

How The World Will End  
Reflections On  
*A History Of the International System*  
Classroom Lectures  
Given by James Sheehan, Stanford University, 2008  
(Available on iTunes-U)  
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What follows is admittedly a hodgepodge of half-baked thoughts—which is okay, because I am not “a writer,” simply a person who, from time to time, writes. Some people like to refinish furniture, quilt, I like to write. It’s pretty much like that. Besides, there’s too many “writers” in the world. I read recently that more than 30,000 novels were published last year (last year was 2011). And that’s just novels! And just in the U.S.! Amazing. Kind of absurd, when you think about it. Who’s going to read them?

I got the idea of putting some of what I write up on the internet from my daughter, using a simple, off-the-shelf web site program. I suppose I could have started a blog, but a blog might suggest I have an ax to grind, which I don’t. Nor do I Twitter or have a Facebook, which might be due to a generational divide.

And then there’s this. Several years ago I came across Philip Loparte’s *The Art of the Personal Essay*, which I must say was something of a find. After reading his introduction (Loparte’s the editor), I knew I’d found my approach to prose writing (most of my writing up until that time had been playing around with that most arcane (some would say archaic) of all writings: structured verse). Initially, however, nothing worked. I couldn’t finish anything, and I couldn’t figure it out, until I realized it was me—I couldn’t write about *myself*. And then there was this complication: I didn’t (don’t) know enough about anything to feel comfortable writing about, well, anything, really: politics, philosophy, literature, nothing. So I put the whole business behind me. Until, until one day it occurred to me that I could simply write about what I read, or was listening to. I could just “react-write,” if you will. I didn’t have to know anything!

And finally (timing is everything), my daughter talked me into buying an iPhone. At first, it was a mostly a phone, with pictures. But through time, and messing around with it, I realized it

was mostly a little computer, and the phone part was something of a convenient add-on. Well, one day, just messing around, I discovered iTunes-U. Christ, I could listen to people who *did* know what they were talking about—with qualifications of course—and write about *that*.

So now I have my approach to writing, a place to put it—a safe place, where few will find it—and a lot of stuff to write about. I'm set.

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Forethought on the lectures: *“Over the whole earth—this infinitely small globe that possesses all we know of sunshine and bird song—an unfamiliar blight is creeping: man—man, who has become at last a planetary disease and who would, if his technology yet permitted, pass this infection to another star.”*

—Loren Eiseley, *The Time of Man*

James Sheehan, a smart man indeed (I'm guessing a scholar), suggests that, in order to come to grips with the world, understand how it works, speaking broadly, we will need to admit to three overlapping, interlocking systems: nation-states, international markets, and ideologies—or value systems, what Willard Van Orman Quine characterized as “webs of belief”—or, cultures, in the broader sense. Notice how these systems seem to move from the concrete to something more abstract. For example, states are concretely bounded by geographical markers, whereas markets easily cross such lines in the sand, and ideologies ignore boundaries altogether. Also, the three can be ordered hierarchically, privileging first states, then markets, and finally ideologies. Thus, Sheehan contends, states still rule the day—although one could argue less so, than, say, during the eighteenth century, the era of mercantilism. Today's markets have become too global for such erstwhile state control, and ideologies too contentious for political actors to manage well. Organizationally, Sheehan continues, states are ordered around the idea of sovereignty, where they have a functional equality internationally while maintaining a primacy within their own borders; markets are ordered around the supply and demand of products and services; and ideology around beliefs, or expectations generally.

It should go without saying that the major players in each uses the others for their own purposes, although ideologies appear the most problematic. For example, Terry Eagleton, in his

*Ideology, An Introduction*, offers no less than sixteen possible definitions currently in circulation. These include, in part, “a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group...ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power...*false* [italics added] ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power...systematically distorted communication...forms of thought motivated by social interests...identity thinking...socially necessary illusion...,” among others.

