

# The Tipping Point Alliance

## A Vision and Strategy for a Meaningful Life in a Fracturing World

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May 2019

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# A few comments around the Vision

The following text is a personal commentary of the Vision. It is a personal expression of what has led me to write the initial formulation of the Vision with a few friends. My friends have as well developed their own version of commentary. Each of these commentaries is then a subjective stand. It tries to put some flesh on the core of the Vision (what unites us) and to illustrate what is meant in this Vision for each of us, and in the present text specifically for me. In this sense it is not an exclusive interpretation of the Vision; it is only one possible illustration of it; the reader does not need to agree with each point of it. This text is narrowly connected with the present stage of my own search for meaning. It means that this expression will still much evolve in future. Each of us is at a different stage of his / her own evolution, according to the context in which we have grown up and the specific experiences we have made in life. The commentary is in this way far from being an absolute truth. It is only a personal testimony. I hope that, by sharing my own approach, it can help the readers to be enriched and stimulated in their own reflection and search for meaning.

## **0 - A much needed synthesis between wisdom and practical know-how**

### **Science and wisdom: two disconnected paths that need to combine and integrate each other**

We all may observe how our modern society, especially since the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution, has developed fascinating means for science, technology and the production of goods that have improved our standard of life. In parallel our search for the meaning of life and for wisdom has deepened along the centuries and provided new perspectives for the way we live or aspire to live. Yet both paths, the scientific-technological path and the wisdom path, seem to have developed on separate tracks instead of combining and integrating both approaches into a wider and well-balanced synthesis of all our human potentials.

### **Market has replaced relationships and technology has replaced meaning**

In our modern society market has replaced relationships<sup>1</sup> and technology has replaced meaning<sup>2</sup>. These two dominant, yet very partial, fields of our daily life provide their own solutions, in their own name and in an exclusive way, and determine our lives. Consequently we have given up our power to decide what the priorities in our personal or collective lives should be. Because the scientific-technological path and the wisdom path propose completely divergent ways of thinking and living, we need urgently to find ways to integrate one with the other and to make wisdom the privileged guide of how we use all available means such as goods, technology, economics, politics, science, knowledge. It is essential to rediscover a true anthropology, i.e. a wider vision of the meaning of life.

### **Climate change as a visualisation of the global inequity of our social construct**

When we become aware how much climate change is a threat for our own survival and how quickly it will destroy us if we do not do everything that is possible to limit its development and its impact, we need still to understand that it is much more than a question of abundance of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. It is indeed the sign of the deep injustice that characterises the way we relate to one another. Our global society, on Earth scale, is suffering of the deepest inequity. Only 1% of world population (42 mio of millionaires) owns 45% of the global wealth; 10% own more than 100'000.-

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1 Marshall Sahlins describes how kinship (i.e. our relationships between members of the same community) have been replaced by money exchanges that exclude our capacity for empathy and communion. Today one can buy stuff on the internet and even in the supermarket without having any contact with human beings.

2 Ivan Illich shows how the means and tools we use impact on the way we understand life and how these tools - when they are used as the universal technical solution to any problem of any kind - impose their own logic onto the way we live. They generate therefore other priorities which are contrary to our aspirations.

US\$ that is 84% of total wealth, while 64% own less than 10'000.- US\$ and live on 2% only of the total wealth. It means that, as inhabitants of rich countries who own between 10'000.- and 1 mio US\$ (i.e. without the richest 1%), we represent one third (35%) of world population but we consume more than half (53%) of world total wealth; and we have access, because we have money, to part of the general wealth generated by the 1% richest. Although the lower limit of our wealth category (10'000.- US\$) has been fixed here much lower than what is representative for our effective situation (as Europeans, North American and Australian we represent in fact only some 1 bio people or 15% of world population and not 35%), we can estimate that we consume in average more than 50 times as much as the average of the poorest half of world population<sup>3</sup>. In a nutshell: the rich and powerful (most of us) takes all. This is the deep message of climate change because the deterioration of our climate is due to the over-production and over-consumption by rich countries. It means it is not a demographic problem (high birth rate in poor countries) as it is too often declared by rich people. It is rather a problem a excessive materialism and greed that is yet in incapable of bringing true happiness: one rich American consumes more than 10'000 poor Bengali! It means it is mainly our problem as rich society. If everybody would consume only the average share of Earth biocapacity, the equilibrium would be guaranteed. But we do not. As rich people we consume in average some 40 times more than the poorest half of world population. Of course the standard of living is not equal for all people in rich countries, but it is nevertheless, in average, much higher than the average world one. The message of climate change is then a call for living in harmony: in harmony with our environment, not using more than our average share of wealth, and in harmony with all other human beings, and in respect of the needs of other sentient beings, when we learn to share what is provided and to respect the limits defined by the natural cycles that proceed to the renewal of all resources.

### **The main obstacle for change is our incapacity to break our resignation and to make choices**

I believe that the fundamental problem we are confronted to, in this fracturing world, is not the lack of solutions, because we know the problems and we know most of the solutions, but it is rather our incapacity to see clearly what is developing in front of us, and to dare to decide of priorities and to make clear choices, because we surrender to the powers of these partial sectors of market and technology that define most of our lives. We prevent ourselves from making choices because we have accepted to surrender to materialism and comfort in the name of our little privileges; and these privileges are indeed very much mere illusions as one can observe that they bring much suffering upon ourselves and our fellow human beings and finally offer very little happiness. We are no more able to aim at a general quality of life for all, based “essentially and simply” on human values. The great challenge of our time is hence how to break the deep resignation of our state of mind and how to start a move towards change. The start is the problem, not the change itself.

## **A) THREE ASPECTS OF OUR ROOTEDNESS IN TRUTH**

### **1 - A necessity to integrate into the perspective and sacredness of the Universe**

#### **A leading Intention orients the Universe towards a meaningful yet mysterious aim**

I believe that the Universe is not an apathetic heap of materials which would be evolving in a chaotic and hazardous way; it is infinitely more than a mere material reality generated exclusively by the laws of physics, chemistry and biology or by the laws of chance and necessity<sup>4</sup>. Pure probability could never have generated, even in 14 billion years since the Big Bang, such an infinite diversity

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3 According to the Global Wealth Report 2018 by Credit Suisse.

4 If Jacques Monod (Nobel Price and author of *Chance and Necessity*) were right, he would himself be similar to a heap of stone, just a bit more complex. His Nobel Price would have no sense as it would be also the mere fruit of chance and necessity. Absurd!

and complexity as we observe it today: human beings and whales, galaxies and bacteria, roses and banana trees... This first elementary observation implies then two further conclusions:

- 1) The Universe tends towards an unknown but yet real aim or is at least led by an Intention or a Will that guides its evolution<sup>5</sup>, yet not in an imposing way.
- 2) If the Universe is more than pure matter, its guiding energy, Intention or Will is mainly invisible but yet essential because it is indeed the real source of the world as it is.

### **An invisible but essential energy: the Ground of Being, Source of all life**

Like the wind that cannot be seen but only observed in the way it moves the trees or like life in the way it animates sentient beings, the Ground of Being that is the Source of the Universe cannot be seen as such but only be perceived through its diverse forms of expressions. Although it is not visible, it is much more essential than the material appearances we may observe because it is precisely the cause of everything and the energy which nourishes us and guides the evolution of the whole. This means that we are invited in priority to focus on the search for this invisible dimension if we want to understand the deeper meaning of life and how our world works and evolves, even in physical terms.

### **A necessity to integrate into the whole in adapting to the laws of the Universe**

This means also that the Universe is a larger container and frame with its own laws and energies. It is the general context into which we have to integrate our own ways of living. So far it seems that we, as mankind, have, especially since the late Middle Age and the Renaissance, failed to do so because of our tendency to believe in our own power to recreate the world at our own will. It is certainly good to be creative and to generate new inventive forms but this has to be done nevertheless in respect with the main orientations of the Universe. If we go against the stream of these gigantic forces, we can only be squashed. We know very well that, when we ignore the law of gravity, we pay it a high price. It goes similarly with these more invisible laws that guide the Universe.

### **The book of the Universe reveals what Reality is: Mystery and Graciousness**

Our material surroundings and especially nature make explicit these fundamental laws of the Universe which are essential for our survival and thriving. They make them visible like a book that would explain what life is meant to be. Despite their powerful influence and energy, these laws and forces do not at all foster a form of predetermination or predestination that would prevent us from acting in our life as we wish to<sup>6</sup>. I believe that the Intention that is guiding the Universe is a form of generosity that proposes us, as human beings or other sentient beings, the best possible conditions of life we could imagine. We have to discover how to better trust this essential Intention even if it is indeed a Mystery that we cannot know fully; but the experience of past generations has shown that

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5 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin has described scientifically the whole evolution of the Universe and interpreted this evolution as aiming at an Omega Point that represents the end accomplishment of evolution. He has also illustrated how evolution is generating forms that are ever more complex in their physical form; this is what he calls the Without. In parallel to this external development of physical complexity there is also an inner evolution which fosters an ever deeper consciousness; this is what he calls the Within. The physical evolution of the Without towards more complexity cannot be separated from the evolution of the Within towards more depth of consciousness. More complexity, more consciousness. This interpretation means that consciousness did not appear with mankind but it was indeed already present in the whole evolution of the Universe since the origin as a nascent and evolving process.

