

PART I

Background

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Excerpt
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The Challenges of the 21st Century

We have organizations for the preservation of almost everything in life that we want but no organization for the preservation of mankind. People seem to have decided that our collective will is too weak or flawed to rise to this occasion. They see the violence that has saturated human history and conclude that to practice violence is innate to our species. They find the perennial hope that peace can be brought to the earth once and for all a delusion of the well-meaning who have refused to face the “harsh realities” of international life – the realities of self-interest, fear, hatred, and aggression. They have concluded that these realities are eternal ones, and this conclusion defeats at the outset any hope of taking the actions necessary for survival.

Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth*¹

INTRODUCTION

Most careful observers of our contemporary global landscape would have no difficulty in accepting the claim that we have entered a period in human evolution characterized by the “acceleration in the velocity of our history and the uncertainty of its trajectory.”² The current age is one of expectations and hope as well as deepening contradictions, uncertainties and emerging risks. The forces of globalization have brought about the elimination of many physical and psychological barriers, precipitating a massive transfer of power and influence away from traditional centers (mainly governments), and in turn contributing to the empowerment of civil society and the decentralization of decision-making. They have facilitated increasing connectedness but also alienation, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a narrower circle, higher expectations of continued improvements in living

¹ Schell, Jonathan. 1982. *The Fate of the Earth*, London, Jonathan Cape, p. 185.

² Brzezinski, Zbigniew. 1993. *Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Eve of the 21st Century*, New York, Macmillan, pp. ix–x.

standards and growing concerns about the sustainability of our development path. We have celebrated the dramatic improvement in various indicators of human welfare that has taken place in the past half-century, including remarkable progress in average life expectancy, a sustained drop in infant mortality and a rise in literacy, against the background of a sharp reduction in the incidence of extreme poverty³; but we have also awakened to the realization that the high economic growth rates that fueled these favorable trends have in parallel led the planet to run up against binding environmental constraints and often resulted in social alienation and widening inequality. As we were already warned decades ago, there are limits to growth,⁴ and we are reaching them as predicted.⁵ Our current trajectory cannot continue without a collapse in one form or another, and the past is not a good guide to the future.

Our present epoch seems to be increasingly characterized by fear of the future with growing insecurity, social fragmentation and polarization, and a lack of hope, even among the young who often face a more uncertain future than that of their parents. The economic system favors profits for the rich over employment for the masses, with many in the middle seeing decades without improvement, if not falling

³ Between 1950 and 2016, world gross domestic product (GDP) per capita expanded at an annual average rate of 2.1 percent and this expansion was associated with a remarkable evolution in three key indicators of human welfare. In the half-century between 1960 and 2016, infant mortality fell from 122 to 30 per 1,000 live births; average life expectancy at birth rose from 52 to 72 years, a 38 percent increase that has no known historical precedent; and adult illiteracy fell from 53 to 14 percent. Equally impressive was the sharp drop in the incidence of poverty: data from a World Bank study show that between 1990 and 2015 – a period that includes the globalization phase of the twentieth century – the number of poor people living on less than \$1.90 per day (the poverty line used for the definition of extreme poverty) fell from about 2 billion to slightly less than 740 million, a historical low. The reduction in extreme poverty, however, was largely accounted for by the very high economic growth rates in China and, to a lesser extent, in India. In areas suffering from fragility, conflict, and violence the poverty rate climbed to 36 percent in 2015, up from a low of 34.4 percent in 2011, and that rate will likely increase. In sub-Saharan Africa the number of extremely poor people actually rose from 276 million in 1990 to 413 million in 2015. Furthermore, using a less austere poverty line of \$3.20 per day, the number of poor in sub-Saharan Africa in 2015 was about 667 million. At this higher poverty line, the number of poor in the world is closer to 2 billion people, which is still an unacceptably high number.

⁴ Meadows, Donella H., Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and William W. Behrens III. 1972. *The Limits to Growth*. A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind, New York, Universe Books. The original report was updated in 1992 (Meadows, Donella H., Dennis L. Meadows and Jorgen Randers, 1992. *Beyond the Limits: Confronting Global Collapse, Envisioning a Sustainable Future*, White River Junction, VT, Chelsea Green) and again in 2004 (Meadows, Donella, Jorgen Randers and Dennis Meadows, 2004. *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update*, White River Junction, VT, Chelsea Green) only confirming the basic premise.