Although nation-states and markets are extremely complex, it’s reasonable to assume that they ultimately arise from animal needs for security and resources, what all lifeforms seek in order to establish and maintain themselves. Ideologies, of course, are uniquely human, and may be where the most intractable troubles lie. As an example, Sheehan asks why the belligerents of World War I didn’t stop fighting in 1916, when it was obvious to everyone that there would be no spoils to the victor, and, if one considers what the settlement of the war ultimately brought—the Second World War, some twenty years later—no victory at all. So why did they fight on? Was it ideology that clouded their collective judgment? Napoleon once boasted he could get men to die for a few pieces of colored ribbon, a statement both categorically absurd and apparently the case. In our own time, it is clear to everyone that nothing will come of American forces staying in Afghanistan. Yet we stay. Why? Is it because we cannot bring ourselves to write an ideologically adequate withdrawal narrative? Lyndon Johnson was so adverse to writing a withdrawal narrative for Vietnam that he finally had to give up the presidency. Richard Nixon procrastinated so long that the war finally did it for him, broadcasting itself on the six o’clock news as Americans watched in amazement over their TV dinners.

Is this how ideology works, or is there something more fundamental going on here?—something more, I don’t know, neurological.

Mark Moffett, in his *Adventures Among Ants*, tells the following story. In the fall of 2007, Moffett and a colleague were invited by a fellow ant enthusiast to witness perhaps the greatest military campaign on the planet—at least one that could be seen with the naked eye (who knows what’s going on at the level of bacteria and viruses?). Moffett and his fellow researcher were driven to the coastal town of Escondido, California, north of Del Mar, to a tidy neighborhood of modest homes, where the driver found his street and parked. Moffett and his friend got out of the car and were urged to kneel at the curb, where they were shown “a finger-wide, chocolate-brown

belt of tiny dead bodies, piled up by the thousands.” Their driver informed them that this was the battle line between the Very Large Colony and the Lake Hodges Colony of Argentine ants, introduced into California around 100 years before.

Like the belligerents that massed along the Maginot Line, the fortification that ran between France and Germany during the First World War, these ants fight continuously. Hundreds of thousands die daily, millions weekly. Yet nothing significantly changes as a result. Like the armies of Europe, the line moves, first in one direction, then in the other. But to what end? Most obviously for territory. But at what level do ants actually understand territory, much less needing more territory? As it stands today, the territory of the Very Large Colony already ranges from the Mexico boarder up past San Francisco! Does a similar phenomenon happen with humans, where our biologies underpin our ideologies, our ideological narratives simply supervening as epiphenomena across our neuronal networks—where the real work is done—and outside of conscious awareness? It seems that we humans, like the ants, commonly misconstrue situational reality, even though, *unlike* them, we have the potential for self-reflection, to reason, and to justify our actions— creating narratives in the process, withdrawal narratives being just one example. But why does it seem so difficult, and take so long?

Of course it could be argued that ants are too removed from humans to make a strong analogy. What about a closer animal relative? What about chimps, who reportedly share over 98% of their DNA with humans? E.O. Wilson, in his new book, *The Social Conquest of Earth*, may help us here. He gives this example: a group of researchers in Uganda have been following the exploits of a group of chimps over the past 10 years. The researchers found that, every 10 to 14 days, a group of male chimps will reconnoiter the territory of a neighboring group, walking single file into the other group’s territory while quietly and methodically checking the underbrush and trees. If they encounter a larger force than themselves, they will hurry back across their border toward home; if they encounter a lone male, they will attack, hitting and biting it to death; if they come across a lone female, they will let it go, although if she has a baby, they will force the mother to leave but keep the baby, killing and eating it. The net result, after 10 years, has been an expansion of the observed chimps’ territory by 22%.

In the example of the ants, internecine warfare is most certainly instinctual, and will remain chronic. The chimps, however, appear more calculating, tactical: when and where to invade, pull back, decide who gets eaten (ants do not eat their own; from Moffett's book: "I focused my camera on a group of three ants pulling on another that was already missing an antenna. As I watched, a hind limb tore free. The worker who wrenched it off stood for a moment as if surprised at her success, the leg hanging from her jaws, before dropping it and inspecting her adversary's stump."). Chimps' behavior, however, is more complex. They seem more like us—more bare bones of course, but still.

[I wanted to say something here about ideologies, but the subject quickly overpowered me. I tried going back over the literature, where things became even more unmanageable. It seems that little is clear concerning ideologies (ideologies are supposed to make things clear—note Fredric Jameson's "If everything were transparent, there would be no ideologies"; and St. Paul's "We see through a glass darkly"). Thus, ideologies appear to not be doing their job. But do they *always* fail us, as many claim? The challenge with ideologies is that they are supposed to correspond at some level with reality, to the really-real, to the "out there," the world beyond. If an ideological view of the world fails completely to touch the outer world, it is mere fairy tale. "Real" fairy tales of course don't pretend to do otherwise. But the fact of fairy tales, the fact that weavers of such tales can create such elaborate stories of worlds not there, and in such detail, should give us pause. It goes without saying of course that one *hopes* one's beliefs correspond with reality, not just cohere internally. So of the three interlocking systems—nation-states, international markets, and ideologies, ideologies may offer the greatest challenge concerning how the world works, or should, but I leave all this for another day.]

