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**Martian Safari**  
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*Revealing insights into human foibles  
and the future*

## **The Unthinking Tinkerer**

Let us suppose that our species continues for the next thirty years or so without destroying most of our number, and that what passes for civilization among us survives without either a radical socio-political revision or a total fragmentation into hundreds of introspective geopolitical pieces. Let us suppose that we can solve or at least stave off the solution of our physical problems concerning energy, nutrition, resources, room, without altering the



fundamental structure and substance of our global society or our basic nature. Many people think it more likely that by the end of thirty or fewer years we will be living one of the two extreme alternatives: a world utopia in which we have resolved our differences and are at peace with nature, or a world of scattered anarchic groups foraging among the radioactive rubble. We are supposing here that it is equally possible for us to muddle through well into the next century in more or less the same fashion we've gotten through most of this one. This possibility must be considered for at least two complex inter-related reasons, both having to do with fundamental characteristics of human beings.

**Firstly, people are extremely poor planners. They not only are unable to foresee the consequences of present or past events even in the very modestly distant tomorrow, but they cannot prevent or prepare for those undesired consequences they can predict.** On the large scale, five-year plans are considered long-range by most governments. Twenty years is in the impossibly distant future. On the individual level, people sometimes make life game-plans, often revolving around culturally-defined successes of one kind or another and material prosperity. We know that many such personal life plots are doomed, that things don't go the way we want them to, not only because the individual fails to take some crucial

step, but because people are not good at thinking in whole lifetimes of contingencies, inter-relations, shifting contexts, and all the imponderables of self, others and time.

Most people, of course, simply accept the basic set of life cycle expectations and prerequisites appropriate to their sex and station, that is bequeathed them by their society. Most spend great amounts of time and energy attempting to protect this scenario from any change, however irrelevant or even contradictory its contents seem to their actual experience in the world. Take away the life scenario, and people are forced consciously to comprehend their activities, to plan ahead, and this is the last thing they want to do.

In short, people do not know what they are doing most of the time, as individuals or as societies or nations. It is not being suggested that we are unique among animals in this respect. However, the plans of other creatures are made by nature, not by culture, and so comprehend lifetimes with ease. Also, nature moves more slowly than culture. How can human incompetency in projection and prediction make us suppose that we can avoid killing each other off one way or another?

One of the major concomitants of human future blindness is fear of deviation from the known, though this too has its own unforeseen but not unforeseeable consequences, some even more dangerous than those resulting from changes. People do not want to stop doing what they have been doing, do it in another manner, or do something different. Of course, utopias are much less likely than disasters in the presence of no planning. There is little evidence that any prognosticators of imminent bliss have a firm idea of what this bliss might be like or how to attain it. Temporal shortsightedness means that, even in a world where change is the order of the day, individuals and groups will pretend that things remain the same so that they can continue to use their ancient methods of dealing with them. The last thing people will permit to change is themselves. It is often said, "we can't go on like this." This may well be so (certainly we can't go on indefinitely), but amazingly most of us want to.

Secondly, a reason for believing it possible that humanity can go on for a few more decades in its characteristic chaotic style seems paradoxically contrary to the first. **Part of the basic biological equipment that has made us a dominant and numerous species is a tremendous adaptability.** This is due to the highly

generalized nature of our morphology and physiology, the limitations rather than laws set by our heredity, and the capabilities of one of our few specialized organs, the brain (which nonetheless provides most of us, again, with a generalized, not specialized, kind of intelligence). One of the products of this biological endowment is **culture**, that specialization that makes us the most flexible of all animals, and the most diverse. One of the limitations of that endowment appears to be that people will accept the intolerable, without thinking about it first. Thus, they are myopic about time, inter-connections, implications. And so this myopia makes us fear the future and face away from the basic problems of social structure and personal relationships. Our circumstances and accoutrements may have changed, but we have not.

Human flexibility and culture allow us to live anywhere, eat anything, survive almost any catastrophe, adjust to any situation. Does this not contradict our demonstrated unwillingness to change? Flexibility, like change, is of no intrinsic value; it is neither valuable nor valueless in itself. If an act of creativity is not instilled with values and understood by the actor, it will work counter to his values more often than not. Most actors of course have never examined their values in the first place so as to decide what is of value there. Therefore the values themselves often never change. **So people can be flexible in the same way and for the same reasons for an indefinite period without really learning or doing anything new. In other words, adaptation is not the same thing as change.**

**It seems people will adapt to almost anything rather than try to change it or themselves.** They will live in population densities higher than those that drive the lemmings into the sea. They will accept social and environmental conditions so oppressive and deadly that their own children may be prevented from growing up. Modern man will embrace what would cause a less flexible but more reasonable creature to die rather than endure.

