ANXIETIES OF GLOBAL CAPITALIST WORLD

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CULTURAL SUICIDE AND CULTURAL CHANGE

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This piece seeks to link individual behaviors that are against rational self-interest and survival (and in defiance of the 'rational actor' model of human behavior that is the basis of economic and political science theory) to those aggregate behaviors at the cultural level that constitute 'cultural suicide' (cultural extinction or social collapse). In examining current behaviors of different groups that are against rational self-interest and do not fit the classifications for individual suicide, it appears that human behaviors are locked into a number of instinctive social behavioral choices that might promote family and group survival under normal conditions but that appear irrational and suicidal when communities reach the limits of their resources. This work offers some preliminary hypotheses for further testing, including the theory that humans have a biologically innate 'logic' promoting periodic high risk competitive behaviors as part of human social ordering and that these behaviors challenge rational choices for long-term survival. This article follows a previous piece testing the hypothesis that there are processes of cultural 'suicide' (or social collapse), that are analogous to individual suicide or genetic suicide, with a logic working at the cultural level in which cultural suicide serves a function in human cultural processes.

Keywords: *suicide, culture, identity, role theory, social change, rational actor model, economic theory, instinctive behaviors, risk behavior, elite behaviors, Jews, US empire, Israel.*

Introduction

Many authors have tried to examine the puzzle of apparently 'suicidal' collapse of societies where it should have been obvious to the victims that unchanged behaviors would result in calamity. On Easter Island, for example, what some consider the classic case of a civilization that caused its own extinction by destroying its natural environment prior to the eighteenth century, it would have been obvious to inhabitants that they were sealing their own fate by overusing resources that were clearly limited without protective planning (Diamond 2005). In what some see as analogous to behaviors today that are destroying the global environment or that are driving empires to their collapse following the parallels of previous collapses (such as behaviors in the contemporary USA and perhaps also in Western Europe, following the collapse of the Soviet Union), social,

cultural and ideological structures seem to be pushing cultures towards collapse or 'suicide' (Diamond 2005; Lempert 1995, 2012, and 2017).

In a previous article in this journal, this author challenged the assumption found in social science today that human 'reason' or 'rational long term self-interest' is bound to triumph over the ideologies and social structures that appear to lock societies into self-destructive or suicidal behaviors (Lempert 2017). Following examples in biology and psychology, this author presented the case that the phenomenon of cultural suicide not only may be widespread and occur under a number of conditions, but that it may follow a logic similar to that of biological species extinction and trait extinction, exhibiting a logic similar to the rationale of suicide at the individual level (Homer-Dixon 2006; Gyllenberg, Parvinen and Dickmann 2001; Parvinen 2005; Rankin, Bargum and Kokko 2007). Though humans do negotiate their ways out of deadlocks (like the 'prisoners dilemma' that seems today to be leading to a doomsday scenario of social collapse based on social science models [Lempert and Nguyen 2011]) or ideological constraints [Hardin 1993]), failure to do so may not simply be an 'accident' or 'mistake' in learning or understanding.

In many cases, cultures that chose an apparently 'suicidal' strategy had the technology to foresee the destructive results of their behaviors but seemed unable or unwilling to learn and apply that learning. Their collapse or 'suicide' may represent a logical choice at the cultural level that would favor the evolution of more adaptive cultures (or, perhaps, of species more adaptive to the planet than humans).

While this logic might be explained at the cultural or species level as fitting a rational logic for species (or eco-system) survival, the argument is still somewhat deterministic. It does not explain why individual choice, given human intelligence, would be unable to overcome this cultural 'inevitability'. Certainly, ideology and socialization forces are powerful, if not the glue that holds societies together. Certainly, culture and its ideologies act as a short-hand to assure that some behaviors are automatic and unquestioning, such that humans do not need to expend effort to think through every daily action and choice. Nevertheless, ideology is still socially constructed and subject to change when circumstances change. Individuals are able to question it and challenge it. Human intelligence enables individuals to identify paths of change and to make corrections. If human intelligence fails to do that, as in the case of these cultural 'suicides', it should be possible to identify the conditions under which these failures occur and also to suggest whether those failures are 'determined' or 'random/ probabilistic'.

On Eastern Island, it certainly would have become apparent, well before 'the cutting of the final tree' that the survival of the culture there could have been protected through some kind of sacrifice (including individual suicide, if not some other kind of population planning). Easter Islanders would have known that they were caught in a 'tragedy of the commons' and were heading to their doom by competing against each other and destroying their environment. Yet, they made the choice to self-destruct rather than to negotiate a solution (Diamond 2005).

The question that social science may be able to ask in parallel, today, given similar threats to the common environment as well as visible declines within major empires following established patterns (Lempert 1995 and 2012) is why the Easter Islanders were (and individuals today seem to be) unable to act rationally as individuals despite per-

ceiving the consequences. The question is not why the Eastern Islanders 'erred', because they had time to change. It is, 'Why did they each fail to act rationally to protect their long-term interests and, instead, cling to an ideology (possibly one of militarism and competition) that they could see would lead to "mutually assured destruction"?'

In asking similar questions today, social science may be able to flesh out a more complete theory of cultural suicide and how it occurs both at the aggregate level and at the level of individuals, and reveal how and why individual behaviors seem to promote it. If humanity is witnessing the process of cultural suicide or collapse today, social scientists may be in the position to collect data and test hypotheses on social processes in motion (that, arguably, may be unaffected by artifacts introduced articles like this one). The question social science can ask (with its many assumptions that are posited for the purpose of this article) is as follows:

Why, given an understanding that planetary resources are finite and that current systems are unsustainable (Lempert and Nguyen 2009), and why, given clear parallels from past cases that current policy choices are replicating those that led to collapse of the Soviet Union and to other empires (Lempert 1995; Tainter 1988) including genocides and World War (Lempert 2015), are individual choices apparently being made to ***accelerate*** *these scenarios rather than to avoid them, as would be expected by rational behaviors of rational actors?*

Indeed, social science can examine the behaviors of two different groups today that are analogous to the Easter Islanders, whose choices may be suicidal in different ways: (1) economic elites in empires that are falling (in the U.S., with some parallels elsewhere, and following the experience of the elites in the Soviet Union) and (2) intellectuals, including Jewish intellectuals, who appear to be undercutting their own positions, if not recreating conditions of early twentieth century genocides.