So, what about the more pragmatic? What about *nation-states*? What are they? And why the hyphenation? And what about *empires*?

Sheehan seems to understand nations as originating out of homogeneous (ethnic) groups—writ small, tribes. For example, early Rome began as a village, grew into regional dominance, gaining hegemony over its neighbors, spread south into Magna Graecia, then north and east into

Greece proper, until eventually conquering “the world,” as the Romans themselves declared. But the Romans, like the Greeks before them, did not want to make the world after their own image. Rather, they were satisfied with tribute (taxes). Such is the project of empires. The modern state, however, is configured differently.

Questions abound over which came first: nations or states—accompanied by the usual caveats and academic hairsplitting. But given the example of Rome, a nation appears to be understood as a group of people with a common ethnicity, most important of which being a common language. If it were to grow large enough, and subjugate enough people from other ethnic groups, but still allowing these groups a certain degree of autonomy, it achieves the status of empire. States, on the other hand, are something of a modern invention. Within states, there is greater homogeneity and tighter and more clearly marked geographical boundaries. A state may or may not be composed of a single ethnic group, or nation. Albania, for example, is 98% ethnic Albanian, whereas China and Russia are ethnically heterogeneous, with dozens of groups speaking as many languages. The nation-state configuration might be composed of a single dominate ethnic group ruling over several ethnic minorities or a numerically inferior yet more powerful ethnic minority ruling an ethnic majority, as was the case in Iraq prior to the U.S. invasion, with a ruling minority Sunni population controlling a subjugated Shiite majority.

It would seem that nations evolved naturally, whereas states were more consciously created political contrivances. Perhaps states become necessary only after human populations reach a critical mass (“crowding,” if you will), following Locke’s contention that government originates out of the necessity for protecting property. Qualitatively, the difference between nation and state might be captured by the concepts *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, invented by the German sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies, usually translated, respectively, as “community” and “society.” There seems to be a sense to the former that the latter lacks, that community arises naturally, organically, whereas society comes into being by fiat, by governments in other words. And governments, unlike communities, are not necessary in and of themselves, simply necessary evils. It would appear, therefore, that many nation-states were nations first, states second; others, however, quite the opposite. For example, consider Iraq, a “carve-out” state, created, as one historian put it, by European bureaucrats sitting in a Paris hotel room at the end of the First

World War. With all this in mind, is it any wonder that the history of the world has been one of low-grade turmoil during the best of times and chaos during the worst?

Sheehan quotes the British historian, Martin White: “All of us know that what we want to do and what we do is always a subject of the interaction between our will and the world around us.” Sheehan offers a cogent example of this truth from the Bush/Cheney years, when someone observed, shortly after the “shock and awe” of the invasion of Iraq wore off, that the administration had been, alas, “mugged by reality.” Such may be the fruit of hubris, or from not knowing enough history, or both. Even that great, would-be sage of international politics, Henry Kissinger, can be faulted here, when he scoffed at our allies for not coming on board at the beginning of the Iraqi conflict: too bad for them—we’ll keep all the spoils for ourselves.

Decision makers and their wannabes. Political actors live in one of two conditions: *in* power or *out* of power, each condition requiring a different way of looking at the world, a bias if you will. Those in power, Sheehan warns, suffer from the “insider bias,” while those out of power can luxuriate in the “outsider bias.” The insiders have gotten what they want, and suffer as a result (careful what you wish for), because life is hard, the responsibilities enormous, with so much to do, with not enough hours in the day, and with having to contend with the ever present attacks from the outsiders. Outsiders, on the other hand, have the time and the luxury to gloat over the insiders’ ineptitude. They can hover above the fray, while their opponents are trapped among the trees, agonizing over which direction to take (“For every human problem, there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong,” attributed to H.L. Mencken). The outsiders, on the other hand, do not have to be bothered with the devilish details, seeing things as manageable, solutions obvious. For the insiders, however, decisions must be made on the fly, often based on incomplete information (for example, Washington’s mismanagement of the New York campaign during the early part of the Rebellion). In a candid moment, insiders might admit to wanting to trade places with those out of power. Yet they stay. They will have to be driven out—either by force or the ballot box.