6 If these laws were rigid they would not have allowed evolution to develop the way it did. They remain indeed very flexible and allow any form of new creativity to arise, and open even possibilities for the evolution to create new forms and for an ever growing diversity to extend ceaselessly, as long as these main laws are not negated or contradicted.

this energy, the Ground of Being, is Graciousness<sup>7</sup>; it is a positive energy that offers us rather a quality of being that has to do with love and peace and joy, more than it tries to impose onto us a determined future or any predefined obligations to act in a way or another. This form of radical and surprising respect for our own freedom and personal responsibility means that everything is for us possible in our lives at the measure of our own understanding and intention, evidently at the cost that we have then to cope with the consequences of our choices and behaviours.

### **True love cannot impose itself: it chooses therefore freely to be self-giving and powerless**

Consequently the Ground of Being does not impose anything upon us. As its essence is love, its presence remains fundamentally discrete and almost imperceptible – in a certain way powerless – because its true intention is to be freely answered; and pure love, to be authentic, can in no way be dominating but only offers itself in abundance in the hope of being freely chosen by the one to whom it is offered. It is why this essential Intention does not try to control us either; therefore this intentional form of radical self-restraint of its powerful might, which opens an unlimited space for our personal and collective freedom, does not exclude or does not try to prevent harm or evil (or any act in general) to be done by us in the name of our freedom of will and of conscience<sup>8</sup>. This invisible order of the Universe is in this sense based on the extremely subtle and discrete presence of love that remains most of the time completely removed and hidden, because it is its essence to be discrete, even invisible, yet present. Our vocation as human beings is to recognise and identify this presence and discover who or what it is; and we may discover then how we may create personal links of life with it (Him or Her). And especially harmonise with the essence of this energy that is the Source of all lives and of our own being.

## **2 - The need for a vision that is subjective and yet generates harmony**

### **Being born in a specific place we take a specific local start that opens onto the vastness of Truth**

The awareness that there is an essential Presence which (who) guides the Universe will inevitably change deeply the way we live. Although the essence of this Presence remains nevertheless a Mystery (despite all the various teachings that try to explain what it is), it reveals to us that the Universe is forged by a general perspective that gives meaning to life and that we have to harmonise all of our activities and intentions and choices with this perspective. Yet each of us is far from being a universally conscious being; we were all born in defined contexts of time, space, language, family, race, culture, religion, etc. that we have not chosen. We have all started our lives at a specific well defined point in space and time that has nothing universal. We have therefore accumulated a very specific personal experience that is very much linked with, and in a certain way predefined by, this specific context of origin; and we may say that this specific character has hidden from us the true essence of life; but it is equally true that it has also revealed, day by day, step by step, to each of us what life is about, not in general terms but in small details that nevertheless reveal progressively glimpses of the larger picture. The place of our birth with all its predefined settings is truly and inevitably the distinct root of our growth; it is the specific compost in which we are rooted and which nourishes us from the start; although this starting point is very specific, we are nevertheless then free to grow branches in all directions as far as we wish to, and especially in the chosen way which seems

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7 Fr AMA Samy SJ: Reality is a Mystery; everybody will agree with this statement because we are aware that we know so little about the true essence of our world and the meaning of life. This Mystery is Graciousness: this statement cannot be proved but it can be experienced.

8 True compassion is a force that decides freely to become powerless because it cannot impose anything without betraying its own nature; it does not mean that the power is not existent, but this power is not used to control or impose. Life by essence can only thrive when it accepts to become powerless. Love expresses then itself as this independent energy that cannot be forced upon us; it is freely self-giving and has, in response, to be chosen by us if we want to. Powerlessness means also the recognition and acceptance of our own fragility and vulnerability, made perceptible to others, which do not deprive us from being fully. On the contrary!

to respond to our deepest needs and intuitions as well as to our originality. Our specific starting point is truly a help for our growth, more than a limitation, because it does not fundamentally limit us in anyway but, on the contrary, nourishes us with specificity and originality.

### **We inherit the wisdom of previous generations forged by their own experiences**

All our personal very respective experiences, collected through many generations, have progressively built all together, as much in their contradictions as in their convergences, a kind of larger fresco of what we, as mankind or ethnic group, believe the world is. Our social setting (community, culture, civilisation) has organised this accumulated experience of past generations into different forms of cultural constructs that tend to explain the world and initiate the new generations to an existing complex visible and invisible reality and bring them to the level of knowledge and awareness and wisdom that the community to which they belong has reached at this stage. This heritage is extremely rich because it allows each of us to join the movement instead of having to rediscover by ourselves from scratch what matters in life. In this way we all have been initiated (in our families of origin, at school, in spiritual communities, or simply through everyday life) to the accumulated knowledge of our own culture, whether under the form of daily social networking, or of science, psychology, sociology, philosophy, ethics, arts, spirituality, etc..

### **The many threatening twists of inherited teaching need to be undone**

This heritage (science, religion, art, culture, etc.) is very rich yet we may also notice how it has been as well (too often very powerfully) influenced and deformed by the negative aspects of our ambiguous common humanity when people (we!), because of our fears or angers, lose touch with our common human references and start to fight each other or when we try to dominate the weaker members of our community or exclude foreigners in the name of some well-rooted false beliefs anchored in this form of heritage. Science, religion, art, culture are, in their past and present forms, very powerful illustrations of this major and divisive twist due to our human awkwardness<sup>9</sup>.

### **Our respective path consists in personification through questioning and personal experience**

This means that all this heritage of transmitted knowledge needs, for each of us personally, to be re-examined at the light of our own respective experiences and made personal, i.e. assimilated in our proper and unique way. Our personal experiences<sup>10</sup> are essential because they belong to the flow of life and offer us therefore the opportunity to bring back external impersonal knowledge and wisdom into the non-graspable dynamic of our own personal life. These subtle qualities of knowledge and wisdom of our heritage are indeed mere living forces and cannot be pinned down as abstractions; they can only exist and be active if they are truly flowing in our own lives. It is why our personal

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9 Science, religion, art and culture have participated in distorting our common vision. 1) Science: From a tool of wonder and discovery for the common good, science has become a cold and impersonal measurement of the surrounding world, leading to the development of a materialist understanding of our world; it has also led to the implementation of technologies which are used without neither restraint nor focus on the true meaning of what is essential, nor search for the right purpose of what is aimed at, nor consideration for the consequences it has on our natural as well as social environment. 2) Religion has frequently generated a kind of regressive understanding of the Universe and too often it tries rather to offer simplified answers and intends to settle people as docile sheep more than it tries to describe an unfathomable Mystery; it rarely dares consequently to ask the challenging questions it is meant to or invite to the deep inner transformation it should lead to. 3) Culture (and especially liberalism or humanism) on their part propose a stimulating act of questioning the existing evolution of our societies but they create at the same time an image of man as a semi-god (top species) that is doomed to fail by ignorance of the wider web of relationships and meanings which are involved in a purposeful understanding of what life is called to be.

10 By *personal experiences* I mean all aspects of our personal life in our interaction with the world, with the others or with ourselves. Experiences are not only material (everyday life) but they include also how we interpret what we observe as well as the different states of our own mind and of our emotions and thoughts. Experiences are at the same time experiences of matter, of the body, of the mind, of the soul and of the spirit. It means they are not only pragmatic and mechanical but also highly psychological, intellectual, spiritual, etc.

reinterpretation of the social heritage (science, psychology, culture, wisdom, etc.) is an essential task in order to bring them back to life in our own perceptions. Every aspect of it, i.e. everything can be questioned; there is no taboo. We have to dare to question anything that concerns this heritage: is the Earth flat? Is God a creation of man? Why is the sky blue? etc. We are therefore free to recreate our own understanding of life by reinterpreting in our own ways science, technology, psychology, philosophy, arts, spirituality, etc. Yet, despite this freedom we have of reshaping our own understanding, the harmony of the Universe remains what it is and cannot be changed. Our stand can only be pure subjectivity and respective personification - because of the personal unique experience and specific context in which it has developed - but it is also constrained (or at least challenged) by the impersonal and objective forces of Reality on which we have no grasp. None of us can redefine their own truth without trying at the same time to conform with the total universal Truth. There is flexibility in the personal interpretation<sup>11</sup> and maturation of our respective experiences (this is the subjective aspect) but there is also the necessity to remain in, or find, harmony with the whole (this is the objective aspect). We cannot reinvent the world at will!

### **The special role of religion and spirituality as transformation rather than explanation**

In this process of reinterpreting our heritage and finding our own path religion plays an important role that is too often rejected. The reason is that institutional religion (which is different from religion in general) has, precisely as it has been described before, degraded too often into a simplistic teaching that aims more at controlling believers than at offering a true path of liberation.