Both economic elites and intellectuals are specifically trained in and have the social role of foreseeing the consequences of contemporary choices and of protecting long-term survival interests of their societies. If they are choosing not to do so, it may be assumed that they are 'deliberately' (perhaps, subconsciously) choosing high risk behaviors that could invite their own destruction. Why would they do so?

The theoretical question social science can test, looking at contemporary behaviors in an application of anthropological and psychological techniques, is:

When and how are rational choice and reason, for protecting long-term self-interest, apparently trumped by some other logic (possibly, instinctive primate behaviors) and what is the logic of those behaviors?

This article offers some preliminary hypotheses as to why choices at the individual level, when individuals know at some conscious level that their actions are inviting cultural collapse or genocide, might still promote cultural suicide, cultural collapse or genocide. These choices are not the same as those of individual suicide, since the individual is not directly taking his/her own life and may even promote some short-term interest for those individuals. At the same time, these actions create long-term harm to individuals and their offspring. In general, there appears to be a set of biologically innate human behaviors that are part of the 'logic' of periodic high risk competitive behaviors that are a part of human social ordering both within groups and between groups. From the perspective of political or economic theory, these behaviors would seem entirely irrational

and against individual self-interest, given the assumption that long-term consequences are also incorporated into current choices. Yet, from the collective perspective of the culture, these choices promote a cultural logic for human social ordering and may even reflect some instinctive human social behaviors that generally do promote groups and the human species, or that could at least be expected to protect an overall eco-system even if not benefitting humans.

The structure of the article follows that of the scientific method, though the test here is very preliminary, using some participant observation (anthropological) data, political data, and logical analysis to offer some hypotheses for discussion and further testing.

Background: Searching for Instinctive Behaviors that Might Trump Individual Rational Choice and Link to a Logic at the Cultural or Societal Level

This article represents an attempt to explain self-destructive cultural behaviors as following instincts from our ancestry as primates, rather than reflecting our unique human intelligence or reason. This approach reverses some previously held assumptions about the rationality of human choices that previously may have made it difficult to ask certain questions about political and economic behaviors. It confronts the image we, as humans, would prefer to have about our long-term prospects (as a species or of contemporary cultures), our vision of the wisdom of our culture (as advanced, rational, adaptable, and durable), or our historical record (that we like to define as one of teleological 'progress') and creates a conflict with religious beliefs (the Judeo-Christian view of suicide as an 'immoral' 'choice').

In setting the context for examining these questions, some of the different disciplinary perspectives, jointly and individually that bear on the issue of potentially 'suicidal' cultural/societal choices, can be placed into a new inter-disciplinary framework. The suggestion that cultures may make choices at the cultural level and that those choices may include 'suicide' rather than self-preservation is a new approach that draws from models in genetics as well as from psychology and sociology in studies of suicide (Lempert 2017).

The further suggestion that there may be innate (primate) behaviors at the individual level that also trump rational choice at the level of politics or economics, directly challenges contemporary 'social sciences' (political science and economics) by drawing from biology and psychology to promote a unity of social sciences under the umbrella of anthropology. As a holistic social science, bridging the biological sciences and humanities, anthropology offers an arena for testing different assumptions, including those of irrational and innate behaviors that may trump the accepted views of rationality and of teleological 'one-directional' 'progress', by linking analysis at the level of culture and the individual.

Psychologists and sociologists have long started with different assumptions about human behavior from those posited by economists and political scientists, challenging the model of humans as 'rational actors'. They have yet, however, to have applied these assumptions directly to behaviors that might lead to cultural collapse or suicide; areas largely in the purview of political scientists. Early sociologist Emile Durkheim did seek to explain the seemingly irrational behavior of individual suicide (Durkheim 1951

[1897]), while early psychologist Sigmund Freud suggested that 'people have an innate death drive that impels them to pursue their own downfall and death' (Freud 1920 [1901]), but they stopped there.

Since then, there seems to have been at least a tacit agreement among many social sciences to follow the economists' 'rational actor' model that assumes human behavior follows the logic of utility maximization; that individuals bargain with each other to maximize their long term interests. Linked with this is a religious belief that social changes are teleological, that societies are moving 'forwards' and current social processes will continue this progress rather than lead to cyclical collapses, regress, or simply random evolution. Although social and cultural anthropologists have not accepted the idea of single, linear evolution of human systems, they have accepted the idea that cultures are 'socially constructed' products of the human mind and human choice, in somewhat of a break (and conflict with) physical anthropologists who study innate behaviors and with evolutionary adaptations to environments that are more deterministic.

While social scientists tend to avoid biological explanations of behaviors, the study of animal (and human) behaviors using biological models has tended to reinforce the assumption of 'rational choice' by showing how different choices that may not be what economists call 'profit maximizing' are actually rational from the point of view of individual survival or survival of one's genes to future generations (Axelrod 1984; Wilson 1978; Lorenz 1982). Nevertheless, at the same time, social scientists studying animal and human behaviors have introduced the idea of different instinctive behaviors that are biologically based, including those of attraction and mating and hierarchy, that do not fit the idea of simple rational actors seeking to 'maximize' wealth or utility along a single linear dimension. These models have challenged the rational actor model of political scientists and economists and have suggested the need to look at behaviors from within a social context rather than to start with *a priori* posit theories about human behavior that do not match the empirical reality of human motivations.

In studying individual behaviors, social scientists report a number of paradoxes that have been difficult to reconcile into previous theories of human behaviors. Some of these observations have been by economists, on how preferences are weighed (Arrow 1950), while others are on choices within the social context, including self-destructive behaviors, such as suicide.

The biological models suggest that beyond various innate behaviors at the individual level (*e.g.*, individual choice, for humans), there may also be patterns of behaviors at the collective, social level, that also defy the logic of individual rational actors. This author's previous study of cultural suicide offers one such example of a behavior at a collective level that may or may not have some kind of analogue or link to a rational behavior at the individual level. The behavioral logic at the level of collective behavior seems to defy the idea of a rational 'utility maximizing' behavior for the individual. What, then, explains this seeming inconsistency between the two levels?

