

## THE WOES OF THE WORLD: 2002

### (Or: The Complexity of Power Disparities, Writ Large from the Human Example)

#### How These Woes Came About, Why They Persist, and What To Do About Them

The proposition here is to try to (a) list the major woes of the world today, (b) explain (when necessary) why they are major woes, (c) relate them causally to one another, (d) understand why they exist, or how they came about (including some effort to describe and explain their geographic distribution), and (e) discuss how they might be alleviated.

a-c. The Woes, and Some of Their Connections (Or: evil is not a simple concept. . . ?)

1. Widespread disease, and geographic disparities in its severity, contributing to:
2. Widespread poverty, also including geographic disparities in severity, this situation maintaining and enhancing power and wealth disparities among geographic and political entities (since time immemorial);
3. Widespread polygyny and all of its correlates and consequences, including lowered status of women and young men, and oddities in education procedures and availability, and contributing to:
4. Unstable, inadequate, or non-existent systems for inheritance of private property, this contributing to:
5. Trivial or non-existent middle class components in societies, hence, no tax base or other sufficient means or incentive for generation and support of representative governments, inhibits the rise of democracies. [On polygyny's role: Socially monogamous societies with elected governments and lots of public wealth push kin-loving acts such as those characteristic of Mafia-like and other expanding corporate clans in polygynous societies, which tend to compete with government, right back to the level of the nuclear family (except in Sicily?!) -- creating (incidentally?) an emphasis on the distinctness of every individual's kindred or circle of kin -- and they take over almost every function above these levels. Terms like "warlord" and "subclan" and "arranged marriages" tend to disappear from the language. But then such societies build other kinds of "families" and "subclans" based on reciprocity rather than nepotism, and arranged around that most beautifully partible of all resources called money. Nepotism as a part of expanding corporateness is as detrimental to democracy

and peace as is the unholy union of religion and government. Other kinds of corporateness? -- hmmm.] Absence of a voting middle class and significant tax base as the support of government leads to or sustains:

6. Rise and retention of government ownership of land and resources, contributing to:
7. Non-elected, power-sequestering governments, corrupted as a result of self-support via government-controlled land and resources, reinforcing 1-6 above, and enhancing or not alleviating:
8. Inadequate public education systems, hence widespread and prevailing illiteracy, and:
9. Ethnic, religious, and cultural divergences, particularly between nations or other population units that geographically neighbor one another, fostering:
10. Use of extremes of religious and other socio-political-moral systems to generate and exacerbate adversarial relations between different geographic and political entities;
11. Rise and distribution of medical knowledge, food production, devastating weaponry, and multiple other technological capabilities in wealthy nations (all of which enhance power disparities);
12. Huge, powerful corporations supported by wealthy governments, and supporting those governments, the two forces together controlling resources such as sales and distribution of food and weapons, and affecting everything else in this list;
13. Rise of international networks devoted to interference with or destruction of the machinery of civilization in wealthy technological nations, because those nations are seen as responsible for woes resulting from inadequacies or failures in the first 12 items on this list, networks that have become fanatic in the sense of rejecting all restraints on the means employed in seeking their aims.

#### d. Why These Problems Exist

1. Disease severity in extensively dispersing species like humans correlates with the following variables:
  - a. Population density (high density is conducive to spread of disease)
  - b. Climate (diseases are more prevalent in the wet tropics)
  - c. Antiquity of human life in the region (regions occupied across most or all of human history have more human diseases)
  - d. Size, diversity, and routes of colonizing groups (small groups, or population "bottlenecks," are likely to carry with them fewer diseases, as are groups migrating slowly through regions with low density and temperate climates).

These variables together predict severity of human diseases (and complexity of indigenous civilizations) as follows:

- a. Highest in the wet tropics of Africa, an ancient and continuously occupied home of the human species, with high population densities (no great ancient cities or civilizations or technologies; no indigenous written languages: you can't fight everything at once?).
- b. Lowest in (i) New World temperate regions, because of climate coupled with recent peopling by only a few small groups of immigrants traveling slowly through temperate Asia and entering the New World by passing through near-Arctic climates, and later mostly by Old World temperate climate peoples, and (ii) Australia, because of small number of immigrants, recentness of habitation compared to Africa, and, perhaps above all, aridity of the mainly tropical and subtropical climate across nearly all of the continent.
- c. Intermediate in the rest of the world, for different reasons:
  - (i) New World wet tropics because of recentness of immigration and its nearly optimal bottleneck origins, coupled with available montane climates (Mayans and Incas creating the only "great civilizations" in wet tropics anywhere).
  - (ii) European and Asian temperate regions because of more ancient habitation than New World temperate regions, higher population densities, and access of diseases from Africa, these all combined with a climate unfavorable to most human diseases.

2. Widespread poverty correlates (or used to correlate) with disease prevalence and high population densities (e.g., is most extreme in the wet tropics of Africa, with both features). There cannot be high population densities unless there are sufficient resources to enable reproduction to flourish during *some* times; but disease prevalence combined with unpredictability of climate and weather can create conditions leading to dramatic fluctuations of population, leading to poverty. Poverty is expected to be least significant in regions most remote from ancient human habitation or with (even arid) climates in which resources do not fluctuate violently, whether these conditions are created by the human inhabitants or are inherent in the physical climate of the region. Both things happen in temperate Europe and America, and also in northern Africa, and on Pacific and other islands. Poverty should probably be measured by shortages of living requirements rather than by amounts of material goods amassed.

