

FROM CLOSED TO OPEN WORLD

The Extraterrestrial Imperative

by Krafft A. Ehricke & Elizabeth A. Miller

*The late Krafft Ehricke (1917-84), the German-American visionary and rocket scientist, developed the concept of the “Extraterrestrial Imperative,” which today has become a focus of LaRouche PAC scientific research and organizing (see **Feature** in this issue). Ehricke believed that it was the responsibility of humanity to explore space and exploit the resources of the Solar System, in order to sustain the development of the species. There are no external “limits to growth,” Ehricke insisted, because while the Earth is a “closed system,” the exploration of space opens the entire universe to humanity. For Ehricke, human creativity has no limits. The following is an excerpt of a copyrighted, but unpublished, book he wrote in 1971, a year before the publication of the Club of Rome’s counterculture manifesto, **The Limits to Growth**.*

1. The Extraterrestrial Imperative

The Extraterrestrial Imperative is a driving force in the natural growth of terrestrial life beyond its planetary limits. As such, it is an integral part of the obviously expansionistic and growth-oriented pattern of life’s evolution. This drive caused life to grow from infinitesimal beginnings into a force that encompasses and transforms an entire planet through its biosphere. More basically, the Extraterrestrial Imperative expresses a “first message,” a primordial imperative, bred into the very essence of the universe, driving the evolu-

tion of matter from simplest forms (elementary particles) to highly complex structures (e.g., the intelligent brain). A vast amount of cosmic energy is released by stellar matter in the initial phase of this process—the transformation of hydrogen to helium and heavier elements—and bound up in the later phases, involving the formation and evolution of living matter.

By these roots, it is possible to identify the Extraterrestrial Imperative as a basic principle that can be derived from a consistent interpretation and generalization of recurring phenomena common to evolutionary processes.

The Extraterrestrial Imperative is of concrete significance to us. It offers a lasting solution to the growing problem of keeping the societal, that is, the human and biological environmental costs of modern humanity’s life style and aspirations, within acceptable limits. It provides a rational and consistent orientation in the wilderness of past and present events, hence a solution-oriented understanding of humanity’s situation at this important crisis-prone juncture. The evolutionary road on this planet is paved with many crises. In fact, every major advance was preceded by, triggered by, and made possible by crisis. However, not every crisis led to an advance. The penalty of failing the test of crisis is death.

Taken out of its greater context, and evaluated in a narrow current time frame, each major crisis appeared



Courtesy of Krafft Ehrlicke

Krafft Ehrlicke: "Talk about no-growth and dynamic balance ... ironically contains the seeds of vast environmental destruction, because a mankind suffering and perishing from lack of technological progress and vital growth in productivity will destroy the environment in the paroxysm of mortal crises"

unsolvable, often suggesting that basic limitations to further evolutionary growth and advances had been reached; when in reality, only a transition from existing to larger frames of reference took place. In other words, growth-oriented transitions tend to give the "optical" illusion of a limit to growth.

Consistent with this phenomenon, limits to growth views are widely held today. Analyses, viewing humanity's present situation out of its greater context, abound. Consequently, reactions to immediate exigencies and to transitory outward manifestation of our industrial civilization have resulted in a maze of divergent, or outright contradictory, interpretations. They engender doubt about the future. They encourage a rash of doomsday predictions whose, in part computerized, messages impress the descendants of the Age of Enlightenment as did fire and brimstone predictions frighten the souls of a simpler era.

Now, as then, the messages imply or proclaim helplessness to avert what lies ahead, short of almost frantic submission to the dictates of the threat to give up much of the hard-won progress, or else. Now, as then, the messages create withdrawal and guilt syndromes. Shocked by the alleged inevitability of a frightening

future that is not at all inevitable, minds withdraw from a misunderstood present into a nostalgically glorified past that never was.

It becomes fashionable to subject progress to a cynical and pessimistic attitude that is far more dangerous to the future of our children than was the earlier uncritical acceptance of its more superficial manifestations to our generation. Once again, there is a rising tendency to view the human as incorrigibly bad, or at least as highly suspect, compared to some innately good and noble entity—and where God is no longer the all-encompassing reference, there is still the natural environment, the "unspoiled" wilderness, to provide the contrasting purity to which any guilt complex necessarily must relate.

