



third class hatred and malice directed against successful people combined with other patronizing commentary, and possibly one third George's own on-topic contributions. Two more-or-less random examples what has pretensions to be a textbook suffice to make the points. First, from a passage supposedly about Thomas Jefferson's ideas on progressive taxation:

*"...That Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings (apparently) shared a loving, if illegal, relationship, while old Tom remained true to his dying wife not to marry again, makes ya just love the guy even more, doesn't it? We note, with pleasure and amusement, the recently expanding turnout in celebration of family reunions at Monticello..."* (p. 48)

The prurient interest in Jefferson's love life crops up conspicuously over several pages, and equivalently prurient comments occur in many other areas of the book as well.

The next example is in a chapter on the "physical realizability, feasibility and implementation of socioeconomic democracy"

*"As for the dot2000 presidential campaign, the class warfare loose cannons appeared to roll back and forth uncontrollably on the deck of the good ship U.S.S. Conservatism. Repubs and Democs alike, defending the taking of 'hard' and 'soft' money from the wealthy influential wanting to have influence, nevertheless paid lip service to defending the poor and working, class, with all the candidates speaking more Spanish on the stump than most of us can understand. Then there was that wonderful Reform Party, with GoPatGo Buchanan taking advise [sic.] for awhile from Lenora Fulani, a card-carrying character, and 'The Donald' Trump (bless his billionaire heart)..."* [and on, and on] (p. 237).

In short, no matter how intrinsically interested I was in the topic, and no matter what I had paid for this book, I would have consigned to the trash can within the first 50 pages. However, I agreed to review it, so I slogged through to the end.

The book begins with the reasonable premise that something is inherently wrong

with economic systems allowing people to starve through lack of income when others are able to amass tens of billions of dollars in wealth. According to this year's Forbes Magazine rich list<sup>1</sup>, in April 2007, there were 946 billionaires in the world, with Bill Gates still the richest at \$56 billion. The World Bank's 2006 World Development Indicators estimates that in 2002, more than one billion of the world's population lived on incomes of less than \$1.00, and 2.6 billion on less than \$2.00 per day<sup>2</sup>. By contrast, according to a Forbes chart, in 2002 the 200 wealthiest people had an aggregate worth of more than 1.1 trillion dollars.

George introduces his UGI and MAW concepts, discusses the fairness of establishing some kind of livable guaranteed minimum income, and then reviews a range of historical and contemporary works on the evils of maldistributed wealth, often with a strong tinge of class warfare. In passing, he points out the consistent failures of income tax systems where through the creative use of exemptions, the obscenely wealthy may actually pay less tax than do low and middle income earners. He then argues that replacing income taxes with taxes on excess wealth will produce a fairer system. The rest of the book explores how democratic processes can reliably establish the bounds on UGI and MAW, justifications, incentive and self-interest, practical approximations to his theoretical ideal, financial benefits and costs from various combinations and limits on upper bounds on MAW and lower bounds on UGI, how such systems could be realized practically, and the wholly beneficial ramifications that implementing democratically established UGI and MAW would have on various aspects of society. The one genuinely interesting chapter is an essay on Islamic economics, which appears to work to redistribute wealth in ways that appear to be acceptable in Muslim society. However, given the limited scholarship of the rest of the book, I would want to do more research before I would consider any-

1. [http://www.forbes.com/2007/03/07/billionaires-worlds-richest\\_07billionaires\\_cz\\_lk\\_af\\_0308billie\\_land.html](http://www.forbes.com/2007/03/07/billionaires-worlds-richest_07billionaires_cz_lk_af_0308billie_land.html)

2. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/table2-7.pdf>

thing written by George to be authoritative.

