

Evolutionary Biology and the Simultaneous Policy: Vision-Logic for the Next Stage in our Evolutionary Future

Evolutionary biologists are increasingly questioning the Darwinist view of evolution which describes it largely in terms of competition and natural selection in favour of a “post-Darwinist” stance that more properly recognises the crucial role of co-operation. But since major transitions from competition to co-operation occur only at certain critical and short-lived points of evolutionary crisis, it is perhaps unsurprising that co-operation’s significant role has hitherto been under-valued and under-explored. Today, as humanity increasingly faces a critical point of crisis in terms of our survival on planet Earth, it is essential that light now be shed on how co-operation has worked in evolution, and how it can be made to work now if we are to have a sustainable future.

Holonic progression to ever-larger scales of cooperation

An important theory underlying the view that cooperation plays just as important a role as competition is Koestler’s concept of holons and holarchies; the idea that reality is composed of holons or “whole/parts”: wholes that are simultaneously composed of smaller parts and are themselves also parts of larger wholes.ⁱ For example, molecules are holons and yet they are made up of smaller atom holons while also being part of larger cell holons. The entire system is a “holarchy”: a hierarchy of holons or ‘whole/parts’ which is endless in either direction and in which each new higher-level holon emerges out of its predecessor, transcending and yet including it.ⁱⁱ The importance of Koestler’s thinking is that it allows us to move beyond two-dimensional, systems-thinking approaches to a three dimensional view of evolution which recognises not just that it has span, but also depth, and that it is directional towards ever-larger scales of co-operation.

Between each holon on the same level there exists an inherent tension between its ‘wholeness’ on one side, and its ‘partness’ on the other; i.e. between a desire for individuality, and a need for conformity to the society – or holarchy - to which it belongs. This tension drives evolution towards ever-larger scales of cooperation as evolutionary biologist Elisabet Sahtouris explains: “There is a cycle of evolution that occurs all over, across time and space, at the tiniest levels of biology, and in the largest cosmic processes. It always begins with unity that then individuates—as in the ancient Vedic creation story in which a little wavelet forms in a smooth sea, and forever after is torn between loving its own individuality and wanting to merge back into the One. This universal tension between part and whole, and among parts, drives evolution. Individuation always leads to a kind of tension and conflict [i.e. to competition]. And if the parts don't kill each other, they start negotiating. Negotiations can lead to resolutions of some of the tensions, moving from conflict to cooperation, and then to some new level of unity” [i.e. to a new, higher-level, larger-scale holon].ⁱⁱⁱ

Of course recent human evolution is occurring primarily through cultural, rather than through genetic processes. Nevertheless, the processes of cultural evolution – just like biological/genetic processes before them – still tend to produce cooperative organisations (or holons) of increasing scale. In large-scale human societies cooperation is essentially made possible by their forms of

governance; by their political systems. An ideal system of governance is one in which all entities in the system capture both the harmful and positive effects of their individual behaviour, with harmful acts being punished and positive acts rewarded within a framework which aligns individual self-interest with the common good. As evolutionist John Stewart points out, “cooperative organisations were formed through the emergence of constraints that limit the independence of the independent entities. These constraints (e.g. governance, management, etc) restrain destructive competition and enable cooperation to emerge.”^{iv} In terms of the evolving governance of human societies, we could thus identify the following holarchy: individual – family – local/regional government – national government.

Cooperative global governance: the next level in the holarchy

The highly developed nature of global communications and the interconnectedness of economies we see today (i.e. globalisation), as well as threats humanity now faces such as global warming, global poverty and ecological destruction etc, now presage a further move in this evolutionary development; the emergence of a holon of democratic planetary governance that transcends and includes the lower holons in the holarchy. This, as post-Darwinist evolutionists contend, is but the next natural – but by no means assured - stage in humanity’s evolution towards ever-larger scales of cooperation.

