give and take. In dealing with environmental concerns we are ... part of a larger ecosystem and depend on its rules.... Living unsustainably means ignoring the rules so that, at some point, life support systems collapse, leaving large numbers of people without the food, water and space they need to survive."⁶⁵

63. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social* (1762), Book IV, Section 1 ("Que la volonté générale est indestructible"), the first and sixth paragraphs: "Tant que plusieurs hommes réunis se considèrent comme un seul corps, ils n'ont qu'une seule volonté qui se rapporte à la commune conservation et au bien-être général.... [Si] elle est subordonnée à d'autres [volontés] qui l'emportent sur elle[, c]hacun, détachant son intérêt de l'intérêt commun, voit bien qu'il ne peut l'en séparer tout à fait, mais sa part du mal public ne lui paraît rien auprès du bien exclusif qu'il prétend s'approprier. Ce bien particulier excepté, il veut le bien général pour son propre intérêt, tout aussi fortement qu'aucun autre."

64. This mercantilist tendency has persisted notwithstanding a free-trade ideology going back historically to David Ricardo's quantitatively formulated argument of 1817 in regard to comparative advantage in international commerce.

65. See www.isags-unasul.org/noticias_interna.asp?lang=2&idarea=2&idsubarea=4&idPai=4046.