As in biology, where systems can be analyzed at the population level and at the individual level but where it is sometimes difficult to link the logic between the two levels (Hofstadter 1979; Michard 1999; Haldane 1932; Williams 1966), anthropologists and psychologists often face a conundrum in trying to link individual and system behaviors

in order to understand and to predict change. While advances are now being made quickly in computer modeling to try to link individual to collective behaviors by studying the principles of 'self-organization' (Kennedy and Eberhart 2001; Camazine *et al*. 2001; Langton 1994), this sub-field is still in its infancy in linking individual human action to collective social decisions.

The current status of explanations for many individual choices that appear irrational is that they are motivated by 'ideology' or 'institutional pressures', with individual behaviors constrained by socialization and control systems that prevent freedom of choice. For cultures that have undergone collapse, including Easter Island or the classic cases of environmental collapse like those of the ancient Maya or Khmer where resources were overused, the assumption is that certain ideological beliefs were not subject to challenge and those systems were unable to adapt. (Note that these cases are different from those of human error, where knowledge of environmental cycles was faulty and did not include the possibility of unusually long cycles of climatic change that were not easily predictable. In these systems, some of the strains on resources as population grew were becoming visible, as was the need for drastic actions.)

At least for the case of Easter Island prior to the eighteenth century, that some use as the classic paradigm of collapse[1] (Diamond 2005), it appears that as the natural environmental collapse became foreseeable there was no attempt at sacrificing population to try to regain a balance. Instead, the choice appears to have been a homicidal and suicidal one: increased violent competition for resources that would and did lead to extinction.

The question on Easter Island and other societies suffering collapse, in the past and today, is why ideology and the forces that maintain it should be able to trump human reason in the face of obvious information that the ideology was or is failing. As difficult as the sacrifices they might have had to make were, why would Easter Islanders have been unable to rationally choose to make them? If reason failed, what instinctive behaviors prevented it?

There have been several studies on the psychology of group pressure and human denial (Asch 1951; Milgram 1974) that demonstrate how strong the forces of ideology and group pressure can be on those who are not the decision-makers. Nevertheless, those experimental laboratory tests of conformity do not mimic the situations or conditions of cultures facing potential collapse. In those actual cases, individuals (leaders and intellectuals) also have a social role that allows them to use their resources or position (or to hide from public pressure through simple acts like secret ballot voting) to challenge consensus. Indeed, where they have the social role and structures that enable them to amend or transform ideologies for the benefit of the group, what would prevent them from doing so?

While decision-theory following the rational actor models comes up only with the hypothesis that individuals lacked information or were prone to discount risks or to choose wildly when under stress, if social science is freed from the constraints of the rational actor model, it becomes possible to test additional hypotheses of human 'drives' or innate behaviors. It may very well be that such instinctive behaviors that would favor group solidarity and human survival under normal conditions would be unchecked and unsuitable in some conditions of environmental constraints that would lead to collapse

or cultural 'suicide'; an irrational choice at the individual level for the culture but perhaps the dominant and logical behavior at a different deeper level at which the behaviors are innate.

Hypothesis: Testing Instinctive Behaviors that Might Trump Individual Rational Choice and Link to a Logic at the Cultural or Societal Level

The general hypothesis tested here and presented above that would link a logic of individual choice to a suicidal outcome at the collective social level is relatively simple to state:

Instinctive human behaviors (probably from our primate ancestry in the limbic parts of our brains) that favor the survival of human collectives under normal conditions lead to cultural collapse or suicide in other conditions (such as resource constraints in a closed system that includes other cultures, and where attacking them for their resources is not a viable option) by overriding rational, intellectual behaviors for long-term planning.

In order to test this hypothesis, however, it needs to be presented with more specifics. To do that requires the identification of some potential individual behaviors that could be innate and that would protect human groups under most conditions. Confirming the hypothesis would seem to require evidence that if such a behavior were innate and could trump rational decision-making by individuals, that it would be potentially destructive under some extreme or unusual conditions even though these behaviors might also fit a rational logic of cultural suicide at the cultural level.

This article tests four common specific behaviors that might meet the conditions of the hypothesis in being linked to cultural collapse by being likely (or 'hard wired') to override individual and collective choices that could prevent collapse: violent social aggression against outsiders from other groups (the basic of setting group boundaries in its extreme form); exclusive focus on short-term benefits to one's family, clan or tribal group to the exclusion of cooperation; assertion of dominance and inequality in a hierarchy with one's culture in the dominant position; and creation of conditions reinforcing a weak or victimized position of one's group, replicating previously victimization of that group within a hierarchy of cultures. The fourth of these is documented in individual behaviors of individuals and also seems to exist for subordinated groups in the form of 'learned helplessness' or 'pedagogy of the oppressed' (Freire 1970) but is not generally thought of as a part of cultural identity or group consciousness. The repertoire of behaviors that are instinctive and could be suicidal could be many more than these.

The hypothesis for each specific behavior can be restated, for example, as follows:

Specific hypothesis (1): *Predation-aggression behavior, if an instinctive behavior to promote survival of a group in competition with other groups, leads to cultural collapse or cultural suicide in conditions where the upper boundaries of resources are reached or where competitors will counter with mutually assured destruction, and it will override rational behaviors for cooperation under certain conditions.*

This is the specific hypothesis that comes out of the Easter Island case. What seems to have happened before the extinction of humans on Easter Island was that an instinct for aggression and fighting over the last remaining trees trumped cooperative behaviors

to sacrifice population and to protect what was remaining of the eco-system so that a few individuals could survive.

Rather than restate each of the other three specific hypotheses in parallel to the first one, they are listed in Table 1, below, demonstrating how they meet the conditions for testing: They appear to be innate behaviors that favor a collective group under normal circumstances (described in column 2) but become a suicidal choice under conditions of limited resources (described in column 3).