First we need to establish a difference between religion and spirituality. Spirituality should rather be understood as the form of experience we have of our personal relationship with the divine or the sacred dimension of life. Religion, by contrast, is rather the teaching that has been formalised through times by our ancestors in order to transmit to us what they have learned about spirituality. It is therefore evidently strongly influenced by their own subjective experience and it is also deeply shaped by the culture of each past century, especially also by social and political constraints of will for control and domination that had indeed nothing to do with the true content of the message. But, beyond this negative influence, it is nevertheless mainly fostered by a will to transmit, i.e. to express in words and principles what by essence cannot be translated into words and principles. These two categories of influence (mark of historical conditions and will for clear expression) show us that we have to receive the religious message as a starting point, or as a finger that shows the direction into which we have to search rather than an expression that contains the whole truth. It means we have to evolve personally from religion to spirituality, i.e. from the basic explanation that helps us to catch up with the present stage of knowledge further into the deeper and more personal experience of our

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11 In priority the process of assimilation and personification of human heritage by each of us goes through a process of individuation that learns to interpret what we have perceived and observed, mainly through experience. We can observe how our way to apprehend our environment goes through a chain of transformations that captures and interprets the signals emitted by our environment in order to integrate these signs and their meanings into our existing perspective of life that will also probably evolve through this new acquisition.

- 1) First we have the facts that happen around us and in ourselves. We perceive them through our six senses (i.e. the five senses plus the mind) and we organise a first image of what happened by making the synthesis of the impressions these distinct and specialised six senses have communicated to us through separated channels. This is the first transformation that leads to our perceptions.
- 2) Then we proceed with the interpretation of what we have perceived and try to give a meaning to the new information, in relation with what we have already experienced in the past and what we have learned in general. This leads to an interpretation as second transformation.
- 3) Then there is the third transformation which consists in the choice we make in reaction to what we have perceived and interpreted. This choice generates then (non-)action which constitutes in turn another further fact.

One can notice how this chain of transformation is far from delivering a trustworthy representation of the original external fact. This is rather our subjective way of transforming reality into interpretation and meaning. Interpretation is not a scientific rational move, although it uses all our rational faculties. Emotions and feelings play also their roles, and intuition, memory and imagination too.

own relationship with the divine. The finger is not the whole truth but proposes us only a direction of personal evolution how to become more ourselves. Of course there is no clear limit between religion and spirituality because they are not clearly separated; they meet in the common field of the visual forms of expression of our faith and hope.

In a similar way we can say that religion plays a double role. It can be understood as a translation or as a transformation. It is a translation in the way it explains how the world and the whole Universe are, and why they are as they are and it proposes also a way how to be in these world and Universe. This is the explanatory aspect. On the other hand religion proposes also a path of personal transformation and liberation from illusions and false desires. Here also the two dimensions meet and there is no clear line that distinguishes one from another. Religions are both translation and transformation at the same time. But we can nevertheless follow more or less one or the other path because, although these two ways are common to the spiritual path, they nevertheless go in very different directions. One leads to accept the world as it is; the other leads to personal transformation. The first one can be very simplistic, as a reduced system that answers any question and avoids any form of challenge – this is the primitive and regressive aspect of religion - or it can lead to the second one, as a very challenging path that dares to question everything and calls for a radical practice of life that relies mainly on a perception of meaning related to what is beyond the appearances. It is nevertheless extremely concrete because it leads to adopt different behaviours in the present world. People like Francis of Assisi or Gandhi were of this kind. Because of their spiritual understanding of the world they adopted very different attitudes and behaviours from the common people. This is radical transformation. In what concerns our own process of reinterpretation of heritage we just have to situate ourselves between these two poles of extreme translation or extreme transformation. This is our choice in our search for personification.

### **We need also to forge our own personal vision as a wider frame for our life**

Our need for a subjective approach of life goes even much further than the assimilation and personification of universal heritage and wisdom because this process of individuation cannot be only limited to the observation and interpretation of the world as an external reality but it implies also, and essentially, that we find as well our own personal rootedness in it and forge also progressively our personal vision that will guide us in making our own choices at each step of our everyday life; this need for a wider vision includes principally our capacity to see more or less where we seem to go and consecutively our ability to take a stand, to make specific choices, to act in conformity with these personal choices and to have the courage to remain faithful to our true aspiration even if we have to pay a price for doing so. We know very well that our own personal growth, if it is honest and committed to the truth, cannot avoid suffering. We certainly do not search for it but it stands inevitably on our path if we are committed to a form of personal path (a wider vision); and it is evidently also, on the other hand, a trial that will help us to grow in consciousness and spirit. We believe (because we may experience it constantly when we learn to listen to it) that we all have an inner voice that inspires us. This inner voice is the Spirit that generates our creativity and clear-sightedness. It is a precious guide that, as an expression of the Ground of Being in us, does not impose anything upon us but only inspires us to be more daring and more committed to truth or to love. One of the most fascinating aspects in this inspiration by the Spirit is that it is completely subjective; it is an interpretation of a sign that is hardly tangible. The sign itself is so discrete that it cannot be proved and the interpretation we make of this sign still less. Yet the sign is nevertheless very real (so do believe at least the people who follow a spiritual path) and to ignore it, because it is too discrete or not clearly graspable, would be missing the essential. We have then to take a risky stand by interpreting and trusting what we can never be hundred percent sure of. The other beauty is that this form of listening to the inner voice is accessible to everyone who dares to walk the path because each one has it in oneself.

### **The path of freedom does not consist in doing what we are pleased but in living in the truth**

This deep rootedness in the inspiration by the Spirit and this authentic and personal relationship to truth are essential. In our modern western society we have made individualism our supreme virtue in the name of a twisted understanding of personal freedom. But it is a great deceit. Our contemporary freedom motto says: do what you are pleased to and stop doing what you do not like. This is purely narcissist behaviour that focuses only on the ego (the false self) and short term pleasure. Our freedom, to be authentic, needs in fact to be rooted in truth. We cannot just reinvent the world at our own image and will. To be free does not mean to do what pleases us but means to be able to accept truth as it is and the Universe as the great whole into which we have to integrate. True freedom is the ability to renounce one's own wilfulness because there is a higher will that creates life as it is. To oppose this will under the pretext that we know better is to oppose life. Freedom is the path, truth is its content<sup>12</sup>. This path of living in the truth opens onto the richest possible experience in life. Renouncing one's own will is not a restricting resignation that would accept destructive states of social constructs; it is on the contrary the great step of total openness to authentic freedom: the capacity to live life to the full as it is offered, or to restore it to what it is meant to be, i.e. without personal hang-ups! Once our personal wilfulness is out of the way, we are truly free to struggle for truth, justice, peace, love and joy as the true essence of life. This latter choice is, as one can see, far away from resignation. It is grounded in truth more than in our personal false preferences. Yet it remains a personal choice to be in tune with the essence of life as we understand it. Subjectivity leads to freedom when it is liberated from social or personal twists of vision and illusory hang-ups.

### **3- The path of liberation to higher consciousness and practice of love**

#### **We have to make a clear choice between egocentric comfort or search for truth**

When we are aware that there is a deeper Reality which is the source of life, behind the screen of what we see in front of us, we feel encouraged and curious to try to look “behind the curtain”. There is of course nothing bad in enjoying simple material pleasures without asking any question about the essence of life but we know also that it is a bit short and that life is much more than just getting comfort and ease. This is our personal choice either to be satisfied with a life only self-centred on material issues or, on the contrary, to respond to the deep need for meaning and have the courage to try to discover this wider reality that goes much beyond the practicalities of our daily survival. The former attitude implies an egocentric existence centred on our own personal desires, pleasures and wants while the latter very soon opens us to the unknown and questions how we handle our relationships with others and how we integrate into our own lives a search for personal inner growth and transformation. It becomes heterocentric and takes us onto a path “upwards, deeper and beyond” (these words are only simple metaphors!) that will yet paradoxically connect us still more strongly with the “mundane” reality of everyday in a more meaningful way.

#### **Permanent change calls us to make a clear choice for personal transformation**

In nature nothing is permanent; everything is changing ceaselessly. In narrow connection with this ever changing context the main key issues in our society or personal lives are probably all deeply anchored in, and related to, the question whether we accept this character of permanent change and whether we search for inner transformation and social change (because evolution is the essence of life) or not. Without this personal need for transformation we become resistant and refuse to evolve. On the contrary an inner quest will inevitably lead us on a path of discovery that will be radically transforming. It means it will open to us the possibility to live a much deeper and meaningful life.

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12 Paul Evdokimov.