So we are a species capable of tolerating what almost any other being would find insane, from air pollution to unjust socio-political systems. Why, then, do we so fear change, the unknown? Why do we find it so hard to figure the future meanings of our present actions? The answer has to do with the special difference between change and adaptation in the case of humans. **Adaptation** orients the individual to the self and its immediate interests. **Change** may threaten that self, or its preservation as defined. It may even threaten the definition.

The means by which people adjust to unpalatable and/or new situations ordinarily involve one of two alternatives: a manipulation of the psyche that usually manifests itself as philosophical resignation, or a manipulation of environment and instrumentalities. These are especially characteristic of European cultures, that are also the main architects of our present-day troubles, and that also occasionally define other human beings as instrumentalities. Neither changes the actor himself, or, consequently, the social structure of the situation, which is what is problematic. Neither requires effort or abstract thought, the major difficulties encountered in planning and predicting. **We have a thousand times the intelligence of a cat or a monkey, but we are just as mindless.** Thus, people can adapt, and have done so repeatedly over the past fifty thousand years or so, without changing fundamentally and more or less without thinking. We are still self-seeking. We have domesticated and transformed the whole natural world through our intelligence. But we ourselves are still untamed and we tinker but don't think.

Arriving then at the nineteen-eighties, it may safely be supposed that one possible response of living humans to their psychotic world is to put up with it, still tampering with it thoughtlessly as it falls to bits in our hands. Such a response changes nothing, plans nothing. But it might get us through a few more decades.

## SAFARI

Let us further suppose that this mindless manipulator who is man perfects, as he well might, the means of leaving his home planet for various regions of the solar system and galaxy. Clearly, this is a goal and a capability of at least two nations, and one dear to the peoples of many others as well. The first question to be asked is, why does he want to go out there? Then, what will be the circumstances of his going? What will he do when he gets there?

We are not, of course, talking about a trip everyone will make. Few of us now living will ever leave earth. Early space-farers will include military, para-military engineers and technicians, and occasional scientists. Later, other people will go too, if they can pay, or if society defines them as important and gives them power. In any case, the crew will not be large, and the contingent of humanity found off earth hardly a representative sample.

Speculative fiction and avowed programs of existing space agencies and their



associates suggest four main forms space travel will take:

- (1) exploration of cosmic bodies and the space around and between them, using robot vehicles;
- (2) establishment and occupation of self-contained artifactual bodies, such as orbital space stations;
- (3) terraforming<sup>1</sup> and colonization of (parts of) other planets; (1. The word means what it says, but can refer to a variety of processes from inducing planet-wide chemical and climatic changes to the construction of hermetically-sealed earth-like environments. The latter is the most familiar alternative to readers of science fiction and astro-engineering manuals. See "The Cosmic Connection" by Carl Sagan, 1976, page 170.)
- (4) transport of colonies through interstellar space in celestial vehicle-dwellings, requiring immense periods of time, with the goal of carrying out (3) in some other solar system.

The first three programs will eventually require a fifth, namely the creation of a standing force of vehicles that do not do (1) but assist in (2) and (3), supervise and provision their inhabitants, transport their produce, mediate between them and earth.

Before we can hope to understand the meanings, uses, and repercussions of each of these forms of penetrating and exploiting the cosmos, we might ask what such activities have in common with earth-bound pursuits and present or prior history<sup>2</sup>. (2. The five fronts, as it were, of the war on space's freedom from men are discussed in more detail in "Space Myth 1: Spring Park, USA, Space," by D. D. Wills.) The analogy that comes immediately to mind is with the European age of "discovery" and subsequent colonial epoch. Perhaps space-faring is really a continuation of this period, not a repetition or reincarnation of it. Many of the same elements are present. An initial period of ostensible exploration, mapping, etc., is followed by the implementation of exploitative procedures of various sorts. Where there are natives in the newly 'discovered' regions, economic and political relations must be established, outstandingly trade and military peace. Sometimes these involve immediate imposition of rule, sometimes rule is delayed. Continuing relations require that certain agents of the "explorer" power establish at least temporary residence. These agents are inevitably followed by colonizers, emigrants who go to occupy the "new" territory as its conquerors rather than as potential subjects or citizens of any sociopolitical organization which may already exist there. Again, the presence or absence of natives is critical in characterizing the colonization process. So far as our analogy with space-faring and -colonizing is concerned, this