Table 1

The Four Specific Hypotheses: Innate Behaviors that Favor the Collective under Normal Circumstances but that are Suicidal Under Conditions of Limited Resources

Possible Specific Innate Behaviors that Might Fit the General Hypothesis	***Benefit Under Normal Circumstances***	***Suicidal Choice under Situation of Limited Resources***
(1) Predation-Aggression	Cohesion and protection of genetic group; Imperial expansion (some cultures)	Warfare promotes overuse of resources and prevents protection of the commons
(2) Non-cooperative Tribalism and Family Protection (smaller level than predation-aggression)	Cohesion and protection of the genetic group	Competitive overuse of resources that prevents protection of the commons
(3) Assertion of the dominant hierarchical role (for some groups the opposite hierarchical role as a fantasy of victim-aggressor behavior)	Maintains the overall system hierarchy by filling vacated roles of competing for a dominance hierarchy	Recreates internally destructive behaviors that may threaten cooperative survival and innovation
(4) Reassertion of hierarchical position, even if that of low status or victim	Maintains the overall hierarchy and creates a sub-group solidarity around a shared and known identity	Invites abuse, inequality and possibly genocide against the sub-group in the name of protecting its identity

These specific hypotheses can be easily linked to the ‘prisoners' dilemma’ model that is prevalent today in social science, and that can be applied the case of interactions between cultures where there is competition over resources; what this author referred to in a previous work as the ‘global prisoners' dilemma of unsustainability’ (Lempert and Nguyen 2011). Contemporary globalization appears to be ensnaring cultures in a ‘prisoners' dilemma’; producing a collision course for human societies in which where the seemingly best short-term choice for each culture is the one with the most devastating long-term consequences and where there seems to be an inability for cultures to bargain to a better solution for humanity. If behaviors are innate and each culture chooses a strategy of short-term interest that overrides rational logic, then bargaining and cooperation are impossible. Under such conditions, cooperation has yet to evolve (Axelrod 1984).

For readers who do not have immediate access to the author's previous article on the logic of cultural suicide at the cultural level, that draws from the work of Durkheim on individual suicide (1951 [1897]), it is instructive to briefly reference it here again. Table 2 combines material from two tables in that earlier piece to demonstrate how the four types of individual behaviors identified by Durkheim for individual suicide that can be used at the level of societies to describe cultural suicide, are not manifestations of individual suicide that are applied by aggregates of individuals and lead to a result at the societal or cultural level but are simply descriptors of types of rationale that can describe suicides at both levels (Lempert 2017). The four instinctive individual behaviors that are listed above and tested here as hypotheses are entirely different individual behaviors from individual suicide as Durkheim outlined (shown in column two) and as defined today by biologists (column three). Indeed, the four types of behaviors tested here do not appear to be suicidal behaviors at all even though their long-term outcomes for their cultures and the individuals in them may be suicidal (such as the extermination in Easter Island through mutually assured destruction). The outcomes of the four instinctive individual behaviors may fit the same logic at the cultural level for those categories that Durkheim identified as 'altruistic', 'anomic', or 'egoistic' suicide (a free choice by the culture, not driven by 'fatalism'), but neither individuals nor outsiders will perceive that their innate behaviors are suicidal at the individual level since they do not immediately terminate the lives of the individuals choosing these behaviors.

Table 2

Durkheim's Categories of Individual Suicide along with Genetic-Biological Explanations Offered Today

Durkheim's Characterizations of Suicide		
	Individual Manifestations	***Biological Explanations Today***
Altruistic (Inclusive Fitness)	Sacrifice of Elderly Parent; Sacrifice of Wounded/Crippled; Elderly widow(er); Kamikaze	Sharing of Resources to promote genetic survival of like genes
Anomic	Genetic Mental Illness	Defective Genes that are self eliminating
Fatalistic (Pain)	Captured Criminal; Captive or torture victim; Scapegoat; Terminal illness; Alcoholism, Drug abuse and other reckless behaviors	Self defensive pain mechanism that's a subset of the above and could be described as altruistic OR group behavior
Egoistic	Romantic; Martyr; Other socially defined 'honor' deaths; Cult behaviors; Deadlock (mutual) suicide of equally matched competitors fighting to the death?	Could be group process behavior that is altruistic

Methods

For the purposes of raising debate and to try to bring attention to contemporary issues, this article examines behaviors within a major power like the U.S. today (a society that is not clearly a 'culture', though sometimes described as the 'Anglo-American' culture); a society that appears to be following the same path as the Soviet Union (Russian Empire) towards collapse. This piece examines the rationality of choices made by the USA relative to the potential for such a collapse (Lempert 1995). Though it is possible to examine behaviors in other cultures/societies besides the USA that seem unsustainable, the USA is in a position of power to influence resources and behaviors of others. It is a better subject for study because it is not a small culture in a hierarchy of cultures that may be acting 'suicidally' for fatalistic reasons or altruistic reasons (as shown in Table 2) as a result of inferior position and lack of real power. Those behaviors may be 'rational' for less powerful cultures following the logic of their position and inability to bargain out of what may be a 'prisoners dilemma' (Lempert and Nguyen 2011).

To test the hypothesis, what needs to be shown is that those individuals who have the ability to make rational choices to change their cultures and avert disaster do not do so but instead freely make instinctive choices that do not fit their reality (directly promote likely negative consequences of their actions). Thus, the task is to identify specific groups, their ability to challenge an existing ideology or institution in order to protect the culture/society, and their behaviors. For the purpose of this article, two different groups fit the criteria:

1) political-economic elites who set the U.S. political agenda in leading political institutions and the press, and

2) intellectuals – using the proxy of Jewish-Americans (a group that has been overrepresented in social sciences and publishing as well as a politically 'progressive' group challenging elites for much of the twentieth century) (Lempert 2015).

The basic data for the analysis includes:

– reported political data (voting and other forms of political behaviors),

– published media sources, and

– participant observation of both groups (the author's frequent contacts through educational and work networks for political-economic elites and through membership (Jewish, intellectuals)), allowing for questioning and testing of choices and change over time.

Below is the presentation of some of the visible data on current short-term choices that appear to violate long-term self-interest of each of the two groups, posing and reframing the four sub-hypotheses to be tested to see whether instinctive choices could explain the irrationality. Presented in each category are the expected rational long-term interest of the cultural/social system and the group, the visible short-term behaviors that seem to contradict that interest, and the issues to be tested that could confirm the overall hypothesis.