To me there are four fundamental issues that George seems blissfully unaware of: (1) Wealth in excess of needs breeds more wealth through investment (literally money makes more money). Eliminating great wealth will remove one of the major drivers of economic growth. (2) Confiscating wealth above the democratically set maximum allowable wealth will quickly eliminate the source of wealth for distribution (why would anyone work to create wealth just so it can be confiscated?), forcing the MAW setting lower and lower until no-one has any wealth. (3) The historical record from most communistic societies that people don't work if wealth is confiscated for redistribution – where is the evidence that voters would have the wisdom to find workable values for UGI and MAW? (4) Where is the evidence that a MAW tax would be any more fairly administered than income taxes are. Even for publicly listed companies, let alone private wealth, we don't have good tools for measuring their value beyond cash in the bank.

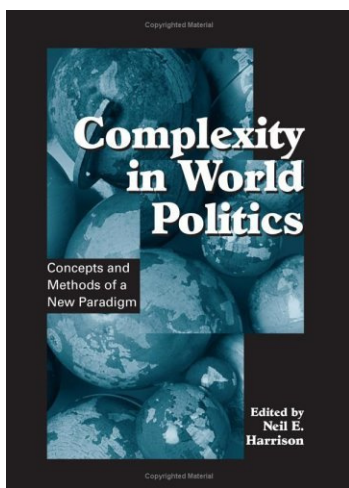
Basically, George's solution to the maldistribution of wealth is so obviously flawed and so poorly argued that I would not recommend the book to any reader interested in finding a solution for social ills resulting from unequal distribution of wealth. That is not to say that I regard the problem to be insoluble.

To me, a much more workable kind of redistribution that would have been impossible in the past to provide a UGI, could be achieved by taxing all cash flows (i.e., taxing the economy as a whole). The world economy is now largely based on electronic transactions from the very largest ones down to minor ones like commuter bus and train fares. It would be comparatively easy to eliminate the last vestiges of physical cash. A flat tax on all transactions could be easily automated, as could the automated topping up of every person's transaction account on a daily or weekly basis with the UGI. Not only would this eliminate the negative productivity of the huge bureaucracies required to assess income or wealth and welfare bureaucracies to distribute it, but it would ensure any wealthy individual making transactions would pay their fare share. Given

the reduction in bureaucratic costs, the impost on a given transaction – whether payment for a good or interest on shares or property should be small enough that it would not deaden the economy the way the direct confiscation of wealth would.

To conclude, George picked an interesting topic for his book, but he seems to have lost the plot in his class hatred of wealth, and wants to cook all the geese that lay golden eggs because he thinks they are too fat.

**A Review of *Complexity in World Politics: Concepts and Methods of a New Paradigm***  
written by Neil E. Harrison  
reviewed by Ken Baskin  
published by State University of New York Press  
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Back in the fall of 2000, I made a presentation at a RAND Corp. workshop, Complex Systems & Public Analysis: New Tools for a New Millennium. About half way through the second day, during a discussion of agent-based modeling of social systems, the person sitting next to me said, “These people realize what they’ve got their hands on. Most of them just want to slap some complexity tools on their old way of thinking.”

At the time, I agreed with her. But in the years since then, I realized what a long jump incorporating complexity into one’s thinking really is. (I’d call it a “jump of attractors,” if I wasn’t so sure some of my readers would object.) Applying complexity to social systems, it seems to me, isn’t a “theory”; nor can one apply it as a turn-key system for understanding human interactions. Rather, it works best for me as a comprehensive way of thinking, very nearly an epistemology, which resembles Chinese philosophy – with its deep sense of interconnection and causality as a product of the entire system – more than the analytically ac-

cessible linear causality of traditional Western science.

Intellectually speaking, that’s a long journey, and I sympathize with newcomers to complexity thinking, who are still at the beginning. Even so, I sometimes miss the I-know-something-you-don’t-know feeling I had at the RAND workshop. And I was surprised to recapture it as I began reading *Complexity in World Politics: Concepts and Methods of a New Paradigm*. Even the title reminded me of that workshop.