It should be noted that decision makers make decisions in space and time, something so obvious that it needs to be said. Space and time of course are wooly concepts. There is, for

example, cosmic space and time, the province of cosmologists, and much too large for us here. Relatedly, there is an objective space and time calibrated to the human scale—space and time writ small perhaps—something “out there,” existing before each of us came into being and remaining after each of us ceases to be. Then there is subjective space and time, a kind of vague working of the mind—elastic, encoded into memory according to one’s experiential circumstances, and perhaps not space or time at all. And finally there is a collective, historical space and time, also memory based, lived indirectly, taught through group membership, as citizens for example, or members of a church, a community-based phenomena ranging in importance from the mundane to the sacred. Indeed, the same historical event may seem mundane at one time and sacred at another. For example, a middle school student hearing about the writing of the Declaration of Independence may seem mundane at its core, then evolve into something sacred twenty years later at a Fourth of July celebration on the village green.

Sacred space and sacred time need give us pause, for here may be where our most intractable problems lie. Take the Israelis, the Palestinians, Islam and the West more generally, all creating large histories etched in sacred time and space. Not Japan however. An American diplomat once asked a Japanese diplomat what principles (read: a sacred past) Japan’s politics are based on. The Japanese diplomat responded, Our politics are based on an archipelago, not on principles. For the Japanese, lacking the natural resources necessary for building an industrialized economy, space and time are pragmatic concerns. In other instances, however, sacred time and space do hold, pragmatic concerns be damned. The so-called “middle east problem” is an obvious example in today’s world. For example, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, one of the most sacred spaces on earth, commemorates the most sacred time (or “times,” for Jews, Muslim, and Christians continue to argue over fine points of theology in this regard).

Informing Ideas. There are two givens: all experiences are interpreted, and all interpretation is agenda driven. Take beliefs. Most simply put, beliefs are expectations. They concern how things are, should, or could be. Fundamentally, beliefs inform actions, have variable half-lives, come in various shapes and sizes, arise out of circumstances, make (some) things possible, and enable us,



with various degrees of success, to meet our needs. Fundamentally, ideas give order and direction to our day. One might say they are purpose-*filling*.

Grand ideas are iconic and long-lived. They might originate in the head of a single individual (Martin Luther on the eve of the Reformation; or Einstein in 1904, prior to publishing his four seminal papers laying out the foundation of modern physics), a group (the Nazis before the Munich Putsch), a community (the Church at Corinth at Paul's first visit), or seemingly nowhere. *The modern, or modernization*, is such a grand idea, currently informing most of the planet. They say it began in the West and is now *reforming* the East. Its heyday was the period of the Enlightenment, and its basic assumptions have been under fire ever since.

In a nutshell, modernization proposes a universal model for change. It has had powerful policy implications for policy makers, encouraging them to model policy initiatives on its main tenets. Like all great ideas, its influence may have been due to its elasticity, encompassing many potential and actual meanings. For example, anthropologists have tended to think about modernization as a cultural process, economists as an economic process, social scientists as a social process, and political scientists as an institutional process. Still, these disciplines have at least one thing in common, one project: to understand the transformation of traditional societies, of small group societies structured around kinship relationships, of local groups heavily involved in religion and magic, into today's global world. If you were an anthropologist, you understood modernization as the breakdown of tribal society—the move of people into cities for example; if you were an economist, it appeared in the expansion of local markets into a global movement of labor, goods, and that most mysterious of all economic ideas, capital; if you were a political scientist, you saw it in the transition from the divine rights of kings to natural rights, from natural rights to more contingent, man-made law.

This is not to say of course that the modern and the traditional are polar opposites. It is not difficult to find elements of each in the other—seeds of change taking root within the traditional, and, within the modern, emerging traditions arguing against innovation and novelty. It may be the case that, in traditional societies, one had less to think about, and fewer choices, of professions, of ways of making a living, of gods to believe or not believe in. Having choices, however, cuts both ways: as choices increase, possibilities increase, while the probability of

making the *right* choice decreases. It's a crap shoot. George Bernard Shaw may have captured this when he observed, "It seems as though every time you learn something new you have to give up something."

