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The Occluded Mirror: A Question of True Transparency

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So it is now “official”: we can expect to see no stabilization of the human population by 2100. By that time, we are likely to number 11 billion, with at least a meager likelihood of our having hit 13 billion. “Meager” has always boded ill in terms of scientific projections. Our worst nightmares – whether of genocides or the unleashing of chemical, biological or radiological warfare – have always come true. Twenty-two civilizations have gone extinct as a result of those societies consuming beyond their ecological carrying capacity. Now, as outlined on September 18th in an essay in *Science* (Science DOI: 10.1126/science.1257469 – [“World population stabilization unlikely this century,”](#) by Patrick Gerland, Adrian Raftery, Hana Ševčíková, Nan Li, Danan Gu, Thomas Spoorenberg, Leontine Alkema, Bailey K. Fosdick, Jennifer Chunn, Nevena Lalic, Guiomar Bay, Thomas Buettner, Gerhard K. Heilig and John Wilmoth) the 14 authors, members of a primary collaboration between the University of Washington and the United Nations Population Division, have shattered the complacency which has, of late emerged in countless venues and publications.

Yet, since the late 18th century, such complacency has been cogently challenged by anyone who takes the time to examine human fertility dispositions. The demographics are enough to drive sanity to madness. In my early book, [World War III: Population and the Biosphere at the End of the Millennium](#) (Bear & Co., Santa Fe, NM, 1994), published at the time of the UN Cairo Conference 20 years ago, I titled a chapter examining differences in statistical opinion “Demographic Madness”; and likened those differing computational biological equations for achieving median extrapolations as a kind of “demographic Mount Everest”. One can never predict avalanches. Similarly, predicting human behavior is impossible because there is not one human behavior but, at present,

nearly 7.3 billion human behaviors, to paraphrase India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

The norms have by and large one thing in common, which has tended to thrust our primate species into the forefront of demonstrative ecological catastrophe. That common thread may come as something of a surprise to readers: neither language, nor fire; or, for that matter, a complex neural circuitry in our cerebellum. Rather, it is clothing that distinguishes our kind from all others, and best explains our current debacle here on Earth, in my opinion.

None of our weapons of mass destruction – from the fork, used most efficiently to consume other animals, to the atomic bomb – have had as much effect on our global environmental impact, our population size, geographical distribution, sexual proclivities and overall I=PAT equivalencies [[the Ehrlich/Holdren equation](#)] as have clothing.

Imagine a world in which we were all naked. Such a world would not send people into the Arctic or Antarctic to hunt seals and whales. There would have been no fur trade wars in North America. Settlement of the original Colonies would have been largely restricted by temperature, not the politics of affiliation with native peoples. This, in turn, might well have obviated the need for Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase. Expansion of past civilizations would not have hung their medals on the back of horses, fire-power, or legions of military-inspired, hegemony-mad tyrants. With nakedness comes sustainability, a world more like the original Woodstock open-air concert, or Aristotle's agora, than today's extinction-dominated [Anthropocene](#).

Nudity is an absolute amongst all other species. Bower birds may fancifully outfit their displays, but make no mistake: they are naked. And as such, every other species but the one that dresses itself eventually must experience a demographic boom and bust. The most evident case of this can be read into the story of the now allegedly extinct Rocky Mountain Locust (*Melanoplus spretus*) whose population swarms between 1873 and 1877 are estimated to have numbered 3.5 trillion individuals, just three decades prior to the species going extinct (DNA of some 400 individuals have been identified in the remains of North American glacier ice).

But since there are very few remaining full-time nudists among humans on Earth, we can adduce little likelihood (with the exception of a pandemic going exponential, as is the current crisis with Ebola virus) of a human bust anytime soon, particularly across the very continent (Africa) where the tragedy of Ebola currently plays out, and where one country in particular, Nigeria, is likely to approach one billion people, largely poor and urban, by the year 2100.

Should the Ebola virus mutate so as to transcend its current transmission constraints via blood or saliva, going airborne instead, the story will be writ large, on continent after continent.

In the meantime, we have between 11 and 13 billion people – with all of their biological fall-out – to look forward to. We can glean some clear and present sense of that calamity from the World Wildlife Fund’s most recent edition of its [Living Planet Report](#): of the “more than 10,000 representative populations of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish” surveyed, reports the WWF, there has been a decline “by 52 per cent since 1970.”

Inventors expert Mary Bellis has suggested that hominid clothing may date back [500,000 years](#). During the past 30,000 years, there is no question as to the utility value to humans of wearing animal hides, then woven fibers and cloth. But all of that utility (in addition to placating the mythology of some ‘Original Sin’) has merely served to vastly accelerate our ability to overstep the carrying capacity that would otherwise serve the dignity and modesty of a species with nothing to hide.

With so much talk of transparency in government and economics as being a central pillar in any vital democracy, isn’t it curious that only the male Jain Digambara monks of India continue a national and honorable tradition of nudity? Were we all to follow that paradigm of simple living one advocated by Mahavira and later on, by Gandhi - the world at large would look very different indeed.

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