### **1<sup>st</sup> step: knowing oneself and accepting our own “pathologies”**

One of the first steps on the path of transformation consists evidently in knowing ourselves with all our inner contradictions, unsolved knots and personal wounds, with all our skills and aptitudes, inherited or self-inflicted. We all have indeed our personal “pathologies” fostered by our past which are like characteristics of our person! We have just to accept them and work with them, especially in being able to see them for what they are. We see then that most of them can be addressed and not stand in the way of our realisation when we accept to look honestly at ourselves.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> step: distinguishing our false self from our True Self**

A further step consists in discovering what our false self is and, by contrast, how our True Self is active in us. The former is a social construct based on the ego identity that constitutes a necessary protection and artificial coherence which protect us from external aggression or wounds: a kind of protective shell that yet also imprisons us. Although we need it for everyday life, this ego shell is not our true being: we are more than our body or our mind or our memory or our social role with which we tend too often to identify as an all-encompassing and yet reductive identity. All these aspects of our lives are parts of what we are but our deeper being is beyond these formal appearances<sup>13</sup>. As the eye cannot see the eye, we may say by analogy that the core of our being is beyond these formal aspects of our person for the reason that we can observe them. Our True Self is then beyond this social construct of the false self and it draws its identity from the relationship our being develops with the Ground of Being or the deeper Consciousness that animates us<sup>14</sup>. The True Self is in this way the expression of our deeper essence and identity that takes root in this mysterious source which we experience discretely but never can grasp clearly. It acts in us without us knowing exactly what it is. We are indeed much more than a closed shell (like the false self); we are rather like an open skeleton that supports us and is animated by a form of life energy (kundalini?) that, although perceived in us as an inner force, comes from elsewhere (i.e. not generated by our own body); because of this necessary openness, we remain constantly exposed to this essential energy that nourishes and inspires us, and to other external rich influences.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> step: beyond desires, discerning what is a construct of the mind and what are our true needs**

Another further step of our growth consists in reviewing our desires and needs when we notice how much our suffering depends on the way we look at the world. It is impossible for us to change the world but we may more easily change the way we look at it. When we observe the nature of our mind we notice how much it creates the reality in which we live. Our perception is shaped by our desires and by what we want the world to be in order to satisfy these desires. The world we see, or

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13 The proof of our more complex identity and reality is that we can observe our body and our mind and our memory and the way how they function or what they produce. Because we can observe them we are aware that we are not them but that they are only some (minor?) parts of us; in the same way as we can look at our hand and we know we are not the hand, even if the hand is part of us (our body).

14 In a simplified way we could say that our lives run through three different levels: being, doing and having. Being is evidently the most essential because it is rooted in our essence, while doing is experimental as means of relating with the world where we live as incarnated beings. This incarnation is a privilege because it makes perceivable what is indeed not visible (see the metaphor of the wind). Having is the less important level as it does not provide any experience or life.

- 1) Being is the first (in time and importance) essential experience of life: breathing in and out, feeling what is inside and around us, being aware of oneself and the surroundings, just Being a witness of what is, and nothing else.
- 2) Doing is action that provides experiences and interactions with the surroundings. It should be rooted in Being in order to make life a deeper experience. Doing without awareness is like automatic pilot.
- 3) Having is indeed of little importance when one has ensured the livelihood of oneself and one's own dependants. Rather than having (owning), we need preferably easy and direct access to essential means that open to a meaningful experience of life. In our modern world focused on materialism, having has become too often an escape into a form of security that relies on material status more than on true essence and experience.

rather our relationship to it, is much less defined by what it is than by what we believe it is because of our emotions, feelings, expectations or desires<sup>15</sup>. When we become aware of how our mind creates a false reality, we learn also that we have to educate our mind and to discover a way of being that does not depend on the satisfaction of all its caprices<sup>16</sup>. This change in awareness, which reveals to us the relative ineptitude of our mind's creations, has a deep impact onto the way we will further experience life. We become then more witnesses than actors, or, in other words, we focus our attention more on the way we relate to the world than on the way the world responds to our self-made expectations.

### **Growing from egocentric to heterocentric vision into higher (or deeper) consciousness**

Life is indeed a long process of growth into deeper consciousness. This evolution can be observed from early childhood; for instance we discover first (a few months after birth) that we are distinct from the surroundings, and then, a few months later, distinct from our mother; at a later stage (around 8 years old) we soon learn to understand also that other people are not only distinct from us but that they have as well their own personality, their own perceptions, perspectives and will; we discover further the power of conceptual thought and introspection; then our being continues to develop, through the whole duration of our human life, by stages into much more complete experiences of higher levels of consciousness that open onto the universal perception of the Universe as a whole of which we are a part and with which we are one. The growth of consciousness leads us fundamentally from a limited egocentric and separate perception of our person to an heterocentric perception and extended union with the wider reality where there is no more “me and them” but only a global consciousness of being<sup>17</sup>.

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- 15 Our perception of the world is more the product of our mind than the objective translation of what it is; despite the fact it is an unreliable product fostered by our mind, our subjective perception becomes yet the main leading knowledge and force of our behaviour. Once we have observed this truth and become aware of how our mind is ceaselessly constructing a world that does not exist but in our head, we can learn to observe our mind as a creative energy that is not always reliable because it invents ever new ideas and concepts. For instance when we hear a rooster crow we immediately forge an image of it according to what we know about roosters. It will appear white in our mind if our own rooster is white, although the one that crows is perhaps red. And if we do not have any ready-made image in our memory, our mind will immediately create one which will be pure invention. The mind has horror of the void. It will invent anything to avoid the void to become patent because this gap will reveal the ineptitude of the mind.
- 16 Most of these desires appear in this case to be very irrelevant as they are creations of the mind and not rooted in our essential being. We can observe in ourselves how much daily consumption for the satisfaction of made-up needs becomes often a way of escaping the true issues of life.
- 17 Ken Wilber did a brilliant description of this maturation process in nine successive stages. Although it is a challenge, we can try here to summarise this description in a few words. It is recommended to go back to the source for better understanding (see Ken Wilber: A Brief History of Everything). These 9 stages are:

#### **A) Birth of the self:**

1. Hatching of the physical self (4 months): the baby discovers that s/he is distinct from the physical environment.
2. Birth of the emotional self (15-24 months): the baby discovers that s/he is emotionally distinct from his/her environment (separate self especially from the mother).
3. Birth of the conceptual self (2-4 years): images and concepts emerge in the mind and represent an external reality (the idea dog as a concept or an image of what a dog is in reality).

#### **B) Rational stages:**

4. Birth of the role self (socio- or ethno-centric / 6-7 years): the child learns that the other is in a different position, sees the same objects under another angle (e.g. from the back or the side) and acts differently. S/he discovers his/her own roles (rules, scripts) in the social context and learns how to be in tune with them (conformism), i.e. in relation with others. It does not extend further than to the group to which one belongs (my tribe).
5. World-centric or mature ego (11-15 years): capacity to imagine different worlds and discovery of the impact of thoughts onto perception and behaviour and ability to examine one's own thoughts (introspection, thought about thoughts); develops judgement; critical attitude about inherited roles and values. Moral stance

## **The path to higher consciousness should lead in priority to inner transformation**

In this kind of “escalation” of the successive stages of higher consciousness, there is nothing to perform<sup>18</sup>. There is no prestige either. This is indeed no special glory to get to higher levels of consciousness. It is just a choice (a question of life and death) to sit where we sit and to reconnect with our deeper essence. Anybody can do that if one wants to<sup>19</sup>. And what matters most is the fact that this kind of ladder of consciousness is indeed no real ladder. Not only there is no climbing to be done – although there is a progression into higher consciousness taking place - and everything is already given in us - although the discipline of following the path is certainly necessary; but it is essential to understand that the fundamental dimension of this path does not consist in the “performance” but resides indeed in the progress of our own transformation. What does it bring to reach the top rung of the ladder if we are not transformed (transfigured)? The progress on the ladder consists in a deeper discovery of what life is in its essence; it should bring a new insight while we evolve from a egocentric perception (as originally identified with our body-mind-memory) to an heterocentric and all-including experience of unity with all sentient beings and the whole Universe. We will soon notice that this revelation is not so much the fruit of our effort but rather a gift of grace. When we open to the whole dimension of Mystery (deeper consciousness) we also open to the love which is the true essence of this world. When we learn what love truly is, as the energy that leads the Universe, we are transformed into humble receptors of this wonder. We are no more the actors but only the receivers and the ones who may pass further on this sense of wonder to others. It means that the final aim is then not the last rung of the ladder but truly this deeper transformation that happens in ourselves without us knowing really how to get there; it is given to us by grace. It means that the transformation is more important than the reaching of the last rung, although they go partly together, the latter helping the former; it is better to be truly transformed and not reach the top of the ladder! And this transformation seems indeed to be the real core of the experience. We will come back later to this evolution in consciousness, when we will investigate the confusion between pre- and post-rational consciousness in our conventional rationalist approach of life.

## **The urge to become the witness of our own body, mind, emotions, thoughts, reactions**

When, on this path of deeper consciousness, we thoroughly observe what happens in ourselves, we may notice that emotions, feelings, thoughts, representations, desires, pains, joy, imagination, etc. are

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moves from conventional to post-conventional. Evolution from ethnocentric to world-centric: discovery of diversity and multiculturalism. Only a minority of people reach this stage.

6. Body-mind integration (centaur): adds up the parts and sees networks of interactions. The self is conscious of the body and the mind as experiences; discovery of the role of observer; the self is looking at the world, the body and the mind. It is integrated in its networks of responsibility and service.

**C) Transpersonal stages:** transition from the gross-oriented reality into the trans-personal domains

7. Psychic: Awareness not confined exclusively to the individual ego. The observer disappears because he becomes one with the surroundings. He does not look at the mountain; he is the mountain (nature mysticism). I am.

8. Subtle: experience of inner peace, light and blissful state (divine mysticism); experience of pure love. Interpretation of this real depth-experience is yet needed..

9. Causal: to the source of the observing self or witness. Absorption in the non-manifest and non-dual; discrete identifiable state of awareness as unmanifest absorption or cessation; pure Self and pure Emptiness. No more Seer. One Taste.

18 This is evidently not the place to develop in more details a description of these different stages of consciousness. The summary of the presentation by Ken Wilber will be here sufficient. In his own way, with an emphasis on the progression and integration of these different stages, his description sometimes resembles yet (a bit awkwardly!) a kind of race toward a performance. Indeed this is a twist as there is nothing to achieve on this path but rather to dismantle our own strategies of resistance and to open to the unknown and to the Ground of Being.