Two paradigms of modernization—perhaps three—have competed for dominance: capitalism and communism, and a possible third blending the two—market socialism. Each has its advantages, and its shortcomings, a reality memorialized by Winston Churchill: "The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings; the inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries"; as well as this from John Kenneth Galbraith in *The Affluent Society*: "The miserable consumption of the poor is partly the result of the ostentatious demands of the rich. There isn't enough for both, and the latter get far more than they need...But could anything seriously be done about it?"

Of the two, only capitalism seems to have delivered on its promises, although it could be argued that the various forms of state-sponsored communism foisted on the weary populations of the Soviet Union and China were not at all what Marx had in mind, and thus the reason for their failures. Capitalism's relative success, on the other hand, may suggest that it is a better fit with the material reality of the world, with how life evolved on the planet, through competition for scarce resources. Also, capitalism seems to arise naturally within local communities, whereas communism seems to require central planning, and large bureaucracies—decision-making from afar—ultimately resulting in central planners failing to understand local needs, which is Friedrich Hayek's argument in his *Road to Serfdom*.

Yet the underlying dynamic of capitalism's success may ultimately be its undoing, which brings us back to change. The poet John Berryman once wrote, "What does not change is the will to change," then killed himself, suggesting there can be a world of difference between the will and the wherewithal. Modernists and their ideas, as it turns out, may be as adverse to change as traditionalists—and poets—for once modernism became the status quo, power blocks formed, vested interests protected, and change itself became suspect. Perhaps change wasn't all it was cracked up to be.

Still, capitalism's undoing is in the wind, although this may be overstating the reality. Indeed, it may be unproductive to speak of capitalism as though it were a singular concept, a "thing," for

it seems to mean different things to different people. It is what (some) people do, some groups (some very large groups, in “places” called “Wall Street,” to give a tortured example), as well as children standing behind cardboard boxes selling lemonade. So it may be better to speak of capitalist-like activities (“capitalism-at-work”), and *this* is what needs to be unpacked.

With a little effort, the major concepts behind capitalism-at-work can be teased out and understood by anyone with average intelligence; what is more difficult is to argue for those reasons capitalism-at-work may be leading us to ruin. The left, for example, points to climate change; the right sees a climate change conspiracy. Why the disconnect? Cognitive dissidence? Cognitive dissidence may be more a malady of the right than the left. The left seems by nature more optimistic, more sanguine toward human nature, regardless of a mountain of evidence to the contrary (something like 230 million died in wars during the twentieth century). Perhaps the optimism of the left comes from anticipation, anticipation that some day there will be a truly just world. The right knows this will never be the case.

Sheehan organizes the twentieth century thus: until 1914, the twentieth century is simply an extension of the nineteenth century; from 1914 to 1945, the period of the two great wars, including of course the twenty years between the wars, the whole sometimes referred to as the “thirty-years war”; from 1945 to 1989, the period of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union and the U.S. vied for world dominance; and from 1989 to the present (currently 2012), which of course does not yet have a name, because it does not have an ending, “a completed narrative,” as Sheehan calls it, complicated by the fact that many of its major players remain alive, a fact that makes historians nervous.

The period that ended in 1914 began in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna, during which modern Europe drew the map to settle the issues of territory and the problems concerning spheres of influence that had resulted in a quarter century of warfare. From 1914 to the present, the society of states have grown more numerous (currently hovering around two hundred), in some ways more equal (note the United Nations as a legitimizing institution for states), and in some ways more powerful. For example, even though Britain’s navy has shrunk in importance internationally, the firepower of each of its ships and submarines is significantly greater than its

ships and submarines circa 1914, or those at the close of WWII. If anything can be said of the twentieth century, the destructive power of states grew beyond the wildest dreams of prior generations.

Sheehan quotes from Machiavelli's *The Prince*: *"When you see the trouble in advance, it is easily remedied, but when you wait until it is on top of you, the antidote is useless, the disease has become incurable. What doctors say about consumption applies here. In the early stages, consumption is hard to recognize, but easy to cure, but in the later stages, if you've done nothing about it, it becomes easy to recognize, but hard to cure."*

Sheehan states that Machiavelli's observation is a commonplace in politics, this need to recognize something in time, before it has become too hard, perhaps impossible, to deal with, an example being what has happened to the United States in Iraq.