⁵ MacKenzie, Debora. 2012. "Doomsday Book." *New Scientist*, January 7, pp. 38–41, shows the original projections to be remarkably accurate.

backward, and half the world population still struggling to meet basic needs.⁶ Poverty, exclusion and neglect present fundamental social challenges, with no easy solutions in sight. The world economy is running on increasing debt, threatening a return to the financial chaos of a decade earlier, but with governments' room for maneuver significantly reduced. The forces of disintegration are reflected in growing evidence of the failing institutions of governance, with often discredited leadership, widespread corruption, loss of public confidence, and the recent rise of populist, reactionary and autocratic movements rejecting multilateralism and diversity. Contributing to all this is a generalized loss of moral responsibility, higher ethics or values, even spirituality, able to fill the vacuum of any higher human purpose in a materialistic society.⁷

There are counterbalancing forces of integration, and many signs of progress, including at the global level in the United Nations (UN) and elsewhere, that need to be reinforced and extended if we are to avoid a collapse and make the necessary paradigm shift and fundamental transition to a more sustainable future as called for in the 2030 Agenda.⁸ In a globalized economy and society, improved global governance must play an important role at this crucial moment when change is increasingly urgent for environmental, social and economic reasons.

It is not easy to set priorities among the many challenges of today, as all are interrelated. Their complexity calls for new approaches suitable for dynamic, integrated systems evolving through constant innovation in technologies, forms of communications, patterns of organization and institutional frameworks. The challenge for mechanisms of governance at all scales of human organization is to accompany and steer these processes to ensure the common good, setting limits that prevent their being captured by the already rich and powerful for their own benefit, and ultimately ensuring a just society that guarantees the well-being of every person on the planet.

⁶ The World Bank's poverty database indicates that a full 48 percent of the world's population lives on less than US\$5.50 per day, a sum that leaves such people vulnerable in the event of loss of a job or other such shocks. At best, people living below this poverty line struggle on a day-to-day basis to make ends meet.

⁷ We are aware of studies such as Pinker's that show that, by some objective measures, life on the planet is better than ever, but this is not the perception of the general public, and current forces have the potential to reverse previous gains. Pinker, Steven. 2011. *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, New York, Viking. See also his *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress*, 2018, New York, Viking.

⁸ United Nations. 2015. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Outcome Document of the Summit for the Adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, New York, September 25–27, 2015. A/70/L.1. New York: United Nations. www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/L.1&Lang=E

Environmental Challenges

In the scientific community, the major areas of urgent concern have been climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. To take just a few examples: global carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels have grown at an average annual rate of 2 percent since 1990 and hit record levels in 2018,⁹ reflecting the continued growth of the global economy,¹⁰ and a sharp rise in energy consumption in China, accompanied by the weakening of natural carbon sinks, such as forests and seas. Not surprisingly, large volumes of Arctic ice have melted and accelerated flow in Greenland glaciers and now in the Antarctic is contributing to rising sea levels.

Even when world economic growth came to a halt in 2009 because of the global financial crisis, these perturbing trends were not reversed, as the present scale of human activity was only marginally and temporarily affected, and world economic growth again took off shortly thereafter. In the absence of other measures aimed directly at reducing emissions, only a sustained, deep economic depression such as that witnessed during the 1929–1933 period, or some other major crisis, might have an impact on the pace of accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. However, expecting an economic depression to help temporarily mitigate the challenges of global warming is hardly a commendable solution, involving severe social costs.

While economic growth and technological innovation have led to a massive increase in global wealth, this has resulted in serious degradation of the planet's natural resources, now accelerated by climate change, and is leading to emerging supply constraints. It is estimated, for instance, that by 2025 the number of people living in regions with absolute water scarcity will have risen to some 1.8 billion. Climate change, soil erosion, and overfishing are expected to reduce food production and are likely to put upward pressure on food prices in coming years. Climate change also is limiting energy options. The quantity of carbon in oil wells, gas fields and coal mines presently producing, not counting less conventional sources of fossil energy such as fracking and tar sands, is already about five times the remaining capacity of the atmosphere to absorb carbon without passing 2°C of global warming, meaning that we must leave 80 percent of existing fossil fuel reserves in the ground and stop developing new resources.¹¹ The latest science says we must not exceed 1.5°C and have only about 12 years to turn the corner in the energy transition to

⁹ Evarts, Eric C. 2018. Report: Global CO₂ emissions at record levels in 2018. *Green Car Reports*. www.greencarreports.com/news/1120348_report-global-co2-emissions-at-record-levels-in-2018.

¹⁰ According to the International Monetary Fund's *World Economic Outlook*, average annual global economic growth between 1990 and 2018 was 3.6 percent. A slowdown in the aftermath of the 2008–2009 global financial crisis has since been reversed.

¹¹ McKibben, Bill. 2012. "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math." *Rolling Stone*, August 2, 2012. www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719.

renewable resources,¹² requiring unprecedented efforts at all levels. A recent study identifies the requirements decade by decade to phase out the use of fossil fuels and to make the transition to renewable sources of energy if the commitments made in the Paris Agreement in 2015 are to be met.¹³ Yet there is no mechanism to push countries to abandon lucrative sources of revenue or companies to write off 80 percent of their assets, or to determine how to share the burden of such a fundamental transition in which there will be winners and losers.