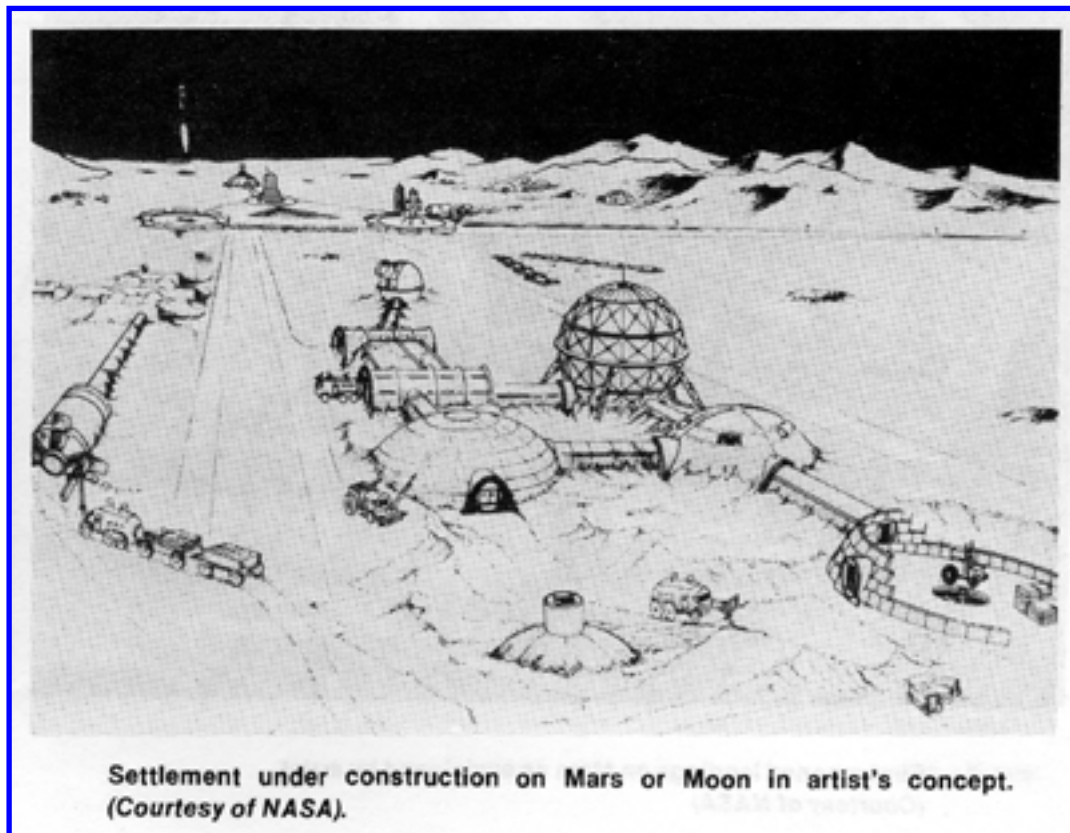
point presents the greatest difficulty. There are no creatures known at present absolutely to be native to any other planets but earth, let alone to the void itself. However, it must be pointed out that once there are inhabitants of formerly-unoccupied places, they themselves become its natives. Thus, other human beings and their descendants [sic; "decendants" should be "descendants"] may be at some future time the natives of other planets, the mythical and much-sought intelligent extraterrestrial beings, in relation to the inhabitants of that time's earth. So if there are no true extraterrestrials, their absence need not delay the playing out of the colonial game for long.

Colonization on earth was and is accompanied by the "Euroforming" of the "new" place, its more or less gradual transformation so that the immigrants could tolerate living there. If there were natives, this included them. Of course the colonists got something from the natives too (sometimes they got killed). They were marked by their new places to varying degrees, up to the point of rejecting their home colonizing world after importing its basic mechanics to the new one. The transformation of the colonized areas and protection and surveillance of their occupants demanded a veritable [sic; "vertiable" should be "veritable"] army of emissaries, physical and social engineers, governors, and other operators in addition to the actual immigrants, though occasionally the latter could also fill these roles, as could, rarely, natives. Among the more familiar of those taking part in Euroforming, however unwittingly, were missionaries and other kinds of proselyters, anthropologists<sup>3</sup> and scientific researchers, merchants, political and military functionaries. (3. Anthropologists do this by describing and interpreting other cultures in terms Europeans can grasp, which has the unfortunate side effect (frequently unintentional) of Euroforming those cultures not only in the minds of Europeans and social scientists, but ultimately natives as well. Anthropologists are, of course, guilty of other colonialistic activities, too.)