3. Polygyny is historical, probably in all human populations, at least when the meaning is that it is allowed (as opposed to how prevalent or extreme it is). Polygyny occurs rarely in people living in extremely hostile climates (e.g., far northern Europe and America, South African deserts), where the monogamy can be said to be "ecologically imposed." As "socially-imposed" monogamy, prohibition of polygyny spread in Europe and was transmitted to the New World by European emigrants (and was subsequently touted -- often successfully -- by missionaries and others into every part of the world except those so filled with horrible diseases as to cause even the most fervent religious emissaries -- not to say, U-M doctoral students looking for thesis projects -- to chicken out). The explicit possibility of polygyny remains (or was

present until recently) in New Guinea, Australian Aboriginal societies, Pacific peoples, most Native American societies (these last three have mostly started imposing monogamy, or had it imposed on them by European occupiers of their lands -- both Protestant and Catholic), most African societies, and in Muslim societies wherever they are. Muslim societies are the only societies with a written moral code (the Koran), and which sometimes have generated technological societies up to the status of nations, which continue to permit -- and defend -- polygyny (is this true?).

4. Inheritance of private property became a stable and central aspect of society in the monogamous peoples of Europe and spread from there. It is not as stable or central in polygynous societies. The argument has been made that the transition to socially-imposed monogamy was influenced by inheritance problems for the well-to-do, an early step being designation of all consorts but one as "mistresses," the one "wife" being the only conduit for legal inheritance (the only producer of legal heirs). There are also other arguments, such as societal unity (in the face of threats by other human groups better at it) being favored by reproductive opportunity leveling.

5-8. In countries like Brazil, Venezuela, Indonesia, Burma, Malaysia, and many others, there is essentially no middle class owning private lands, and certainly none capable of providing a tax base to support the government. It is such countries in which 6 and 7 occur (and 8 as well). I composed this list of countries hastily; it is in no way complete, and my statements may not fit every nation on the list -- or every one of them equally well -- there may be others more appropriate to list. Just look for countries with enormous proportions of the land nationally-owned, so that virtually all financing of the government has to come from the resources being taken off those lands, all too often nowadays via "foreign" corporations. It is common to blame the corporations (and "capitalism") for the problem, but it's the absence of private property, and of the resulting middle class of taxpayers that could sustain a representative government, that I see as at the heart of the problem.

8. Illiteracy is widespread in low density and non-technological populations, where its effects on the world are trivial, and in countries like those described immediately above, where -- because the countries involved are often larger, and richer and more influential -- its effects are not trivial.

How do you generate elected representative governments, and the necessary literacy (and all the "good" things that follow), beginning with the general situation described for large and diverse countries in the last two paragraphs? Hmm? Hmm? Hmm? It may be the biggest problem in the world. . .

9. Examples of one, two, or all three of these things fostering confrontations and wars are Rwanda, Bosnia, Albania, Serbia, Israel versus the surrounding Arab nations, Russia versus some of its breakaway republics, Ireland, Germany, and to some extent every population of the earth that is either diverse within its self or inhabits a region next to a population that sees its self as distinctly different (in other words, maybe damned near all such problems. . .). We can contemplate the possibility that

establishing a state religion in any society or nation that borders another with a different religion, some strikingly different "ethnicity," or having two morphologically or ethnically or religiously distinct people -- living parapatrically or mixed in nearly equal numbers and not or scarcely interbreeding -- creates a virtual certainty of significant strife (e.g., Rwanda, Fiji, Ireland, Israel, Germany (the last one most dramatically during the first half of the 20th century -- leading to, or contributing to, the only two World Wars).

10. Religion seems to be the historical practice most closely associated with dreadful confrontations between societies or peoples. Most if not all efforts to exterminate a "people" -- e.g., in North America, Australia, Tasmania, Patagonia, Germany, Rwanda(?) have been justified in the name of religion. The assignation of "evil" to a people is virtually restricted to religious motivation. Religion may have thrived mostly because it is a frighteningly potent unifier of a people; it tends to be the source of rules before written language and its accompanying legal systems are put into place -- with written language the actual nature of precedents is removed from dependence on the memories and the good will (give us a break) of the powerful.

11-12. The wealthy nations of the world pass medical knowledge and technology, food, and other resources (including weaponry) to many (not all) of the poor peoples of the world. But they do it utterly inadequately, and often (almost invariably?) with accompanying machinations that range from unconscionable to just plain despicable. We know how to solve this problem because we're the ones doing it (or allowing it), and we have the legal, social, and economic means. We just have to find out about it, get involved, convince the rest of the populace, and generate some adequate rules so as to excise the B.S. (I'd be interested in your evaluations of the attached article about world hunger).

13. Terrorism. Is additional explanation needed?

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I wrote this yesterday morning, in two periods before and after tending my horses, mostly because the conversations in this seminar stimulated me to think about it. I think my brain had been working on it without my knowledge (poor thing). I did it pretty directly and rapidly, and without consulting anything, so every last detail may not be correct (but I'm confident enough to claim they are until you prove me wrong). . . Did not read any of the publications you folks mentioned -- not even the book of the California medical-physiologist-sometime-ecologist-send-your-troops-on-ahead-big-time-book-signer-lecturer you all were citing (mercifully, I forgot his name. . .).

I'll leave it to you guys to write Part 3 (e): How to get here from there. How to solve the problems inherent in all of this, or at least how to make them significantly smaller. . .