Sheehan continues: President Bush, on the evening of Sept 11, 2001, writing in his diary, compared the events of the day, the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Sheehan agrees, that, yes, in many ways they were alike. They were alike in their rareness: that an attack on American soil had caused substantial damage; alike in changing the attitude of both the public and to some degree the decision makers toward both the outside world and how Americans themselves thought and acted. But what we have to learn about these events is how very different they were, particularly concerning means and ends. The means could not be more different. For example, for the Pearl Harbor attack, the Japanese had assembled a fleet of aircraft carriers and over four hundred bombers and fighters, an extraordinary feat in terms of its operational planning and the technological expertise required. Compare this to the September 11 attack: nineteen men, partially trained to fly aircraft for a few hours, armed with box cutters available at any local hardware store, flying commercial aircraft, for which they had bought tickets—one way tickets—and you see the difference between these two events: the one a massive investment in state and society, the other an incredibly cheap and simple conversion of peaceful, commercial instruments into instruments of destruction. Rule number one: wars are expensive, insurgencies are cheap.

Think about the contrasts between the enormous national investment to build the Japanese fleet of aircraft carriers and the rather modest sums required to fly the nineteen hijackers to their destination. For the Japanese, the costs were all upfront, for the Americans (and much of the rest of the world), it was all after the fact as airlines and airports everywhere in the world tried desperately to prevent it from happening again. Rule number two: *counter-insurgencies* are expensive. They might turn out to be more expensive than war itself.

And when we move from the means of these attacks to the ends, we are once again struck by a contrast of great significance, because the Japanese strategy, their goal, was the traditional ends of wars between states: to destroy a potential troublemaker, the American fleet, to allow the Japanese time to fortify a defensive perimeter around the Pacific that would be sufficiently impregnable, a free hand they regarded as their right to control things within their sphere of influence. A terrible miscalculation as it turned out.

What about the hijackers on September 11th? What exactly was *their* goal? Who were *they*? The fighter pilots that attacked Pearl Harbor were the representatives of Japan. They wore the uniforms of the Japanese military. Who exactly did those nineteen hijackers represent, and what exactly did they intend to do? The Japanese targets were military, the World Trade Center was not—nor was the Pentagon. So these targets must have been purely symbolic, for no one supposed that the attack on the World Trade Center would bring American capitalism to its knees, or that crashing into the Pentagon would bring the American military to an end. But even more puzzling, what was supposed to happen next? What exactly were the strategic ends behind this attack?

Sovereignty. Sheehan defines sovereignty as a “monopoly over violence” within state boundaries. Thus, sovereignty legitimizes violence and makes it an instrument of statecraft, to use when necessary, or simply expedient, in order to maintain order, power, and the like.

According to Jean Bodin, the sixteenth century French jurist and political philosopher, the sovereign is an equal among other sovereigns and a master at home. And, according to Sheehan, it is the combination of these two claims that gives sovereignty its significance, both theoretically and practically.

Not all states exercise such control over their territories. Internal threats to sovereignty commonly originate from out-of-power factions within a state, or from the outside, from other states, who, like birds of prey, watch and wait to exploit weaknesses and vulnerabilities of neighboring states. Examples of internal threats to sovereignty can be seen in such states as the Republic of Congo and the Sudan (now two Sudans, though this may be a contemporary condition). Less apparent perhaps is Italy, which competes with the Italian mafia for control of Sicily. Even the United States experiences challenges to its sovereignty: most threateningly today along the US-Mexico boarder, and when in times past the bootlegging enclaves of Kentucky and Tennessee would (because they could) thumb their noises at state authority. Indeed, in all states, crime, organized or otherwise, are challenges to a state's sovereignty. Urban gangs and rural guerrillas worldwide carry on internecine warfare with local authorities. In the 1960s, in a curious turn of events, the government of Columbia, in an attempt to contain internal violence, ceded a portion of its territory the size of Switzerland to the FARC guerrillas, a move that only encouraged the FARC to increase their activities.

Problems of sovereignty are related to people problems, "the people," as in "We the People...," which brings us back to that difficult phrase, *nation-state*.

Who, asks Sheehan, are "the People"? Obviously not slaves, or Native Americans. Perhaps not so obviously, women, and only incidentally *non*-landholding white males, those with a potential for achieving full-fledged peoplehood were they to become property owners. What *was* new was the fact that a government was being organized around the idea of *popular* sovereignty. But what was that?