- **Group I: Leadership: U.S. Political-economic elites who set the country's political agenda**

Expected rational long-term interests for the system and the group: The economic 'rational actor' model suggests that elites act to minimize risk and assure secure long-

term stable environments favoring stable investments and long-term profit maximization that also enables them to maintain their positions. That stability is promoted through sustainable resource supplies, economic equality and rule of law (to mediate conflicts) and investment in people to assure a stable and productive work force and consumption base. The experience of the Russian-Soviet Empire's collapse demonstrates how the concentration of power and investment in militarism and social control undermined that system. The post-1930s economic depression and post-World War II history demonstrated that stability and growth were promoted by international law and rule of law, opportunity/equity.

Visible short-term behaviors that seem to contradict the long-term interest: Roughly since 1980, US policies seem to have reversed all of the key stability factors and to have copied those very policies that led to the collapse of the Russian-Soviet Empire. These seemingly irrational policies include: increased militarism and internal controls (prisons and government intrusion); concentration of power, increasing disparity of wealth; and undercutting investment in education and research. The short-term logic of elites has been to dismantle rule of law, to quickly extract wealth, to partly de-link personal (family, corporate) interests from those of workers and consumers, and to promote militarization for controls over resources and fossil fuels, despite threats to global climate, water, and to long-term human health (Lempert and Nguyen 2011).

Questioning the apparent break-down in logic: Given the knowledge of collapse of the Russian-Soviet and other empires, why would elites invite collapse along a similar path? Why dismantle the post-war protections of rule of law and redistribution that safeguarded the system from instability? Why unleash climate change and destabilization? Why create competitions for resources and population/consumption expansion that increase future risks of war and instability, given the twentieth century historical lessons? Some businesses have short-term interests – oil and military – but most others that are dependent on these resources recognize their limitations. While some segments of the elites may have tried to promote nuclear war or mutually assured destruction since the 1950s, elites as a whole did act to assure stability in the early post-depression and post-World War II period, but that appears to have now changed. Why?

Issues to be tested, including instinctive behaviors: Are elites really motivated to assure long-term stability and wealth or is their real goal to promote confrontation out of some innate drive (1), to favor their own reference group at all costs for the sake of power (2), to establish a position in a hierarchy (3), and to induce risk for the thrill of risk, intensity and the 'game' of violence (any of the three specific hypotheses)?

- **Group II: Change Agents: Intellectuals, with Jewish-Americans as a subset of intellectuals-reformers**

Expected rational long-term interests for the system and the group: Given the role of intellectuals in foreseeing the need for societies to change to protect elites, the long-term goals of intellectuals for promoting system stability are the same as those for elites, above. At the same time, intellectuals have a personal and professional interest in promoting education, universities and intellectual freedoms and a stated professional interest in considering 'progress.' For Jews, a minority group, there is a heightened personal interest in rule of law to protect cultural diversity and in economic stability and

peace/tolerance to protect Jewish survival, as well as in success of all groups to minimize any potential for 'scapegoating' or targeting of Jews.

Visible short-term behaviors that seem to contradict the long-term interest: US intellectuals and Jews have supported the seemingly irrational choices of elitesto support 'conservative' political shifts since 1980. For both groups, the amount of challenge to these views promoting short-term interests over long-term stability has diminished (visible in voting behaviors and other political activities). The 'statesman' role of protecting university investment, economic equality, and rule of law, while opposing militarism and concentration of power, seems to have disappeared. In many ways, university social science disciplines appear hedonistic (Lempert and others 1995, 2018). For Jews as a whole, support for political 'progressive' positions and movements has almost entirely evaporated (Lempert 2015). The short-term logic of intellectuals, overall, seems to be to join the elites rather than to advise them on their long-term interests. That of Jews seems to also be to join with elites and to support the targeting of Muslims/Arabs as a common enemy, possibly for the purpose of channeling potential anti-Jewish sentiments against Muslims and not all Semitic peoples, in an alliance of Jews with Christians (Lempert 2015). While some past Jewish policies were for reconciliation with Palestinians and the Muslim world (in recognition of centuries of peaceful co-existence), the short-term approach is to see Israel as a 'Jewish-European' state with a militarization of relations and support for Israeli-Jewish settlements on land that is recognized in peace agreements as not for Jewish settlement.

Questioning the apparent break-down in logic: Why would Jews act to recreate conditions prior to World War II that bear some resemblance to pre-Holocaust conditions (*e.g.,* the high wealth and visibility of a small number of elite Jews who are identified with predatory financial interests (Wall Street) and the promotion of economic inequality, resource wars, and militarism (currently against Muslims)), given that these make Jews a very easy scapegoat under conditions of economic stress and international conflicts? Why would intellectuals create conditions that would highlight their expendability? (Lempert *et. al.* 1995)

Issues to be tested, including instinctive behaviors: Are intellectuals and Jews really motivated to promote equity, stability, long-term survival and progress or is their real goal to satisfy innate drives for releasing aggression against others even if they were not the cause of past harms? Is the behavior: (1) simple assertion of clannish interests; (2) assertion of dominance role in group hierarchies though it may include abuses against others; and (3) recreation of past patterns of abuse and victimization including identification with the role of victimization and even inviting it (4)? Can the 'assimilation' of Jews be ruled out as the explanation? Can the argument that intellectuals do not have the freedom to explain how current elite choices are undermining the survival of the system and long-term interests be ruled out? Is the behavior of intellectuals and Jews the result of current control systems that place intellectuals under more restrictions, and create more disincentives against fulfilling the part of their social role that seeks to protect the long-term stability of the system?

Data

There is a variety of data that suggests the viability of the specific hypotheses for the two different test groups but offering absolute 'proof' is difficult at this preliminary stage. Existing data makes it difficult to separate out the four specific sub-hypotheses from each other since explanations of innate behaviors tend to cluster together (aggression, hierarchy, and group protection). The data can be summarized and characterized for the two different groups as follows.