The problem is that the present highest holons of governance – nation-states – are configured to govern only in the *national* space. But under globalisation, the holons of global capital, trade and transnational corporations (and international crime and terrorism) already operate in the *global* space. Furthermore, we live in a world of competing nations who are unwilling to relinquish their sovereignty to any institution of global governance and the UN, not possessing any binding authority over them, is not configured to provide it.^v

Indeed, far from *co-operating* to implement appropriate global laws and taxes to balance the needs of society and the global environment against the needs of transnational business, governments are far more preoccupied with *competing* with one another for inward investment and jobs. They are thus easy prey for free-riding global investors and transnational corporations who happily play one government off against another for tax breaks and a loose regulatory environment. Governments, by the same token, destructively compete with one another to boost employment and inward investment by down-leveling social and environmental protection laws and by reducing corporate taxes. Or, as with the USA, it free-rides on other governments by not participating in the Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court, etc. The nations of the world, like the wavelets in the smooth sea of the ancient Vedic creation story, now love too much their own individuality; their own “national interest”!

But this governmental imperative to maintain “international competitiveness” also has an important consequence for democracy. Since the threat of capital and employment flight forces governments, regardless of the party in power, to conform to a very narrow span of market and business-friendly policies it necessarily reduces democracy to an electoral charade in which voting no longer has any significant meaning. Little wonder we have growing social unrest in deprived areas with a noticeable swing towards Far-right political parties and, at the same time, widespread protests against globalisation; and all this characterised by chronic “voter apathy”.

All unmistakable signs that democracy – the system by which negative feedback should be provided - is no longer functioning properly.

Hitting the age-old barrier....

But in evolutionary terms, is this destructive competition and free-riding with its attendant dysfunctions and feed-back shortfalls anything new? Indeed, Stewart identifies precisely this same barrier to co-operation as preceding *all* major evolutionary shifts, such as the formation of the modern eukaryote cell from associations of simpler cells, the formation of multicellular organisms from aggregations of cells, and the formation of societies of organisms from aggregations of organisms. This barrier to cooperation, Stewart explains, applies “to all living processes. The circumstances that cause it are universal. Individuals [i.e. individuals, corporations or nations] who use resources to help others without benefit to themselves will be out-competed. They will be disadvantaged compared to those who use the resources for their own benefit. And the barrier applies no matter what the evolutionary mechanisms are that adapt and evolve individuals. The barrier has applied whether the evolutionary mechanisms are those that adapt corporations, individual humans, other multicellular organisms, single cells, or autocatalytic sets.”^{vi}

Sahtouris further points out that destructive competition and free-riding are especially characteristic of immature species: “Young species are found to have highly competitive characteristics: They take all the resources they can, they hog territory, they multiply wildly. Sound familiar? But a lot of species have managed to grow up, to share things and territory, to cooperate. It's what keeps them alive.” To survive, therefore, humanity will - like all other organisms - have to *grow up*: we will have to abandon the present immature, *competitive* paradigm of international economic relations and evolve it into a mature and *cooperative* one. The human species, like all others, is following the same cycle of competitive individuation leading (hopefully) to negotiation, leading in turn to a new higher level of cooperative unity. So, if we thought we were separate from other species or somehow "above" them, the joke is on us!

.....and overcoming the barrier?

However, the barrier to cooperation is not insurmountable, as Stewart points out: “If the barrier completely prevented the evolution of cooperation, evolution could not progress”, and yet it *has* progressed and has done so, says Stewart, “by building cooperative organisations out of self-interested components”; by finding ways to make it *in the interests* of individual entities to cooperate. But how can cooperation possibly be made in the interests of individual nations when first-movers will suffer competitive disadvantage?

This impasse may potentially be overcome by citizens around the world who are increasingly joining the International Simultaneous Policy Organisation (ISPO), initiated in 2000.^{vii} ISPO provides a process for moving to a cooperative global society which requires neither nations nor politicians, nor individuals to act against their interests.

The Simultaneous Policy (SP) is a range of legislative measures designed by ISPO's members and their chosen experts to bring economic justice, environmental sustainability and peace to the

world. SP is to consist only of those desirable measures which cannot be implemented unilaterally by any nation due to the fear of first-mover competitive disadvantage and it is therefore to be implemented *by all, or virtually all, nations simultaneously*, so removing the crucial barrier to cooperation. With SP, no nation, corporation or citizen loses out to any other.

