

Preface

The major concept that underlies my published work was thrashed out between myself and my late friend John Braithwaite over the winter of 1968–1969, with some input from Charles Muir and others. This concept has been the core of almost all my published work since—all the nonfiction and almost all the fiction has been compatible with it, if not generated or influenced by it.

The key concept, as outlined by John Braithwaite, was for a “Politics of Survival”—a program that would ensure that at least one viable segment of human life and civilization would survive any imaginable catastrophe—inevitably requiring the preservation of other forms of life as well. John and I disagreed pretty strongly from the outset about how that might be brought about. In particular, although the concept had sprung from a discussion about asteroid and cometary impacts, John came to believe that threats from off-planet should be ignored, to focus on what he considered to be more immediate ones of human origin. By contrast I felt that we should start with those, partly because they were cross-party issues and partly because they were more immediate. In one such argument, he challenged me: “Seriously, which is the more immediate issue—global starvation or asteroid impacts?” To which I replied, “Put it this way – if something a mile across hit the Pacific twenty minutes ago, we aren’t going to finish these cups of coffee.”

Completing my own formulation was highly liberating, coming at the end of a decade in which the destruction of humanity had come to seem increasingly inevitable. But I quickly learned that the very concept was a long way ahead of its time. At the end of the 1960s, everyone I spoke to about it was convinced either that doom was inevitable or that there were no problems at all. Either way, there was no point in talking about solutions. So I gave up on talking about it and simply got on with it, within ASTRA, the

Association in Scotland to Research into Astronautics. ASTRA is the Scottish counterpart of the British Interplanetary Society (BIS) and was a Scottish branch of the BIS for ten years before becoming independent as ASTRA in 1963.

In the early 1970s, I ran discussion projects within ASTRA that became parts of my book *Man and the Stars* [1], and a second series that became *New Worlds for Old* [2] and *Man and the Planets* [3]. The projects were run on Politics of Survival guidelines; I simply never mentioned it, and everyone supposed I had forgotten it, even as they were helping me think it through in more and more detail. But in 1977, the first of a new series of meetings was scheduled for October 1, which made “October the First Is Not Too Late” the obvious title, paraphrasing Sir Fred Hoyle. ASTRA council members Bill Ramsay and Gavin Roberts, backed up by the late Prof. Oscar Schwiglhofer, the founder of the society, demanded that I come clean about the Politics of Survival—and to their amazement, they found that they knew it all already.

After years of my keeping it low-key, in 1986 the late George Hay approached me with a challenge to write it up for the journal *Science and Public Policy*, edited by his colleague Dr. Morris Goldsmith, where it appeared in February 1987 (see [Appendix 1](#)) [4]. My Slovenian friend, the editor Samo Resnik, arranged for it to be published in translation in a student journal called *Katedra* and actually beat *Science and Public Policy* into print by a month. I was asked to launch the concept publicly, in advance of publication, at the Environmental Sciences Society of the University of Stirling, but even though *Science and Public Policy* very kindly mailed out 20 copies, at their invitation, to people who I thought should be interested, there was no feedback at all.

In 2001, ASTRA council member Andy Nimmo proposed that we devote a special issue of ASTRA’s journal *Asgard* to the Politics of Survival. After the events of September 11, 2001, it was agreed that we would set up a new discussion project on it, dedicating four issues of the journal to the results, edited by Jamie McLean and myself with Andy as consultant.

The first issue in March 2002 introduced the Politics of Survival, and the rest of it was devoted to the impact threat and ways to counter it. Partly that was for historical reasons, but also it was because in 1998 ASTRA had become affiliated with Spaceguard

UK, run by Jay Tate and subsequently based at the Spaceguard Observatory in Powys. Jay was a guest speaker at ASTRA meetings in the Airdrie Arts Centre and in the Central Hotel, Glasgow, on March 20 and 21, 1998. We had promised to devote one of ASTRA's publications to Spaceguard, and we now ran an introduction to it and a discussion of the impact threat by Jay Tate [5], followed by an updated reprint of a paper by past president Gordon Ross and myself on using the "Solaris" solar sail as a comet or asteroid deflector (see Chap. 5) [6].

Bill Ramsay, also a past president of ASTRA, then proposed that we set up a new project, or a subproject, to address the question, "What would we do if we knew there was to be an impact in ten years' time?" It led to a fascinating series of meetings, including a conference at the Spaceguard Observatory in October 2003 and a seminar in the Bridie Library of Glasgow University Union in 2012, and the results make up the content of this book.

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