- **Group I: Leadership: U.S. Political-economic elites who set the country's political agenda**

Overview: Popular literature and films focusing on the motivations of economic leaders in the U.S. have repeatedly depicted individuals as focused not on long-term profit or stability but on the thrill of risk-taking (and potential destruction) and on power for the sake of power as well as favoritism for small groups (though mostly for individuals). The portrait suggests that they are addicted to a 'game' of power and violence that overrides seeking rational long-term benefit and long-term self-interest. (Among several notable films offering this view are: *American Psycho*, *Cosmopolis*, *Inside Job*, and *Wall Street*, some based on or using evidence of actual personalities, like *Inside Job*.) News accounts are also filled with reports of such behaviors, particularly of individuals in major institutions that are at the heart of financial, economic and political legitimacy and stability but have taken on increasing risks. There is also some suggestion that the end of the Cold War and the U.S.' global ascendancy suddenly unleashed dominance behaviors in the thrill of victory ('The New World Order') that trumped adherence to goals of long-term stability and tolerance. There are some biological studies (below) as well as some cross-cultural observation that might confirm this.

Supporting Evidence: According to recent biological studies, some 30 per cent of the population has a gene for 'thrill seeking behaviors' rather than rational assessment while 20 per cent have two such genes (Zuckerman 1994). Generally, these behaviors are expressed in human adolescence but less in older individuals whose social, adult role would be to preserve systems and their stability. There are some suggestions that political and economic institutions – particularly financial institutions that have now become key pillars of the stability of industrial economies – may select leaders for these high risk genetic individuals in ways that productive systems in agricultural or small manufacturing societies might not, though there is no clear data. What the studies of thrill-seeking (high risk) behaviors suggest is that there is a need in human groups for individuals to create risks beyond those that already exist in their environments; in other words, there is a human tendency to expect risk and to want to create dangers when it is not there. 'Perhaps when death is a risk in everyday life, such contrived dangers (as skydiving and bungee jumping that are Western 'recreation') are superfluous', one psychologist explains (Zuckerman 1994). The inference is that leaders in a monopoly position where they have eliminated most competitive risks to profits might then suddenly begin to destabilize their own systems in order to continue to experience the biological stimulus of continuing risk. One interesting essay by an American war veteran in Southeast Asia, a decade after he left the military, describes the innate emotional reasons why he 'loved war' and how men were drawn to it (Broyles 1984). He described the hormonal highs and intensity of risk behaviors, the male bonding that cannot occur

elsewhere, the need for testing oneself, the fascination with destruction and death, and the relationship between war, violence, risk, and sex; the instability that promoted mixing of genes in the human gene pool and promoted conception while killing off populations and stability. 'Most men who have been to war would have to admit, if they are honest, that somewhere inside themselves they loved it too, loved it as much as anything that has happened to them before or since. ... War is also an affair of great and seductive beauty,' he wrote (Broyles 1984). Similar cross-cultural sentiments are summed up in the words of the philosopher Bakunin (1992 [1869]): 'Destruction is a creative passion' and perhaps 'creation includes a destructive passion'. The ancient Hindu philosophy of Siva and Vishnu, the gods of destruction and creation that they viewed as parts of human nature, present a similar observation. Further studies might confirm the attitudes about high risk and violent behaviors among elites and also whether there is a desire for high risk behaviors across generations or at certain time intervals, as a function of stability and need to recreate instability. The data for Jews, below, suggests something similar.

- **Group II: Change Agents: Intellectuals, with Jewish-Americans as a subset of intellectuals-reformers:**

Overview: The ideal of the humanitarian, scholar-statesman, philosopher king in the role of holding truth to power seems to have disappeared among intellectuals today, if it ever did exist (it partly seems to have existed in the 1970s (Lempert, 2018)). Today, university administrators (and academics) in the USA rarely seem to speak out on political issues and long-term concerns. They appear to serve as fundraisers and to promote economist policies of elites. Similarly, among most Jews in the USA, the idea of having a 'calling' or social role of promoting ideas of progress and offering a vision and leading seems to have also disappeared. Among academics and among Jews, discussions seem to focus on clannish interests. Given the strength of these interests (and fears about them), public discussions of behaviors, role, and identity of intellectuals and of Jews (and Jewish intellectuals) is 'sensitive' and actual data is hard to find that would confirm what is only impressionistic behavior. However, there are some neutral studies of Jewish behaviors, including of identity and suicide among Jews, along with controversial arguments on attitudes towards dominance and politics of Jews in Israel and in the USA that seem to offer some confirmation.

Eliminating alternative explanations: It may be possible to eliminate explanations that intellectuals or Jews have simply assimilated to the views of elites and that such assimilation (and the resultant silencing of independent alternative, long-term choices) is a rational behavior.

– There is almost a century of social science theory on culture contacts, starting with early categorizations of assimilation, refusal to assimilate and hybridization (Thomas and Zacnicki 1927); now amounting to some 100 theories and 16 categories including bi-culturalism, separatism/segregation, marginalization. Typical theories have looked at adaptation as a 'healthy' process; consistent with the U.S.' political ideology of the 'melting pot' that encouraged fitting in for all groups. 'Multi-culturalism' in the USA has been to promote a shallow set of domains rather than a rights-based federalism approach that would protect cultures; a form of 'pride' without political rights or cultural knowledge. More recent work (Navas *et. al.* 2006) shows that groups assimilate in

different domains: political, work, economic, family, social, ethos, religious. This would seem to explain the Jewish beliefs regarding Jewish co-existence and it suggests that Jewish assimilation would not and should not extend to blind support for views of non-Jewish elites. Jews are not fully assimilated because they maintain religious markers and names, fill certain economic roles (university, law, medicine, and business), and are identifiable in those roles. Given the professional commitments of these roles (*e.g.*, as lawyers, there is a link with the idea of equity, rights protections and freedoms), the identifiability of Jews as Jews, and special interests of Jews (in education, in public libraries and museums), as well as Jewish awareness of their history, full assimilation would be a contradiction and against group preservation and self-interest. For Jews to give up their role of protecting rule of law and equity and favoring full assimilation into positions as workers, where they would also be downwardly mobile, would contradict their maintenance of these other markers. The political assimilation of Jews that is shown in voting patterns (Lempert 2015) appears irrational and against Jewish interests (including access to college loans and tuition for Jews, who are dependent on education and an educated society, and other social spending like Social Security, to promote tolerance).

– For intellectuals, in general, political assimilation would mean that their role would disappear and that they could easily be replaced with propagandists with much lower skills. It would, therefore, be irrational overall for intellectuals not to try to protect education and public education as well as not to try to protect their public roles of intellectuals to challenge government and protect the long-term interests of a stable society. There is no rational interest in 'assimilating' or destroying this role. Thus, their current actions also appear irrational.