In its wake, there is a proliferation of demands to change "human nature." Some wish to rely for this on a return to rigidly controlled societies—and this is indeed a return, since these are the earliest societal structures, tailored to crude behavioral and primitive socio-economic conditions. Others prefer "social engineering," a collective term for a wide spectrum of methods by which it is claimed, or hoped, to fetter and control the human mind. They range from psychologically refined behavioral manipulation to blunt lobotomy—the surgical removal of parts of the front lobes of the brain. By any standard of vigor and confidence, these demands and methods can be interpreted only as expressions of extreme cultural fatigue and self-abandoning capitulation before what appears to be an otherwise unmanageable, hence, a catastrophic future. It is the old delusion of safety through flight from responsibility.

Can such a death wish, such crisis, befall societies so soon after a Renaissance that brought them freedom, enlightenment, humaneness, and knowledge beyond the wildest dreams of those who took the first steps out of medieval darkness five centuries ago? Possibly, but not necessarily. Healthy societies—those that refuse to yield to the deadly lullaby of no-growth and the futility of struggle for progress—will be able to overcome the sinking feeling. They will inherit the future. Indeed, either we grow and overcome our problems, or our problems will grow and overwhelm us.

Can a society with claims to enlightenment, and in possession of the knowledge and means to ascertain facts and their consequences, ignore the needs of the billions who have not yet passed through the industrial revolution and those who will be added to the world

population in the next hundred years? Can the same sense of reality be so befuddled as to blind them to the economic and industrial as well as the environmental consequences of these needs? Talk about no-growth and dynamic balance ignores or shuns these basic facts and their consequences. It makes a deceptive virtue out of short-sightedness, indifference, or the inability to come up with a solution-oriented answer. It produces an anti-social brand of concern for the environment that ironically contains the seeds of vast environmental destruction, because a mankind suffering and perishing from lack of technological progress and vital growth in productivity will destroy the environment in the paroxysm of mortal crises. It promotes an attitude that corrodes the will and the ability to work toward the realistic goal of dynamic balance a century from now. This will require confidence, strength, dedication to excellence, and



Chris Sloan

This artist's rendition of a Moon colony is based on Ehricke's idea of "Selenopolis." Underlying the idea of an Extraterritorial Imperative is the idea that societies of continuing development "will inherit the future. Indeed, either we grow and overcome our problems, or our problems will grow and overwhelm us."

continued devotion to the principles of freedom, dignity, and enlightenment. In other words, it requires a very different set of social ideals; one that is based on a disciplined, solution-oriented mentality, and on guts....

This book is objective but not impartial. It is heavily partial to the proposition that, on balance, there is far more promise than problems for humanity. In fact, that is its central proposition and point of demonstration. Its corollary is that, in view of the enormity of the problems, the promise is truly gigantic and worth our efforts. In a nut-shell, this book addresses itself to the need to overcome the increasingly adversary position of environmental and ecological quality in relation to economic growth and the quality of human life, so that we may pass the precious heritage of human enlightenment and achievement on to our children and future generations, unimpaired, strengthened as guardians of their most sacred right—the right to grow and fulfill themselves....

Ehricke's "Three Laws"

Kraft Ehricke summarized his philosophy of astronautics in three laws (1957):

First Law. Nobody and nothing under the natural laws of this universe impose any limitations on man except man himself. *Second Law.* Not only the Earth, but the entire Solar System, and as much of the universe as he can reach under the laws of nature, are man's rightful field of activity. *Third Law.* By expanding through the universe, man fulfills his destiny as an element of life, endowed with the power of reason and the wisdom of the moral law within himself.

The first law is astronautics' challenge to man to write his declaration of independence from *a priori* thinking, from uncritically accepted conditions, in other words, from a past and principally different pre-technological world clinging to him. This can be done. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of this country prove it.

—Cited in Marsha Freeman, *How We Got to the Moon: The Story of the German Space Pioneers* (Washington, D.C., 21st Century Science Associates, 1993), p. 297.