By the time I put it down, however, I’d realized how much things have changed in just a few years. To my surprise, this book examines intelligently how some of the tools of complexity science can (and cannot) be used to study world politics. True, none of the contributors has internalized complexity thinking to the point where they’ve become conscious that it can function very nearly as an epistemology. Still, if for nothing else, the book is a fascinating study in how much the way people are thinking today has changed, and how much closer to a complexity perspective even those new to its study are getting.

Editor Neil H. Harrison began from the assumption that both study and practice of “world politics has for too long been distorted by [the theory of] rational choice” and that complexity theory presents an attractive alternative. Complexity, he tells us in the book’s first essay, “Thinking about the World We Make,” “views politics as emerging from interactions among interdependent individual agents within evolving institutional formations.” In this essay, he discusses several principles of complexity as a way of approaching the study of politics. And while I may argue with some of his points – his use of the concept of “simple rules,” for instance (more about that later) – by and large, Harrison has incorporated complexity thinking to a high degree. So in discussing causality, he explains that the student of complex systems “should look to the evolution of the system, not to individual events.” Impressive stuff.

Not all the essays are equally impressive. For instance, in “Complexity and Conflict Resolution,” Dennis J.D. Sandole seems too

intent on attacking traditional *Realpolitik* to stay true to the principles of complexity. Perhaps my reaction to the essay emerged in part because of my discomfort at the rhetoric of conflict resolution. In this essay, for example, Sandole insists that post-9/11 terrorists “are *not* deterred by traditional *Realpolitik* threats or the actual use of force” [author’s italics]. According to a recent PBS series on terrorism – and, editorially, PBS seems the anti-Fox News Network – al-Qaeda was nearly put out of business during the Afghan war and only revived during the chaos in Iraq. As a result, I wasn’t surprised when he insists that “the crux of complexity” is “the ‘need’ to nudge systems at the ‘edge of chaos’ so that neither *chaos* nor *order* prevails at the zero-sum expense of the other.” For me, this is a gross misapplication of an idea, the so-called edge of chaos, that’s of questionable value anyway.

Other essays provide what seem to this non-expert in the field of politics to be valuable insights. Walter C. Clemens, Jr.’s essay on ethnic conflict in the former Soviet Union, for example, makes some fascinating points about diversity and political self-organization in the nations he considers, based on complexity principles. Similarly, Ravi Bhavnani’s “Agent-Based Models in the Study of Ethnic Norms and Violence” makes sense of the way long-time neighbors in Rwanda killed each other. For readers of this journal, however, the most valuable part of the book is the last half, in which the essays explore uses of agent-based modeling and the overall value of complexity theory in the study of political systems.

And what makes it most valuable is that it examines what for me is the critical weakness of the book. That is, that it is based on the same application of complexity theory to social systems – one might call it technical complexity – that Ralph Stacey (2001, for instance) finds so objectionable. If I were to agree with the book’s author’s (and Stacey) that complexity theory is rooted in computerizable complexity, as their emphasis on agent-based modeling in the second half of the book demonstrates, then I would also apply it only reluctantly to human systems.

But I don’t. Their emphasis on “simple rules” does make complexity seem inadequate. That’s because such rules are merely attempts to describe the behaviors that complex systems evolve in a stable state. They are capable of evolving further – that is, their systems can learn – as the context changes. When those behaviors *don’t* evolve, the systems are driven into phase transition.

And because the author’s have accepted this limited – and limiting – conception of complexity, one of the strengths of the book is its rejection of that limited conception of complexity as “an encompassing theory,” as Harrison puts it in the concluding essay. “Complex systems concepts,” he adds in that essay, “can generate radically novel hypotheses,” leading thinkers to “ask different questions and search for data in new places.” He notes, in particular, that the idea of agents “introduces potential for dynamic system change”; that it enables one to treat “international negotiations as the coevolution of adaptive states”; and that the essay by Ravi Bhavnani on the Rwandan genocide addresses “a puzzle that conventional theories cannot touch.” Putting just these three together, Harrison and his coauthors have taken a giant step toward what I would consider a true complexity-oriented approach toward world politics. As such, it’s well worth the read.