

aspen *proposal*

attempting to see past
the ends of our noses

The Aspen Proposal (Ver. 2.6)

In the future:¹

We will have learned to fit in with the ecosystem.²

By having smaller families, we will consciously and humanely reduce our population to 1 billion or fewer.³

All our energy and food will be from sustainable sources⁴

We will have developed a steady-state, more circular economy.⁵

The vast majority of the earth's lands and oceans will be left alone, to manage themselves.⁶

Our population will be dispersed on 6 continents to provide some resilience in case of a major meteor strike, pandemic or other natural catastrophe.

With a smaller population and a greater emphasis on resiliency, trade in commodities between continents will be greatly reduced.⁷

Bounded by the overarching principle of fitting into the ecosystem and by the understanding that all humans are members of one branch of the larger tree of life, cultural diversity will be valued and encouraged.⁸

Different environments will continue to stimulate a variety of appropriate technologies and customs.⁹

Humans will focus on meeting their psychological needs in the ways that have proven robust over the millennia: i.e. through cultivation of relationships, art, music, humour, physical activity, meaningful work, connection with nature, spiritual exploration, etc.¹⁰

Humans around the globe will continue to participate in the cooperative exercise of learning about ourselves, the universe, and our place in it.¹¹

Notes:

1. *Likely, somewhere between 2 and 5 centuries from now.*

2. *Consider that "survival of the fittest" in regard to natural selection and evolution includes "fitting in" i.e. having a niche in a complex system that allows the whole system to function with a measure of*

stability. While many indigenous cultures are aware of this, humans as a whole are not fitting in right now, but we can, once we realize how important this is.

3. Fertility rates are currently below replacement levels in many countries and it is expected that this trend will continue and expand as the lowest standards of living rise, women are empowered, education is improved and social safety nets strengthened. The target of one billion is somewhat arbitrary but seems to us a sufficient number to ensure humanity's survival while allowing all other species to flourish.

4. For the most part, we now see the wisdom of ending our relationship with fossil energy and are probably in the process of turning the corner on that one. There are a host of sustainable alternatives and these will no doubt be refined and improved as time goes on. Food production that depletes soils or aquifers cannot be considered sustainable and the shift to regenerative agriculture will continue.

5. We are now at least talking about circular economies, where materials are cycled rather than discarded, and this will be a great field for engineers and designers for the next century or so. Right now, there are few economists and organizations openly questioning the wisdom of economic growth so we still have a lot of work to do to make steady-state economics mainstream and to redesign our economies so they don't need to grow. Economic vibrancy and a decent standard of living do not require continuous growth.

6. The idea that humans have now or ever will have the knowledge and wisdom to manage ecosystems, is a silly conceit that needs to be abandoned. To quote one of Barry Commoner's four laws of ecology, "nature knows best". Leaving most of the planet's lands and oceans alone, to manage themselves, is the most practical, cost effective and safe course of action for our species.

7. While there may still be a bit of trade between continents there will be no need (with a population of 1 billion or less) to continue the status quo. The diversity of life on the planet is seriously harmed by the spread of non-native species and the diversity and vibrancy of human culture is diminished by the spread of globally uniform materials and products. Local production may sometimes be less efficient, but it produces greater resiliency and far more interesting cultures.

8. Cultural diversity is a buttress against any one culture screwing things up in a globally significant way. And it makes for a much more interesting civilization. Environmentally sensitive cultural tourism will flourish as the authenticity of different cultures recovers from the battering of globalism. But cultural diversity must be bounded by the overarching principal that we are just one species amongst millions, all of which are our cousins and they all have a right to thrive.

9. So the products we make and the technologies we design in Australia will be different than those we make in the Yukon. As will the rituals, celebrations, institutions, laws, etc. But they will all respect the reality of the need to fit in.

10. We actually know quite a bit about how to satisfy human needs (see Manfred Max-Neef's Human Scale Development with its matrix of human needs and satisfiers) and are learning more all the time. Some of our knowledge has been acquired over millennia and now the study of evolutionary psychology is helping us understand how we evolved and why we feel and act in the ways we do.

11. Getting through the bottleneck of the next century or two and arriving at the place described in this document does not mean we will just hang out in some sort of stasis from then on. We have barely scratched the surface in our understanding of the universe and it may be, (assuming we can keep civilization chugging along for a few more millennia) that we will come to a new understanding of how it

all works, and how we fit into it. But that is for our distant descendants to tease out. We just have to figure out how to turn our current trajectory around and give them that chance.