Popular sovereignty means that political power resides ultimately with the people, so it would logically follow that the people can reorder the government as they see fit, an idea ingrained in American school children. But does it really work this way? Perhaps, although perhaps not to the degree it is commonly claimed. So who does rule, really? On the surface, elected officeholders of course, proxies for the People, although in some instances (for example, during the George W. Bush presidency), puppet masters seemed to be pulling the strings in the guise of a Secretary of Defense or a Vice President.

The problem of where sovereignty ultimately rests became a issue in colonial America after the the Seven Years War (the French and Indian War in the colonies). The Seven Years War turned out to be one of those be-careful-what-you-wish-for events for the British. All their dreams had come true. They had beaten the daylights out of their ancient enemy, the French, and had driven them out of North America, for the most part: out of Canada, Florida, and they acquired all the land west of the Appalachians to the Mississippi River. They also acquired a huge debt (wars cost) of £ 137 million, with an annual interest of £ 5 million (with a peacetime budge of only £ 8 million). *But*, the colonies were in a growth spurt. Between 1750 and 1770, population doubled, from 1 million to 2 million. *And*, the economy was booming. *So*, the colonies could pay for the war, or at least their part. Right?

Wrong.

Sovereignty again. Until the war, the colonies had been neglected, left to their own affairs, something that had been going on for over 150 years. Generations had never directly experienced the British Isles. They had lost their English accent. They did not take kindly to be talked down to. Indeed, they were downright uppity. They did try, however, to make things right with the mother country, but it wasn't working out. So when they got down to writing a constitution, naturally it was based in "We the People." And the rest, as they say, is history—and a damn interesting one.

Population then and now. Sheehan: "People who worry about population usually worry that the wrong kind of people are having too many children."

Increases in population, Sheehan tells us, had been a worry since the beginning of the nineteenth century—for example, Malthus, who argued that population was increasing exponentially while the food supply increased only arithmetically. Records, spotty and shoddy as they were initially, inform us that, from the beginning of the common era to around 1600, population grew only modestly. Then, during the 18th century, there was a dramatic increase in population, which has continued up until the present. Why?

People who study these things have been able to tease out a sequence of demographic patterns within populations. First comes a pre-industrial stage, with high birth rates and high

death rates, each balancing out the other. Until the 18th century, all human populations were in this stage, stage one, which lasted for approximately 10,000 years, and during which population growth was only about 0.05%. In stage two, where we find the developing countries, death rates begin to fall sharply as birth rates remain high, the latter due to increases in the food supply by using more advanced farming techniques and improvements in sanitation (public health). Interestingly, it has been found that female literacy also accompanies this stage. In stage three, beginning in the 19th century, death rates continued to decline, as did birth rates, due to such factors as urbanization, more controlled timing of births within families due to changing social values, and a continuing increase in female literacy. In stage four, both birth rates and death rates remain low. In fact, in many countries (e.g., Germany, Japan, and Italy) currently in stage four, death rates are slightly higher than birth rates, threatening many industries that depend on increases in population.

In some instances, states might feel a need to control (that is, decrease) population growth. For example, China. The Chinese have attempted, with some success, a one child per family policy, introduced in 1978. Currently, the Chinese perform over 13 million abortions per year, and it is no easy task. Traditional Chinese society values boys over girls because boys have a future income potential girls lack, and girls a future cost—like dowries, a future economic burden that has often resulting in female infanticide. Such are some of the challenges at the micro level.

On the macro level, difficulties of population growth have been of two sorts. In Europe, for example, the birth rate has stagnated: several European countries barely reproduce themselves, averaging only about 2.1 children per household, while others are actually decreasing, and rapidly—for example Russia, where there is not only a drop in the birth rate but also in longevity, particularly among males. The usual case, however, is when the birth rate declines and longevity increases, leaving a younger population of workers having to maintain and care for a growing and increasingly unproductive older population.

A very different situation is happening in other parts of the world—for example, in the Middle East, where the birth rate is high but the economy unable to absorb the demographic pressures of these increases. The answer to these imbalances has been migration, a tide of the



poor moving north into the rich countries—from, for example, Libya to Italy, and prior to the “Arab Spring” movements from sub-Saharan regions such as the Sudan into the oil rich nations of the Middle East.

Climate change is another issue, a highly charged political one. Who wants to face the fact that one’s planet is in peril? And unlike population growth—or shrinkage—climate change is less visible, less concrete, and more speculative.