Supporting evidence: A recent article by this author presented and tested a theory that cultures fit into specific 'roles' relative to other cultures and that while there is a set of fixed types of roles, the roles of cultures are always shifting as their relations shift. This theory also seems to explain how Jews could be moving into a dominance role (in Israel) while also replicating their role as victim or scapegoat in Eastern Europe that is part of their identity in a society like the USA (Lempert 2014). Psychological data on individual behaviors also seems to confirm that individuals pattern their behaviors into aggressor-victim roles and may continue to recreate these roles for themselves decades later, as well as switch between the roles. This would seem to explain many irrational behaviors by Jews, perhaps for all four of the specific sub-hypotheses. The behaviors of other intellectuals, suggest that they may be irrationally releasing aggressions and promoting short-term interests of a group that may also have low esteem.

– Studies of victims of abuse demonstrate that those who have experienced violence in the family are more likely to turn into abusers later in life (Skuse 1998). There are suggestions today that Jews have taken on this role in Israel as the dominant group there. Perhaps, some Jews who have risen to elite positions in the U.S. and have promoted U.S. military policies of aggressors, including violence against Arabs (*i.e.*, American 'exceptionalism' to international law as the doctrines of 'neo-conservatives' and 'neo-liberals'), as a way of releasing their aggressions exemplify these behaviors. Although there have not been studies of aggressive fantasies among Jews or whether Jews fantasize about being Nazis or other aggressors, there is historical evidence of the

post-World War II Jewish leaders in Hungary willingly inflicting terror under the Soviet regime.

– Though studies of (self-destructive) victims exhibiting what is called 'self-defeating behavior' are usually of victims of sexual violence, there are parallels with other kinds of victims of abuse. All victims of abuse suffer impacts on their self-esteem, feelings of 'social exclusion' or 'rejection'. The behavior find in victims of sexual violence is that they recreate their roles as victims (Baumeister 1988, 1995, 2002). These studies also report on 'tradeoff' behavior in which individuals will replicate conditions where others will cause them harm in order to externalize failures so that they do not blame themselves for their own inadequacies. Creating 'anti-semitism' or 'anti-intellectualism' would serve as such a way to externalize blame. Individuals with an ideology of victimization could create an environment of harm and hgh risk as a self-fulfilling prophesy. Some of the most interesting confirmation of this among Jews is how Jews have reconstructed their identity in recent years. Rather than define Jewish values of progress or law or intellectualism, Jews now identify most with their history of victimization; the Holocaust! (Brownfield 1999; Funkelstein 1993; Maya 2005; Shapira 1993) As of 1998, 'remembrance of the Holocaust' was the clear leading marker of identity in the 'Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion'. As one Jewish philosopher, Ray Amital has written, 'I was proud to be counted among the murdered and not the murderers' (Maya 2005). The fact of belonging to the family of victims is itself 'Jewish pride.' Others have studied the psychological phenomenon of 'survivor's guilt' and the feelings that one deserves the fate that others suffered, that 'suffering is good' and that normalcy is in persecution. A recent study of Holocaust survivors found very high rates of individual suicide among 374 Holocaust survivors over a five-year period. 'Ninety Holocaust survivors (24 per cent) had attempted suicide, versus 8.2 per cent of matched elderly comparisons with no Holocaust exposure' (Barak *et al.* 2005). It is not unreasonable to suggest that Jews, themselves may be creating conditions of victimization as a kind of 'suicide' or need to re-experience the intensity and trauma that their ancestors faced.

Contrasting or complementary explanations: It is possible that Jewish support for the apparently irrational behaviors of the US elites and militarism against Muslims made sense as a rational behavior, at first, to deflect hostility towards Jews from Christian American and European leaders (Lempert 2015). This may have continued beyond rational behavior due to other deeply rooted psychological mechanisms (that may or may not be linked with the above). Small acts by Jews and intellectuals to promote short-term protection, reinforced by fears or small benefits that followed, may have triggered cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) in which Jews rationalize that irrational elite behaviors are part of their long-term survival interests. Some recent historical events could have heightened Jewish fears and prevented rational reconsideration of Jewish behaviors. The attacks on New York on September 11, 2001 may have created heightened fear of attacks on Jews in their new 'home' of New York (the city with the largest number of Jews outside Jerusalem). The attacks and consequences could have also increased fears of the US elites and their power as much as of other groups. The ties between Wall Street Jewish elites and U.S. elites in their militarism may also reflex cognitive dissonance behavior among Jews and among intellectuals in which short-term self-interest reinforces supporting militarism and other apparently long-term suicidal

national policies. Small, short-term reinforcements may continue to maintain the long-term irrationality: For example, President Clinton's selection of Wall Street Jews and his extra-marital affair with a Jewish woman (Monica Lewinsky); Vice President Al Gore's selection of a (neo-conservative) Jew as his Vice Presidential running mate, Senator Joe Lieberman; and the Democratic Party's selection Senator and Presidential Candidate and the recent service of Secretary of State John Kerry who is partly of Jewish descent, represent some of these reinforcements by elites.

Results (Summarized)

The four specific sub-hypotheses do seem to offer some explanatory power for the two test groups. Table 3, below, places the suggested evidence for each of the two groups in separate columns for the four specific sub-hypotheses in the different rows and shows that the four irrational behaviors that are at the basis of the hypotheses seem to explain the irrational, suicidal choices of both of the test groups . Note, again, that three of the four sub-hypotheses explanations of innate behaviors tend to cluster together (aggression, hierarchy, and group protection). For Jews, there appears to be a combination of all of these instinctive behaviors, with dominance and victimization behaviors occurring simultaneously in two different contexts (Jews in Israel and Jews in the U.S.) along with tribalism and released aggressions for both. For U.S. elites, high risk behavior appears as innate. There also appears to be as an expression of dominance behaviors following the end of the Cold War.