One of the most interesting later characters in this developmental scenario of "explore-exploit-inhabit-transform" is the visitor, who comes in any number of guises from tourist to artist to the white hunter. Visitors come to places which retain something of their original or natural character even after extensive Euroforming. Since it is difficult completely to transform any place, especially if there are natives, and it is important to preserve some basis for the self-other or we-they opposition, many places will be eligible for visitation. The white hunter represents all that is pernicious about European culture. He executes all the maneuvers of the colonial sequence on a smaller scale all on his own. He embodies

the entire cultural mentality associated with it and plays all the roles himself in every scene.

White Hunter chooses a place which he has defined as exotic and full of adventure. This could be the Mars of 2020 as easily as the India or the Africa of 1930. He and his entourage of other white hunters and their clients and acolytes go there to get some of this adventure in a safe way and hopefully bring a bit or a sign of it back home so home will be a little less the dull routine he was trying to get away from in the first place. But he brings a lot of home with him when he goes, too, not just the contents of his mind. With these tools he Euroforms as much as possible of his immediate environment, yet all the while maintaining his philosophical distance from the "exotic" surroundings beyond it. The cultural opposition must be maintained or White Hunter will fail to get what he came for: a transient and carefully-orchestrated but thrilling contact with that which is seen to be utterly unhomelike; it may be inferior and undesirable as a permanent setting, but it satisfies White Hunter's need to tinker mindlessly and confirms his definition of himself as superior to anything, even the fear of the strange.



A Martian safari will not be much like a hunt for big game trophies at the foot of Kilimanjaro. But it is certain that there will be its structural and even contentive equivalents, including the imported whiskey, bored wife who seduces the guide, and 'native' bearers

(real "aliens" or Martian humans). Exactly what White Hunter will do on a Martian safari and what prizes he will bring home will no doubt remain a mystery for many



years to come. The recent Viking reports, even with their tantalizing biochemical enigmas, do not immediately suggest the nature of the exotic experiences visitors of the future will be able to seek there. Perhaps merely going there and bringing back some bit of landscape not yet defined as life or not-life will be enough for White Hunter of the year 2020.

This little colonial scene transposed in time may not seem particularly threatening or even interesting, its interest and harm lie in the thought processes of the participants (especially [sic; should "expicially" be "especially"?] White Hunter and his like), and in the social



relationships among them. White Hunter has relationships of a certain kind with his wife and other companions from home (which we shall not go into here), with the guide and with the natives. He does not have personal, human relationships with any of the latter, though he may behave very familiarly, even intimately, with them. This refusal to establish personal relations with 'the natives' is another colonialistic attribute of some anthropologists, as discussed by Hsu<sup>4</sup>. (4. There may be other reasons for it, too, apart from a colonial feeling of superiority and desire to maintain distance. It may have to do with the problematical nature of the philosophical notion of 'subject' for pragmatic human conduct. It may also be related to the fact that most individuals suffer when they lose contact with cherished others, and one way of avoiding such suffering is not to cherish when one knows beforehand that one's situation is temporary and that loss will consequently surely come. This is complicated by the peculiar modern truth that some people seek superficiality and transiency even in those relationships they might well expect to endure till death. See "Role, affect and anthropology," by Francis L. K. Hsu in, **American Anthropologist**, 1977, Vol. 9,

**The point is that the real problems and dangers of the exploration and exploitation of the heavens may be the same ones we have on earth now, not failures of engineering and technology but of humanity, social justice, and personal communication.** These are much more subtle [sic; should "subtile" be "subtle"?] than some of the more commonly-cited dangers of space-faring, such as domination of one people by another from above, war on an unimagineable scale, pollution and destruction of the material environments of an entire solar system, even exportation of false or deadly human ideas, ways and things to the innocents of other worlds. These are all quite possible, even likely, though it would seem superfluous for example to wage heavenly war when we can virtually blow up the globe right now without the bother of leaving it. But naturally if some national power doesn't mind going somewhere else after its victory or waiting for 500,000 years while the earth cools off, it would have an advantage in attacking its enemy from space, as long as the latter is on the ground. Some people might think war would be better fought in space, that it would thereby prevent the permanent pollution of the planet and death of untold civilian population, that it would hence be cleaner and better! And of course some of us dominate others of us just as effectively from next door as from above.

**Will we transport our social problems and diseases of character into our various space environments intact? Do we really have the power to contaminate a solar system? Will we not be affected by our space-going experiences? Can our society as presently constituted survive the creation of science sufficient to space-faring and existence in an unearthly setting?**





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