Summing it all up. Well, that’s a lot, and a hodgepodge, as predicted. Let me summarize by paraphrasing a popular phrase: it’s the male brain, stupid (well, it’s the economy, too—but that’s also mostly the male brain at work). I told a young psychiatry resident once where I was working I would let him in on a secret, on what was wrong with the world, and that way he could have a leg up on his peers. He gave me a wry smile and asked, What? The male brain, I told him. He was not impressed—he wasn’t buying it. “It” had to be more complex than that. Maybe he thought it was the female brain, too. I didn’t ask. In my mind—in my own male brain—the female brain may have evolved as a reaction to the male brain—of having to deal with male brains. I figure that by the time they turn out the lights it will have become evident that it was the female brain that kept the lights on as long as they were. But if you don’t believe in evolution, which 40% of the American public reportedly don’t, then think about it this way: first God made man, then woman. Why? To get it right?

Here’s the problem...well, here’s two problems. One, the brain (read, “male brain”) evolved in an environment that no longer exists (okay, so did the female brain, but let’s not complicate the argument). Two, evolution has to build on what’s already there. I’ll explain.

One. The formative years for modern humans (I’ve only recently read) was the Pleistocene, the last great ice age, a period lasting well over a million years (some say over two million years), and only ending around 12,000 years ago. Evolutionary biologists and psychologists claim that, following evolutionary theory, we became what we are today through an “environment of evolutionary adaptedness” (EEA) during the Pleistocene, and because today’s world is *not* the Pleistocene we are mismatched in some very important ways with the very world we inhabit. Of course there is a complication here: the fact that we *created* today’s world—the

social-cultural part at any rate (which is currently having its own influence on the physical environment). But this can be explained: what we've created is an *abundance* of what our ancestors of the Pleistocene craved the most, because their very survival depended on it: fat, salt, and sugar (today's junk food) and advantageous mate selection (today's sex industry), as only two examples. That's one problem.

Here's the other problem. Richard Dawkins points out that we are "built," if you will, from parts rearranged and reconfigured from earlier species models, the rearranging and reconfiguring necessitated through eons of environmental change. I believe it was Dawkins who used the following analogy to drive the point home: imagine you have to build a jet plane from a World War Two vintage bomber (before jets), using only the part of the older plane, *while you're still flying!* That's what humans have had to do in order to meet the demands of ever-changing environmental pressures. (Of course this was done passively through natural selection.)

So here's my point: Sheehan's three overlapping, interlocking systems (nation-states, international markets, and ideologies) are simply adaptations (systems we've cobbled together) to maintain territorial security (you can never have enough), food (you can never eat enough), and beliefs (you can never be too right). It's almost as though we are creatures from another time, another world, an older world, plopped down into a new world, and we're not, well, very well-equipped—Pleistocene creatures run-a-muck—and *because* of this, *this* is how the world will end. Well, there's solar storms of course, but still.

So the next time you find yourself watching the news, notice who's causing all the trouble: males? or females? Over days and weeks and months of watching, it may be both, to a degree, but it will *always* be *heavily* weighted toward males. (How many times have you seen a female on the FBI's Most Wanted list?) And as you watch, notice who's out in the streets running around like crazy, burning and blowing up cars—and people: male brains? or female brains?

On a midsummer morning in 1945, a small group of males assembled in the desert in New Mexico. Like boys playing with matches, they were *very* excited, and not a little nervous, because they knew they were doing something illicit, yet they had worked so hard to get to this point, and they couldn't *wait* to see what would happen next. They had built a tower, and at the top they hung "the gadget," they called it, and at precisely 05:29:45 local time (note that it's still

dark, night), someone pulled a switch and the gadget exploded. In a flash of light “brighter than daytime” the surrounding mountains lit up. Within a second or two the light changed from purple to green to white, and then the world turned back to night. Later they learned that a shock wave was felt 100 miles away and that a mushroom cloud caused by the blast reached 7.5 miles into the sky.

Everyone was thrilled! They had done it! But they had done more than “it”—they had changed the world. It may have been the best and the worst moment of the male brain at work. And then, through a stunned silence, a voice said, “Now we are all sons-of-bitches” (that was the project director, J. Robert Oppenheimer?).

Sons-of-bitches? Seriously? They were going to blame their mothers?

I’m telling you, it’s the male brain. Stupid.