19 It is like going to Timbuktu. There is no glory to get there but it yet cannot be done if one does not decide to start the move on the way, to find the right camel or truck or bus that will bring one there. And when one arrives there, on the edge of the river Niger, one notices that one was already there. But it is nevertheless good to become aware of it. A deep joy and revelation that allows one to be truly and fully in the here and now.

not of our own production; they rather happen in us, as dreams do too, like something of which we are not the agents and which we cannot control. They arise in a mysterious way. Why did I feel this or that? How did this thought arise in me? I did not make it but it happened in a part of me: in my body, in my memory, in my mind or elsewhere. Of course it is then my responsibility to know what I do with all that. In most cases we tend to be driven away by these thoughts or emotions and be led where sometimes we do not want to go. When we learn to observe and become aware of these processes in ourselves or in the others, we become also more capable to remain only witnesses of what happens in us and to use the energy of these ever rising emotions (like for instance the energy of anger) as a power that becomes creative instead of being destructive or leading us astray. We can even learn to wonder about the creativity of these processes and to marvel how the mind can produce such strange and imaginative forms, even when they seem weird or not reliable. Our dreams are probably among the most inventive forms we may “produce”. How does it happen? How could this form emerge and from where did it rise? When we learn to become witnesses of all that happens in us and around us, we can fully enjoy the beauty and creativity of all these never ending processes. As we learn to be no more driven by these forces we can enjoy their full creativity and beauty. We are no more the slaves of their impact but we become the joyful and peaceful receivers of their deep wealth and meaning, or even of their pure absurdity.

### **The awareness of a pure state of being that brings inner peace and joy**

In this way an important shift may happen in our own life: the awareness of a sort of pure state of being becomes the dominant dimension of our life; by contrast doing and having recede in the background as anecdotal dimensions which yet remain important and serious in order to express who we are and to be participant in generating more love in the world, but which nevertheless do not constitute the core of our experience of being. These actions evidently beautify our lives but our essence does not rely anymore on them because we are then grounded in the Ground of Being; this is truly a very mundane (i.e. natural in our daily life) experience that yet has infinite depth. It is the core of inner peace and joy; it is the true experience of love in our very incarnated life.

### **Mysterious essence of life**

This path of accessing deeper consciousness and becoming a witness leads us to the partial discovery of what life is in its essence. Of course this search is without end because life will always remain a mystery. Yet the transformation of our way of perceiving ourselves and the surrounding world brings a fundamental change in our understanding of what life is essentially when we integrate the truth that life is a flow we cannot grasp, rather than something we achieve. We acquire peace and joy because we can detach from our false desires and remain rooted in the deeper experience of life itself.

## **B) THREE ASPECTS OF OUR INCARNATION IN DAILY LIFE**

### **4 – Incarnation as integrating into natural cycles and belonging to a wider body**

#### **Relationships, and not material issues, are the true substance of life**

If what precedes is true, the material aspects of life are then reduced to a very simple expression. There is no more need for accumulation of ownership, but only for getting the simple subsistence or livelihood we need, which is indeed pretty simple although it is not limited to what keeps us alive physically, but includes also emotional, intellectual, spiritual, or other needs. The great leap forward happens when one discovers that life does not depend on material issues or on achieving anything but that it consists rather in developing the right quality of relationships with our surroundings, with one another and with the source of life, i.e. with the inner inspiration by the Spirit. Finally it becomes clear that only relationships constitute the substance of life and that matter, although we interact all the time with it in our incarnation, appears relatively insignificant because it is “only” the

intermediary stuff, never the core itself. In becoming witnesses we become aware of all the bonds that link us with the whole Universe; we become one with it.

### **Simplicity as the radical way of stripping life from superfluous, as the root of true generosity**

We see then naturally how, in opposition to the trend of accumulation in our society, simplicity, self-limitation and generosity become the leading forces in handling material issues. There is no more attachment for possessions. This does not mean that physical desires and pleasures are excluded. No, they keep all their value as pleasures but they do not matter anymore as first priorities (or even as too often quasi obsessions!). It is important here to see clearly that simplicity consists not in just a little bit less of material comfort. It is indeed a fundamentally different way of perceiving life: simplicity becomes the radical way of stripping life of everything that does not bring inner growth; it therefore opens life as an unexpected full experience. In the eyes of simplicity comfort is a bubble that insulates us from life. We have therefore to break the bubble in order to be in direct touch with Reality. If we look around us, in poorer countries, we can observe how many people live in this way and how it is in deep contrast with our own way of life that relies so much on comfort. Without denying the harshness of a life in extreme poverty, we may nevertheless wonder where the smile of the young beggar girl in Dehli comes from? This essential shift of focus from comfort to authentic and truthful experience reveals to us that the discovery and practice of simplicity represent truly the further stage of our personal and collective development into deeper consciousness.

### **The Universe as a book that shows us the path towards diversity, interdependence, meaning**

If the Universe reveals itself to be a kind of book in which we learn to read, we may learn to identify in it the action of these basic laws of simplicity and generosity and to decipher the deeper meaning of small things that our surroundings, and especially nature, make visible; especially if we can see that a discrete and loving presence “hides” behind the visible signs we perceive and a very powerful wisdom reveals itself even in tiny details. We notice then, by contrast, how our modern society is poor and tends in fact to evolve in contradiction with, or in the opposite direction to, the Universe: our modern conventional way of living seems to always choose the poorest possible ways of doing (i.e. the most meaningless - flatland) although the teaching of the Universe (or nature) shows us the path towards more diversity, complexity, complementarity, consciousness, subjectivity, community, depth and meaning<sup>20</sup>.

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20 Nature is an excellent teacher. It emphasises the following four main contrasts (among many others) which demonstrate how much our society is running against the laws of nature:

- 1) **Diversification:** Because it generates an extraordinary variety in the universe where no two things can be found to be identical and diversity is ever growing by giving birth to new species, nature shows us the path towards personification and diversification, while our society tends towards standardisation and globalisation.
- 2) **Subjectivity:** Because intention and consciousness orient the evolution of the whole universe aiming at a mysterious end we do not know, nature shows us the path towards subjectivity, intention and accomplishment, while our society tends to make all choices equal and insignificant like without orientation and meaning.
- 3) **Interdependence:** Because we are one body in complementarity and interdependence in the relationship of the You and Me and because we can relate to each other in terms of differentiation and subjectivity, in terms of diversity which make us ever more complementary and interdependent in need of one another, nature shows us the path towards communion and cooperation, while our society tends to become more individualistic and competitive in a struggle for egocentric accumulation and self-centred dominance.
- 4) **Depth:** Because differentiation, subjectivity and communion lead us into the realm of less materialism and more consciousness, of less matter and more spirit and because we become therefore less focused on the material appearance and more aware of the conscious content, nature shows us a path towards the discovery of more depth and mystery, while our society tends to create a flat materialistic landscape of undifferentiated freedom without hierarchy or priorities.

## **The laws of diversity and unity of the Universe and the laws of interdependence of life**

All what has been explained so far shows that the Universe is evidently much more than a heap of resources we could exploit ceaselessly, without restrictions. And nature identically. The universe and more directly nature are indeed the wider body to which we belong, the larger entity with its own identity and intention, which resembles a mother like entity that embraces and nourishes us and on which we depend. It means that we are not at all the masters and not either the final accomplishment of nature we believe to be; the whole world has truly not been created for our own egocentric enjoyment to which we believe to be entitled under the pretext of being the so-called top species. We are indeed very far from this myth of our superiority that has yet driven us through the past centuries. Not only we are indistinctly part of nature but we are even, rather as a kind of parasites, very much at the periphery of the circles of interdependence<sup>21</sup>: as mankind we depend in fact on all other species (minerals, plants, animals) but none of them depends on us, except maybe in terms of consciousness. As we belong to nature we have then to respect its laws. We have explained earlier how the Universe is guided by an Intention that leads its evolution toward an aim without nevertheless imposing a constraining will onto the free creatures we are. This Intention translates itself into the reality we observe concretely through all the laws - the laws of nature and life - which foster our world. These laws are the invisible threads that sew our reality.

### **Six main major laws of nature: intelligence, generosity, change, difference, cooperation, unity**

These laws are numerous and it is impossible to list them but at least six major laws, among so many others, appear to be fundamental and to work as the dominant leaders:

- 1) Intelligence: everything in the Universe has a meaning and a purpose.
- 2) Generosity: everything is given to us freely and abundantly: life, air, water, culture, inspiration, creativity, love, etc.
- 3) Change: nothing is permanent; everything is meant to evolve in never ending cycles of transformation.
- 4) Difference: our world is made of contrasting and almost antagonistic forces that nevertheless combine and cooperate and keep therefore one another in balance.
- 5) Cooperation: all parts of creation are complementary and need each other to survive and thrive.
- 6) Unity: despite differences and because of complementarity, the whole forms a unity that reveals a community toward we all, in our diversity, tend as a further stage of our common evolution.

The tragedy is that our civilisation does everything that is possible to resist these main laws instead of letting them lead us toward deeper accomplishment and personal or collective growth.