Citizens all over the world are presently being invited to “adopt” SP and are doing so in increasing numbers. Adopting SP means they pledge to vote in future elections *not* for a specific politician or party, but for *ANY* politician or party – within reason – that pledges to implement SP. Or, if they have a party-political preference, adopting SP indicates their desire for their preferred politician/party to pledge to implement it. For politicians, pledging to implement SP signifies their intent to implement it simultaneously only when all or virtually all nations do likewise. As such, there’s no political risk for them since they can make the ‘SP Pledge’ while continuing to implement their competition-based policies until such time as all or sufficient nations have made the SP Pledge and implementation can proceed.

But ISPO’s power to actually *catalyse* cooperation becomes effective because, as citizens increasingly adopt SP, politicians world-wide will increasingly be presented with an attractive yet compelling “carrot and stick” proposition:- Making the SP Pledge is a strong incentive to politicians because it involves no political risk and can deliver the additional votes of SP’s citizen adopters. But with more and more elections around the world being won or lost on very small margins (eg. by just a few thousand votes in Florida at the last US Presidential election), *failing* to make the SP Pledge could cost politicians dearly, for they’ll likely lose to rivals who *have* made it to attract the SP voting bloc. Those extra votes – even if few - could make the vital difference between winning or losing a seat, or even an entire election. By adopting SP in sufficient numbers, therefore, citizens and previously apathetic voters thus have a powerful technology for making it in politicians’ *self-interest* to pledge to implement SP and, by the same token, to make it potentially disastrous for them if they *fail* to do so.

An invitation to conscious evolution

By aligning individual self-interest with the global common interest at every level, SP thus fulfills the age-old requirement for evolution to progress, providing a practical political technology for humanity to drive politicians and governments to cooperate for the global common good. As Sahtouris recognises, “Simultaneous Policy is an imperative if we are to evolve humanity from its juvenile competitive stage to its cooperative species maturity. A wonderful ‘no risk’ strategy for finding agreement on important issues in building global community!”

The paradox of all previous major evolutionary transitions is, of course, that if left to reach a critical stage, competition ultimately ceases to be a strategy for individual survival but instead becomes a strategy for collective suicide. At that point – a point humanity is now fast approaching - co-operation becomes in everyone’s self-interest. But for wipe-out to be avoided and for cooperation to emerge, not only is simultaneous action required to overcome the barrier to cooperation; an appropriate *catalysing process* is also needed. This is what SP potentially offers: a technology for global citizens to consciously co-create the now-vital holon of global governance; a world-centric governance born of an aperspectival vision-logic that transcends and includes political parties and nation-states and “through which runs the blood of a common

humanity and beats the single heart of a very small planet struggling for its own survival, and yearning for its own release into a deeper and a truer tomorrow.”^{viii}

John M. Bunzl, Founder and Director, March 2004.

International Simultaneous Policy Organisation

SP campaign website: <http://www.simpol.org>

ⁱ *Janus: A Summing Up*, Arthur Koestler, Pan Books, 1979.

ⁱⁱ For a more comprehensive explanation of holons, see *Sex Ecology Spirituality*, Ken Wilber, Shambhala, 1995, 2000, pp 43-85.

ⁱⁱⁱ Elisabet Sahtouris, adapted from *Understanding Globalization as an Evolutionary Leap* presented to the Institute of Noetic Sciences <http://www.noetic.org/>, July 2001. For more by Sahtouris go to: <http://www.ratical.org/Lifeweb>

^{iv} From a personal email to John Bunzl, 11th June 2002.

^v Article 2:1 of the UN Charter specifically denies the UN any binding authority over its member nations.

^{vi} *Evolution's Arrow – The Direction of Evolution and the Future of Humanity*, The Chapman Press, 2000.

^{vii} *The Simultaneous Policy – An insider's guide to saving humanity and the planet*, John Bunzl, New European Publications, 2001.

^{viii} *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, Ken Wilber, Shambhala, 1995, 2000.