Human impacts on the planet now exceed many natural processes, to the point that the modern era is increasingly being labeled as the Anthropocene. *Homo sapiens* has become an invasive species, degrading the environment and pushing beyond planetary boundaries.¹⁴ Science is beginning to determine the survivability of human civilization at the planetary level. The more we degrade planetary carrying capacity now, the lower will be the standard of living in a sustainable world society, at least in the short term.¹⁵

These environmental challenges are at the interface of science and policy-making. As much as some decision-makers may want to deny it, there is an objective reality to environmental characteristics and processes that can be measured and monitored with the tools of science. Science can determine past and present impacts, and increasingly can predict and model future consequences. Action can be postponed, generally increasing the costs and negative consequences over time, but it cannot be avoided. Fortunately, new information technologies that make data and knowledge widely available also strengthen our ability to use that knowledge to improve decision-making at all levels if there is the political will to do so.

While much more needs to be done to refine and extend research on future trajectories for human society, the issues requiring governance at the global level are already defined. This in itself is one of the strongest justifications for global governance, since many of the environmental systems being impacted (climate, ozone layer, nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, etc.)¹⁶ can only be managed through concerted action by all nations.

¹² IPCC. 2018. Global Warming of 1.5°C (SR15), Special Report. Summary for Policy Makers. Geneva, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, October 2018. www.ipcc.ch/report/sr15/
UN Environment. 2018. Emissions Gap Report 2018. Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme. www.unenvironment.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2018.

¹³ Rockström, Johan, Owen Gaffney, Joeri Rogelj, Malte Meinshausen, Nebojsa Nakicenovic, and Hans Joachim Schellnhuber. 2017. "A Roadmap for Rapid Decarbonization." *Science* Vol. 355, No. 6331, pp. 1269–1271. DOI: 10.1126/science.aah3443.

¹⁴ Rockström, Johan, et al. 2009. "A Safe Operating Space for Humanity." *Nature* Vol. 461, pp. 472–475, DOI:10.1038/461472a; Published online September 23, 2009. Updated in Steffen, Will, et al. 2015. "Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet." *Science* Vol. 347, No. 6223. DOI: 10.1126/science.1259855.

¹⁵ Meadows, Donella H., Dennis L. Meadows, and Jorgen Randers, 1992. *Beyond the Limits: Confronting Global Collapse, Envisioning a Sustainable Future*, White River Junction, VT, Chelsea Green.

¹⁶ Steffen et al., "Planetary Boundaries."

Yet there is no global environmental authority. Policy in this area is currently done via ad hoc approaches involving elements of international cooperation, voluntary compliance, and large doses of hope. In the absence of a body having jurisdiction over the global environment with corresponding legal enforcement authority, the international community has, de facto, abdicated management of the world's environment to chance and the actions of a few well-meaning states. Even the 2015 Paris Agreement ratified by 185 countries pledging reductions in emissions,¹⁷ if implemented in full, will not prevent a warming in excess of 1.5°C, the threshold recognized by climate scientists as necessary to avoid “potentially devastating consequences.”¹⁸

Social Challenges

While environmental challenges represent the outer boundaries to a sustainable planetary society, there are also a number of inner social boundaries below which no just and equitable society with adequate wealth and resources should descend, with poverty as the most central issue. The failure of the present economic system to distribute its increasing wealth more equitably has led to growing inequality and the consequent social instability.

Alongside the pursuit of economic growth without regard to environmental and social costs, there are other forces at work that are already having a major impact on our system's institutional underpinnings which have been crucial to the progress achieved during the past half-century. Key among these are population growth and the corresponding pressures on resources. According to the *World Energy Outlook* published by the International Energy Agency, global energy demand is expected to grow by more than 25 percent by 2040,¹⁹ reflecting the addition of some 1.7 billion people to the world's population and the corresponding need for housing, transportation, heating, illumination, food production, waste disposal, and the push for sustained increases in standards of living. Because many of the mothers who will bear these close to 2 billion children are already alive today, this expected increase in the world's population – barring some unexpected calamity – will materialize and will be largely concentrated in urban environments in developing countries.

Beyond the inevitable pressures on resources, rapid population growth in the poorest parts of the world in the next several decades will lead to growing imbalances

¹⁷ While reporting to the UNFCCC is binding, the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are purely voluntary and determined by each government. <https://unfccc.int/process/the-paris-agreement/nationally-determined-contributions/ndc-registry>

¹⁸ Stern, Nicholas and Samuel Fankhauser. 2016. “Climate Change, Development, Poverty and Economics,” Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment. The recent withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement shows how fragile even the most balanced agreements can be to the whims of individual leaders.