### **We need to integrate into the whole and adapt to these laws if we wish to know harmony**

If we want to live in harmony with the Universe and to integrate into its dynamic and orientation defined by its Intention, we should better adapt to these laws. If not we will be condemned to swim all the time against the stream and be finally destroyed as the whole is immensely more powerful than we are. In order to stop destroying the source of our livelihood (exhaustion of resources, devastation, pollution, climate change, etc.) and, maybe even more essential, in order to keep our natural surroundings in a state that does not change the nature of the teaching it is addressing permanently to us (the book), we need urgently to make our ways of thinking and living more

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The Ojibway tradition (North American Indian) describes the world in the form of successive concentric circles of different species which depend for their survival on the species represented in the precedent inner circles: in the inner circle we have the minerals then in the next circle the plants then the animals then the humans.

compatible with the general equilibrium and laws of nature. As so much scientific research has proved, it seems that, as mankind, we can only live in harmony with our natural surroundings, with one another and with ourselves if we do our best to adapt to these fundamental laws and rhythms and we learn how to create in “the spirit of nature”.

### **The necessary integration of all our activities into natural cycles (resources, wastes, energy)**

We need then urgently to integrate each one of our activities into the many natural cycles of transformation (resources, wastes, re-creation, evolution). This means much more than just restraining our consumption when we can detach from superfluous desires; it means that each act will have to integrate radically into natural cycles, i.e. that it has to leave no unresolved impact behind. We are no more the independent judges who decide how we want to behave but nature becomes the true ruler that imposes the laws we have to respect and into which we have to fit. We certainly may always invent new ways of doing but technology alone will never save us; these new technical ways of doing - even if they bring great potentials how to respond to the crisis - have in any case to respect also strictly the fundamental laws. The ways we eat, we build, we dress, we transport ourselves or we get the goods we need, all these many ways to satisfy what we call our “needs” have to respect the laws of cycles: resources can only be consumed at the rate they reconstitute; wastes can only be released at the rate they can be absorbed or recycled. And these conditions have to be the same for all: no more privileges or exceptions for richer people. This is objectively a drastic and powerful rule that will completely re-shape our behaviours: for instance any food from long distance, any clothes produced in poor conditions of exploitation, any standard of living that is above world average bio-capacity, any form of energy produced out of fuel combustion for heating, cooking or transport, etc. are no more acceptable because they override natural cycles. Needs depend indeed on means which on turn depend on cycles. This will be the new rule which will transform radically the definition of our needs and desires. Luckily we have today many tools that help us to measure how far we are quantitatively and qualitatively in harmony with our environment, such as the ecological footprint which measures our impact on the Earth (i.e. how much resources we consume)<sup>22</sup>. Nowadays this harmony is far from being practised; in rich countries we consume indeed some 4 or 6 times (in average) the quantity of what is truly and equitably available, or even forty times more than the average “poorest half” of world population<sup>23</sup>.

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The ecological footprint is the theoretical total surface of ground we need for each one of us to have the resources produced (such as food, forestry, fishing, building, energy, etc.) that we use for covering our needs according to the standard of living we have adopted. It is simple: if this footprint is bigger than the available average world bio- capacity (1.7ha/pers) we know that we are part of the problem; if it is smaller than this average, then we are part of the solution. But big problem! in our rich countries the average footprint (around 9ha/pers in Australia or the US, 5-6ha/pers in Europe) is 6 to 3 times bigger than it should be. It means that we have to reduce our standard of consumption by 6 or 3 (and we speak here only of averages, not of extremes!). Big challenge! We need therefore to learn from nature how to consume and to choose what matters most in life. This is here of course only a quantitative approach that does not consider how far consumption integrates qualitatively into natural cycles. For more info or complete data (free of charge) see [www.footprintnetwork.org](http://www.footprintnetwork.org)

23 Many people in our rich countries speak of the problem of demographic growth as the source of increased and excessive global consumption. They insist that the poorer countries, with their high demographic increase rates, are the cause of the problem. It is forgetting that a rich American consume probably as much as maybe 10'000 Bengali! The rich is the problem, not the poor. Certainly the multiplication of average consumers participates to increase the global quantity of consumption that exhausts and destroys the Earth. Yet this is a gigantic twist of the problem to make demography responsible because the main source of the exhaustion of our planet is not overpopulation but over-consumption by a small minority of richest people (1/7<sup>th</sup> of the total population). If we do not include in our

### **The three measures of adaptation: integrating, finding harmony, living in radical simplicity**

We may summarise our approach of nature with three parameters that allow us to measure the degree of our adaptation.

- 1) The first one is how much we integrate into natural cycles (resources and wastes). This is the basic principle of ecology: not to consume more than the environment can produce and not to disturb the environment with wastes it cannot absorb at the same rhythm as we produce them.
- 2) The second principle consists in measuring how much we listen to nature as a teacher and how much our behaviours are inspired by the rules of nature and life that the observation of nature allow us to discern and adopt for ourselves as a mean for harmony and adaptation to a wider context (the universe) and especially as a mean to live in the truth.
- 3) The third measure is based on the principle of simplicity. We indeed only need a minimum of resources for our live if it is in harmony with the universe. We are only one species among many. The problem is that we have adopted the power of technology as means to extract from our natural and social environment what we desire and what we wish to take for ourselves, mainly without considerations for the impact it has on long term upon the equilibrium of nature and the wider world. This use of technology at the service of our greed - this is the right word to describe our desires when they are not limited by self-restraint! - generates a powerful imbalance in our relationships with other species; we indeed invade their space and destroy their conditions for livelihood and survival. The natural world – which is much more than the rest of the planet after we have taken our share because nature is indeed the true essence of our own roots and also conditions for survival – has been split by us in so many small parcels that it cannot survive. As we all know, nature is a complex system of so many forms of interdependence. When we cut it into so many small pieces or “islands” because we eradicate forests and cultivate fields or build cities and highways, we destroy the balance of systems that need all their parts and their interconnections in a much wider scale to survive. The disappearance of so many species today is the consequence of this extreme fragmentation or splitting of the natural world as a major impact of our ways of living onto the planet<sup>24</sup>. To ignore this fact, as to ignore the impact of climate change and our responsibility in its causes, is just blindness, stupidity, cruelty and even suicide. The only solution is the practice of radical simplicity that will reduce drastically our impact to the necessary minimum. This radical simplicity is not a depressing constraint; it is rather the choice for freedom to live life to the full when we integrate into the whole and live in harmony with other sentient beings, instead of depleting and destroying everything we touch.

These three measures of harmony become then the leading references in our relationships with nature and the universe and guide our behaviours. They not only allow us to measure how much we live in harmony; they teach us also wisdom and the practice of truth.

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calculation of average consumption or footprint (in rounded figures) some 350 mio North Americans and 500mio Europeans and some 130mio Japanese and 20mio Australians, this is a total of some 1bio people who are (in national average!!) the main consumers. Of course the number of many poor people living in rich countries should be deducted from this total and the number should also be added of the many other extremely rich people living also outside these rich countries, i.e. in countries with a major poor population as a small privileged elite (sch as the Emirates, Brazil, South Africa, Russia, China, India, etc.). After deducting from the global world population some 1 bio for people of rich countries and also some 100mio for these rich elites of poorer countries, the 80% remaining population of the world would barely consume more than 20% of the existing wealth, i.e. a level of consumption that is much below the present bio-capacity of the planet.

- 24 Read David Quammen: *The Song of the Dodo; Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinction*. The author describes in a brilliant way these laws of interdependence and shows how the survival of most species is threatened by the decomposition and fragmentation of the web of life in so many islands that cannot survive by themselves when in one of these “islands” the population drops below a certain number of individuals. This is true for all species; just the conditions, numbers and areas vary from one to the next.

## **The limitation in quantity: the same equal average basic need for all people on Earth**

The form of necessary self-limitation we need urgently to practise is not at all, as it seems at first glance, a self-harming process. It is rather a creative way of coming back to a way of living that is balanced and equitable, i.e. fundamentally healthy for all of us: simplicity, in the same terms as it has been described earlier. Despite very minor variations in their respective life choices, the many 7.3 billion different human beings on Earth have all roughly equal rights to the same quantity of resources because basic needs are for all of them (i.e. all of us) very similar and of equal importance<sup>25</sup>. We all need some basic food and protection as well as some essential emotional quality such as love and (self-)recognition or possibilities to express our identity and creativity. The huge privilege we all have is that nature teaches us how to share because it shows clearly – if we accept to see it - what is available, and what is not. When there is abundance we can indulge but when there is scarcity we have to restrain ourselves and care for equal sharing. Different researches have been made that define the parameters which could guide us in finding how much should be available for each of us<sup>26</sup>.

## **The limitation as quality when radical simplicity means not less but more**

But more fundamentally, when we are in touch with natural cycles, nature teaches us the basic necessary standard of life, and that it is mere simplicity; and simplicity, as described earlier, is not the degrading experience of a painful lack of what is desired but it is on the contrary a beneficial sufficiency that allows us to be truly free from false needs and happy in living with “little”. See how hunter-gatherers or Aboriginal people used to live. Paradoxically the expression *little* means indeed more happiness and wider or deeper perspectives. This new teaching – which we have much difficulty to hear and to listen to, in our time of over-production and over-consumption - calls us to review radically our needs at the light of what truly matters in our lives. The great challenge is not about stuff but about meaning of what life is meant to be<sup>27</sup>. Only simplicity, and nothing else, can lead us back to this deeper meaning. As a form of new revelation, a radical change of mind in accepting this truth about authentic simplicity will awake our awareness and will also confirm what has been said earlier about simplicity as the further stage of personal development into deeper consciousness.