Table 3

Fit of Specific Hypotheses with Behaviors of Two Test Groups

Possible Specific Innate Behaviors that Might Fit the General Hypothesis	***Group I: Leadership***	***Group II: Change Agents (Minority Sub-Culture)***
(1) Predation-Aggression	Yes, strong social aggression against outside groups and high risk 'game playing' behaviors as part of real underlying motivation of elites when their lives need intensity and challenge	Yes, released aggression of Jews against others even if they were not the cause of past harms
(2) Non-cooperative Tribalism and Family Protection (smaller level than predation-aggression)	Not so much clan based tribalism but some in-group or 'corporatist' protection, though this seems weaker than other drives	Yes, a return to Jewish tribalism and protection over values, particularly in Israel
Possible Specific Innate Behaviors that Might Fit the General Hypothesis	***Group I: Leadership***	***Group II: Change Agents (Minority Sub-Culture)***
(3) Assertion of the dominant hierarchical role (for some groups the opposite hierarchical role as a fantasy of victim-aggressor behavior)	Yes, assertion of dominant and aggressive military position by elites not bound by law after end of Cold War	Yes, dominance behaviors in Israel and among Jewish elites in U.S. in politics and Wall Street

(4) Reassertion of hierarchical position, even if that of low status or victim	–	Yes, Jewish identification with Holocaust and victimization as the defining cultural characteristic in a possible self-fulfilling prophesy

Discussion

While many social scientists today seem to be satisfied with the ability to 'explain' behaviors in new ways, the real test is the ability to predict behaviors rather than to identify or name (or maybe just rename) them. This piece offers a case for explaining irrational behaviors on the basis of innate drives, but it still does not go far enough to disentangle the specific drives and to offer a predictive model. It does not really explain the specific drives or motivations, link them to primate behaviors (though perhaps primatologists can present this link), predict when and why (under what conditions) they will appear, or why learning does not take place to change the path. To do that, requires examining other factors, including the element of time and generational changes, as part of future work.

Why and when do these instinctive behaviors switch on and not others that may also be instinctive such as cooperation (Axelrod 1984), for example? Why do some human social systems plan ahead earlier, to avoid reaching their resource limits rather than delay decisions and take on culturally suicidal behaviors? It may be that certain societies are starting from a different context for a longer time period and certain generational cycles of war or hierarchy simply do not develop in the same way, but other variables must be added to test this.

Data suggests that there are some triggering events of irrational behaviors (e.g., victory in the Cold War and perhaps Jewish-Israeli political power, with both unleashing some dominance behaviors) and that there are also some lag times when security and stability may then trigger the need for high risk (to reassert a cultural pattern that promotes continuity of cultural structures even in the face of promoting overall system collapse). The relationship of different ethnic and national groups as well as of different economic groups in a complex society to each other, in different positional roles of dominance or as victims, patterning (and helping predict) behaviors may also underscore the adage that exposes the irrationality of complex societies, 'Choose your enemies wisely, for you shall become them'.

Part of what this article suggests is that human behaviors also do pattern themselves into dualities rather than full spectrum options and that humans need to test their positions of dominance and victimization while in a co-dependency with conflict. When viewed in this way, climate change denial may not be denial at all but the inviting of a test of human strength that is embedded in human behavior. Similarly, the abuse of alcohol and tobacco, knowing their dangers, may reflect human desire for risky behavior, to challenge odds as a form of proof of self-worth. Violence and theft may be embedded parts of human nature in struggles for asserting and testing group and individual dominance, promoting an illusion of invincibility and invulnerability that is always short lived.

At the same time, where societies begin to reach stability but then seek to destroy it through irrational risk taking, the data suggests that war and depressions 'cycle', not in some predictable time period but whenever people start to 'miss' them and need intensity and challenge in an effort to establish relative positions with other groups. In the same way that the human immune system that requires battle to maintain its function and the human body creates auto-immune attacks on itself when pathogens are eliminated from the environment, human cultures may create a kind of 'auto-immune' response behavior (continued dominance and survival testing that elevates risk and violence when it does not automatically present itself on the outside. Perhaps also some of these 'needs' are transmitted to younger generations to 'test' themselves and 'prove' themselves in dominance and survival struggles through the creation of situations that replicate those faced by their ancestors.

These generational changes/gaps are the opposite of what one expects from previous research. Other models suggested that cycles of violence and collapse are based only on Malthusian pressures, with the young feeling the greatest constraints and having the greatest motivation to advocate for change (Lempert 1987; Malthus 1886). Various cyclical theories of age cohorts, generational rhythms and 'critical elections' have incorporated these ideas of periodicity as well as economic circumstance as a result of climate (Burnham 1970; Elazar 1978; Ryder 1965; Sorokin 1937). The data in this article suggests very different and innate psychological causes for repetition of violence over time that are independent of, but not necessarily mutually exclusive with, these other natural cycles.

Conclusion

For those who worry about the future of humanity, this article is troubling. It suggests that despite beliefs in human reason, logic and the ability to predict and change the future, we humans may still be slaves to our primitive brains and to drives that lead to self-destruction, with little we can do to stop it. At the same time, an article like this at least helps challenge the existing ideological assumptions of societies and exposes as delusional that we can trust our systems to act rationally, to self-correct, and to protect our interests. This article exposes the misplacement of trust in collective beliefs and calls for greater attention to human irrationality.

For Jewish identity, this article may also be uncomfortable. The article suggests that Jews rethink their identity and their position, seeking to construct a clear, positive sense of values rather than identification with victimization or religious symbols in order to promote their survival as a distinct culture.

For intellectuals, this article may also be uncomfortable, particularly in several social sciences.

Though social science is still at the early stages of developing models for cultural collapse, cultural change, and cultural relations, this article adds some dimensions to that study. It seeks to move attention away from certain dogmatic assumptions about rationality and to move the focus of the social sciences towards empirical observations of behaviors at both the cultural and individual levels.

As with the study of cultural suicide at the cultural level, there are several political, philosophical and ideological implications and paradoxes that make the study of cultural suicide at the individual level even more difficult than the science, itself. The idea

that human 'progress' may be a fallacy or that human cultures may choose destruction over survival or that such processes may be pre-determined run counter to current assumptions. Progress in the social sciences and in civilization may require overcoming not only certain institutional biases and ideologies but it also raises some difficult and uncomfortable 'truths'.

NOTE

[1] Not all scholars agree with Diamond's model of Easter Island before the eighteenth century. For the purposes of this article, it is used as a simplified model of classic collapse processes.

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