¹⁹ See www.iea.org, International Energy Agency, *World Energy Outlook 2018*, Executive Summary, p. 1.

and a broad range of challenges for governments, businesses, and civil society. For instance, in the Middle East and North Africa, high fertility rates and the highest rates of population growth in the world will put an enormous strain on labor markets. These countries already suffer from the highest rates of unemployment in the world. To simply prevent these rates from rising further, it will be necessary to create well over 100 million new jobs within the next decade and a half – an extremely tall order. The job creation needs of these countries are nothing new and were present already at the outset of this century; the failure to do so has led to major political and social instability in the region in recent years.²⁰

Unemployment is in fact one of our most important social challenges, as it is a driver for exclusion and marginalization, with consequences including increasing crime, drug trafficking and use, juvenile delinquency, family breakdown, domestic violence, and migration in search of better opportunities. Meaningful employment is essential for human dignity and a place in the community, and work in a spirit of service to the community has important benefits including refining human character and empowering individuals to develop their human potential. No one should be deprived of the opportunity to work, and one purpose of good governance should be to guarantee this opportunity. Neither governments nor private actors have found a solution to this challenge at present. Some have proposed a guaranteed minimum income. While this could be an effective tool to alleviate poverty and provide a safety net for vulnerable groups, it does not address the problem of unemployment and the associated waste of resources. Work is necessary for individual and social health.

In sharp contrast to poor regions with rapid population growth, the populations of countries such as Italy, Japan, Russia and others in the industrial world will continue to shrink; a demographic trend which, in turn, will put huge pressure on public finances as states attempt to cope with growing numbers of pensioners and related social and health expenditures.

Many of today's social problems are the consequence of the globalization of finance and commerce, against the background of a refusal to accept social globalization, the free movement of people, as well as the global implementation of civil and human rights, among other things, in order to ensure a "humane" global governance.²¹ Some countries have an excess of unemployed youth, while others lack young workers to support an aging population. Some countries lack the basic means to support their present or anticipated population, while others have large underpopulated areas and lack the people to develop their resources. Yet the idea that natural movements of populations could rebalance these disparities is politically

²⁰ On this point see Augusto López-Claros and Danielle Pletka. 2005. "Without Reforms, the Middle East Risks Revolution." *International Herald Tribune*, April 8.

²¹ See, e.g., Falk, Richard. 2014. *(Re)Imagining Humane Global Governance*, Abingdon, UK and New York, Routledge.

anathema, in contrast to the nineteenth century when immigration built economies. Obviously, much must be done at the level of public education, trust in institutions, just and equitable distribution of resources, and infrastructure development before such adjustments can become reasonable possibilities, but improvements to international governance can lay the foundation for the gradual elimination of this inconsistency and associated imbalances.

The social challenges of globalization have also grown far beyond the capacity of the present system. While human rights have long been a central concern of the international community, violations of basic rights continue to be persistent and widespread. Migration has become a new issue of planetary scale and is anticipated to accelerate as climate change displaces increasing numbers in the years ahead. The global community will face a mixing of populations for which it is presently totally unprepared. Yet there is no international body charged with giving binding legal effect to the noble principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent international human rights instruments building on its principles, to hold states to account for these international obligations (see Chapter 11).

Economic Challenges

In our globalized world, powerful demonstration effects are at work as everyone can now see how the wealthy live. The spread of instant communication and the Internet have led billions of people in China, India, Latin America, and other parts of the developing world to aspire to lifestyles and patterns of consumption similar to those prevailing in the advanced economies. Furthermore, these populations are often unwilling to postpone such aspirations and increasingly expect their governments to deliver rising levels of prosperity, implicitly pushing for a more equitable distribution of the world's resources. Yet between 1988 and 2008 over 60 percent of the gains in global income were concentrated in the top 5 percent of the global income distribution.²²

Thus, a fundamental development question that we face today is how to reconcile the legitimate aspirations of citizens in the developing world for the high economic growth rates that in the post-war period led to such remarkable improvements in global standards of living, with the challenges of a planet and an economic system under severe stress as a result of the pressures put on it by that very economic growth.²³ The only way to make resources available for the half of the world

²² Milanovic, Branko. 2013. "Global Income Inequality: Historical Trends and Policy Implications for the Future." PowerPoint presentation at the World Bank.

²³ The destabilizing effect of thwarted economic aspirations is not only a problem affecting the developing world. The quantitative historian/mathematical ecologist Peter Turchin predicted some years ago a risk of political instability and impending crisis in Western Europe and the USA peaking in 2020, driven by forces of economic inequality. The only way to avoid such a