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25 This basic equity of needs makes out of the way we presently share resources a true scandal. Nowadays the 20% richest of world population (i.e. we!) consume 80% of the wealth of the world. The 60% poorest (strange to call them the poorest when they form indeed the majority!) live on only 6% of the total wealth. We consume 4 times more than the average share and they consume 1/10<sup>th</sup> of it; it means we consume in average 40 times more than they do and they are the majority! And, despite these facts, we are still mad enough to believe that our wealth gives us a right to have more needs and to consume more than the others (the 80%). This is a vicious circle that will kill us in our deeper being more than it kills them physically.

26 The 2000W society is a concept that indicates we should cut our energy consumption to 2000W per person, i.e. in total 17'520 kWh a year. Together with this energy limit, a ton of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions limit per person per year (the equivalent of 8'000km by car) is also stipulated concerning non renewable or climate change fostering energies (fossil fuels). For comparison the average consumption is nowadays some 12'000W in the US and some 5'000W in rich Western Europe countries.

27 Many people have already understood that we have to restrain our pressure on the environment and to become less greedy if we want to be happy. But only a few believe it is essentially healthy to go much further than just giving up what is superfluous and does not cost much change in our standard of life. Our comfort is generally the main measure for what we call our needs, but too often it reveals a servile dependence on technology that deprives us in fact from a direct experience of life. Comfort is like a bubble of protection that keeps us at the stage of development of an assisted fetus. Only when we dare to break this bubble of comfort and artificial protection, we will come in touch with a certain degree of roughness in our confrontation with the natural environment and we will discover a form of liveliness that we did not know so far; certainly it will be at the cost of a relative discomfort that yet does not threaten us; it will only keep us alert and aware. Nothing bad at this; on the contrary. We may then become aware how much we can enjoy conditions that do not depend on market or technology. These conditions are extremely rare in our present way of living. How many pleasures do not depend in your life today on market or technology?

### **The land as a guide that shapes us; the landscape as a visualisation of our society**

Another great breakthrough happens when we understand that the land on which we live, or rather to which we belong, is indeed our living guide for finding the right degree of simplicity. It is our guide not for ecological reasons but because it is the physical support and effective transmitter of the energy of life. Life comes mainly through the land. Aboriginal people have discovered this truth many 10'000 years ago. The land is what forms us and defines what is available and what is not. It is the holy book that reveals to us the laws of life and the truth that is not visible but can yet be deciphered in it. The land is the link between all of us. It is shaped by spiritual forces that act in our lives. As the landscape we have reshaped more or less by transforming the original land it becomes also the visualisation of our society and reveals to us what we have made of life. The land is the master and teacher (as expression of life and not as a god); in accordance with its teaching we are no more the masters but only the servants of each other. When we give up the will to dominate, we may see the light.

### **The body as an open book about ourselves and how we live**

If nature is a book about life, the same can also be said about our bodies which are another aspect of nature in us. We are basically spiritual beings who live in our own bodies and not bodies which have a mind, a soul and a spirit<sup>28</sup>; our body, for each of us without exception, becomes in this way the expression of this essential dimension of our deeper being (our spirit); in expressing this original essence, it adopts a physical shape with its different physiological forms as parts or organs or systems, all interrelated by complex relationships and means of communication. The body, in its complexity and its manifold layers of subtle nature, is a true revelation of who we are fundamentally and of how we live<sup>29</sup>. Modern medicine has completely twisted the way we understand our body. It made of it a machine (certainly complex but yet a machine) composed of organs, in a similar way as a car is built out of parts; and it made also of the illness the enemy to eliminate. But it is fundamentally wrong to try to kill the expression of the revelation the illness tries to make understandable to ourselves.

### **The body as a guide that tells us the path out of suffering**

We need rather to learn to listen to our bodies as our most precious friends. Even illnesses are there to teach us how to live a better life. They are not the foes to eliminate but on the contrary the friends to take care of and to listen to. Once we have adapted to the changes made visible by the illness and required by our deeper being, the imbalance in our body will change and disappear, and the illness recede after a time of recovery. Of course it is more complicated than that, because we feel powerless in front of illnesses and they may well finish by destroying us physically; but these few considerations nevertheless show how much we have to transform the relation we have with our bodies when we become aware how much they talk to us to reveal the origin of our dis-eases. It means that we cannot heal without addressing the true causes in their depth, beyond the simple symptoms. Our body is inhabited by a force that is not visible but nevertheless rules over it: the force of our own spirit and our True Self, it means our deeper essence. This energy is working ceaselessly

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28 Teilhard de Chardin. For more, see the annex about Matter and Spirit.

29 Everybody knows that illnesses have always more or less a psychological dimension (and even many more other dimensions too). They emphasise in this way what we ignore and what we have to change. Modern medicine uses mainly pharmaceutical means to silent the symptoms as if the disappearance of the signs of dis-ease would mean a return to health, instead of treating the cause of the dis-ease which is often rather existential than purely physical. The body is evidently also a physical entity that needs to be repaired when it has been damaged, but it is also much more essentially the field where the soul and the spirit meet the dimension of our incarnation which allows us to see what is happening, to become aware of what needs to be transformed in our inner conflicts or attitudes and of how to reach a better level of peace in our being.

and not to consider its presence in the recovery process is pure madness, because it is indeed the dominant energy that holds the whole together and is in fact the main actor<sup>30</sup>.

### **New practical ways of living: healthy food, shared knowledge, slow mobility, beauty, experience**

These considerations about the teaching of nature and of our body show that we have to change our ways of thinking and living if we want to be more in touch with life. We believe that it is certainly possible to convert radically our ways of life in only a few years from now if we decide to, i.e. if we truly want to. A new perspective will transform fundamentally the ways we will practise agriculture and feed one another with products that are not meant to increase profit but are destined to enhance our health and our perceptions; and the way we will practise a true medicine that respects all aspects of our being as a deep mysterious complex whole that relies on so many dimensions, and not only on chemistry and on an artificial or rather simplistic understanding based on a mere division into organs and functions; and also many ways to reinvent mobility (slowness), energy (sustainability), education (free), science (transparent), knowledge (shared), art (beauty and truth), religion (experience), etc. Our relationships between human beings or with other sentient beings will in this way be deeply transformed and enriched.

## **5 - Economy at the service of all through relationships, care and creativity**

### **The fundamental generosity of nature and society: most resources are offered free of charge**

Economy should not be the dominant driving force of our world but it should rather be an instrument how to make accessible for all what we receive from nature and what we transform and invent collectively. This statement describes the general intention it is urgent to follow. At the root of this statement there is the evident truth that most resources we need are provided free by nature: life is given; air and water are in abundance in nature; plants provide the basic food. Without these basic gifts we would not be able to keep alive. As a complement to these gifts, work has originally and traditionally consisted only in yielding what has grown naturally or in hunting or fishing animals and then in transforming these basic products for a more suitable form of consumption or usage. In a similar way as nature does, society is equally generous because it provides also each one with the necessary skills: we learn to walk and to talk in our families, and to respect each other in a narrow community setting. School teaches us to read and to calculate and develops in us the normal skills and special gifts we have received free at birth. In other words it means that life, air, water, culture, knowledge, ethics, love, wonder, spirituality are free gifts from nature or from our human common heritage. This fundamental generosity is a striking reality that calls for a deep transformation of all our exchanges and the way we perceive them<sup>31</sup>.

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30 In our culture the body is too often made responsible for many of our problems. All the pleasures we cannot resist are declared to be its fault! We crave chocolate or more cake or sex, this is because our body is weak. But it is not true. The body is only the place where our senses are used to capture their sensations. What the senses register are only facts and it is the responsibility of our mind to decide how to react. The mind is indeed the place where attachment occurs because it judges immediately whether the signal sent by the senses is pleasant or not, whether it wants more of it or not. More cake? it is not the mouth that claims it, it is the mind. Attachment is more than sensation; it is a judgement which is typically a produce of the mind, and not of the body. Our mind is the leader and our evolution goes in the direction of our attention, in the same way as our car tends to drive in the direction of the point onto which we focus our eyes. If the attention is positive the evolution will be favourably influenced; in the contrary case it can be profoundly disturbed by a negative set of mind. Mind and body are, once again, narrowly interwoven and influence one another. Our incarnation is the mirror of our state of mind. Both are in constant dialogue and dynamic influence of one upon another.

31 Now a few words more about work: As it has been described here, every resource is provided freely by nature or society: wood is free in the bush; water in the river; fruits on the trees. Human work is then a necessary complement to make this wood available as a board or as a table, or water at the tap, knowledge in a book or at school. As human beings we provide indeed work only as a force of transformation. We do not produce (nature does) but we transform, i.e. we create new shapes in combining given and already transformed resources (i.e. resources that incorporate past

## **The Commons as our common wealth: knowledge, care, wisdom, space, time, silence, nature**

The more we share qualities such as knowledge, equity and peace, the more these qualities take shape, multiply and become accessible for all and the more we thrive as a community and as persons. This is a fundamental law of life that we forget too often: our personal well-being depends on the general well-being of all and is measured by the level of equity we can achieve. Most wealth belongs indeed to the Commons: most of (if not all) natural as well as social resources. The Commons consist in the heritage of all the resources we have to manage as a community: they are made of all the general equilibrium of nature, of all the resources and skills, of knowledge and know-how, of wisdom and wonder that nobody can own (because they are the fruit of common effort) but everybody should be able to access to. The Commons are the true wealth of a community. This shows how a direct access to means and goods is much more fruitful than formal ownership of these means or goods. In comparison the access to ownership seems rather restrictive: I can access mine but not yours; you can access yours but not mine. Private property indeed deprives while free access to the Commons generates infinite possibilities of evolution. This is the reason why public (or community) services should be the corner stone of our society instead of being dilapidated by all forms of privatisation. This is the basic principle. Of course then the management of these common goods becomes a more complex issue.

## **The twist of profit leads to overproduction that destroys our quality of life**

We observe that, instead of making the Commons accessible for all and of aiming at satisfying our basic needs for livelihood, for creative expression and for deep caring relationships, the present economic system is, on the contrary, geared by the purpose of increasing individual or corporate (i.e. private) profit at the expenses of others. The private sector has the tendency to absorb the public sector as a source of profit and no more of public service for the general good. It means the function of care for equality and protection of the weakest by the state is dismantled and turned into private business. The dominance of profit in every fields of life implies the “necessity” to exploit one another and to produce ever more, much beyond our needs, in order to sell more and accumulate more capital. This is called growth but it is indeed mere senseless immoral overproduction which becomes the great disease of our way of life: this is indeed the principle of overproduction which is the true cause of surpluses, excessive competition, over-consumption, pressure on the prices and the wages, infinite need for extension on a limited planet, globalisation, delocalisation, unemployment, bad quality of products, wastage, extreme poverty contrasting with indecent wealth, etc.. These are all the consequences of overproduction. Our economic system, instead of offering generous life conditions for all, destroys our own surroundings and the quality of relationships between people. To stop this dreadful evolution we need to rethink our ways of “production” (i.e. transformation) at the scale of self-limited needs on a more local level. Not only the focus on profit is destructive for nature and society but it goes, even more basically, also against the elementary laws of classical economy that say that a community thrives when goods circulate the most rapidly (i.e. are accessible to all instead of being stored); and when equality is strong; when there is equity people have then an average wealth that is sufficient to cover their needs and the whole common wealth is used by most people. This is evidently the most efficient way of sharing what has been “produced” (i.e. transformed) by mostly common effort and means (land, knowledge, creativity, infrastructures, tools, energy) and which should therefore remain accessible to all.

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work). In work are integrated skills which have been provided freely at birth or developed by opportunities given by the social context; these skills have been trained and enriched by common knowledge (the art of laying bricks or practising medicine). Diverse forms of training provide the individuals with the knowledge inherited from past generations to which we contribute in turn. Training is provided by society (school, university, professional school, etc.) in general free of charge. Even when it is provided by a single person work remains in this way a common creation. Nature and society are the most generous source of gifts for all if equity is practised.

## **The many forms of work should allow the expression of our respective creativity**

Work, instead of being an anonymous good, called workforce, to be sold on the market, is meant on the contrary to be an instrument (opportunity) for creativity and imagination, for deepest personal expression and social recognition. Its meaning and purpose reach much beyond earnings and livelihood. It takes all the possible forms and, if work is truly in its essence creativity, it includes then also all forms of activities we do daily: ensuring livelihood but also cultivating the garden, repairing the roof, cooking, telling a bedtime story, spending time with one's partner, reading, painting, singing, dancing, practising sport, going bush walking, meditating, doing nothing, etc.; these activities are all work, not because they are painful activities but because they are on the contrary expressions of true creativity<sup>32</sup>. Work involves in fact all the most precious parts of our being and it should be valued as a fundamental opportunity for improving human relationships. Or maybe even relationships are the essential and work is only the way (the pretext) to shape them and make them more intense and meaningful. Work, instead of making us slaves, is meant to allow this deepest expression of each of us and these links between us to develop. It is at the service of women and men and of the community. When subsistence is ensured work becomes leisure and gift, detached from any need for income.

## **Livelihood as a duration independent from work efficiency**

Before it can develop into wider creativity, work has evidently to provide what we need: food, cover, relationships, love, contemplation, etc.. It is important to notice that these needs are more or less constant, more or less equal for all and that they are not proportional to the quantity of work we do but they are rather linked mainly with duration, i.e. with the duration for which we need to keep alive and in good spirit: we need roughly three meals a day, thirty days a month, etc.. whatever we are capable or not to “produce” with our work. And on the other hand we need to satisfy these basic needs before we can work. Society (our family, our community) provides us indeed with what we need in order to make us able to work and give back to the community what we have received freely. Subsistence (livelihood) comes before work because we need to subsist in order to be able to work, and not the contrary, as it is believed too often, that work comes before subsistence. Work provides certainly further subsistence but subsistence comes nevertheless first<sup>33</sup>. Out of this other understanding of work ensues a very different behaviour: livelihood (if linked with our needs) is in fact not proportional to the hours we work. Work can stop when the needs are covered for the given duration<sup>34</sup>. Then, for the rest of the same duration, one can work for free or consecrate one's time to

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32 In French there are two different words for work: 1) *Travail* (labour) means rather the hard work; the origin of the word is the Latin *tripalium* (litt. 3 posts) which describes a form of torture! 2) *Oeuvre* (opus) is the creative work of art. Of course some forms of work are harder than others when they require more effort or pain but this is mainly a twist of our economic system to have reduced work to a form of exploitation that goes against human dignity on the pretext that it is paid and that the worker needs the money for surviving.

33 Although resources are free in their state of origin (tree in the bush, water in the river), our subsistence or livelihood cannot be free because work is necessary to make these resources available and it has to be compensated for, because livelihood costs; this is a vicious circle. In fact everything could be free and work could then be free and subsistence would then also be free. But it is not the case. Subsistence is in fact the necessary condition that allows us to work for the community. This understanding that subsistence comes first justifies precisely what we do for our children: we care for them so they can thrive. The community does the same for us; of course there is a need for a return in order to close the circle. This is indeed the objective of the idea of giving freely a basic income to all members of the community so that they can live fully and be able to give freely back to the community what they have received from it, enriched by their own skills and creativity. Fascinating way of thinking!

34 Alexander Chayanov was an economist under Stalin. He was killed for having demonstrated that the kolkhoz system was not compatible with the mentality of traditional farmers. Chayanov's law says: “The greater the ratio of workers to consumers in a household, the less each worker produces; production stops as needs are covered”. It means that the intensity of production per worker decreases in proportion to the number of consumers per worker. In other words the intensity of work depends on the range of the needs multiplied by the number of dependants. Production will even

pure creativity or celebration. It is what the hunter-gatherers used to do; they had in fact much more leisure time than we do today in our modern society. As we can see, this principle of work linked with basic needs is in harsh contrast with the modern practise of work. Work in our society has been converted into income, i.e. money, but it is an appalling short-circuit, because it does not consider the many other aspects of work: shadow work, self-sufficiency, family time, friendship, volunteering, leisure, contemplation, etc..

### **When money is truly a commodity: my ox in my pocket**

Money at the origin was meant to make life easier. Barter is evidently a rich and lively way of exchanging goods and services but it means that two actors have to find an agreement with what they have to exchange. It limits considerably the possibilities. Money – it is its function as a commodity - allows me to transport my ox in my pocket, to sell only one leg, to sell the leg to the butcher and buy my tools from the hardware shops, to compare also the different items I can acquire and to choose which one I prefer.

### **When money becomes a tool for speculation: the price defines the value**

But money has become much more than a commodity because its use implies inevitably also a conversion of value. When I use it I have indeed to decide how much of the local currency my ox is worth. This conversion is constantly the place for speculation because I can play on the amount according to what becomes acceptable on the market, without any real link with the true value or real cost of the good. This estimated value becomes then a price. And my egocentric interest is of course to get the best price for me (i.e. the highest possible). But values vary from one person to another and prices are subjects to influences by market trends. Many values, such as love, justice, peace, have no price. Many qualities, because they have no price, seem to lose their value (the great natural equilibrium, wisdom, agricultural land, etc.). Non-sense! And many prices have no value because the item sold is nothing but rubbish. It means also that fluctuations of prices mean fluctuations of value, which is also a non-sense. Value has in fact little to do with price. If not through a conversion that is always questionable. How does one then measure value with a yardstick that varies its length all the time (currency, exchange rate, market value, etc.)?! Non-sense<sup>35</sup>.

### **When money becomes a power: the domination and exploitation by the wealthy**

When we have money we can buy numerous goods which we would not access if they would depend on self-sufficiency, i.e. our ability to produce them ourselves. Money provides power. As rich people we can take advantage of our position to access what would not be accessible without this power. Exchanges should of course continue to allow complementarity to develop, each time I do for you something you cannot do by yourself, and reciprocally. Yet, to keep our exchanges in balance, we should not buy more than the equivalent of what we can produce ourselves (in terms of time). This is a very drastic rule that would bring us back to simplicity: beyond fair exchanges of complementarity

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stop when needs are satisfied or when abundance is provided. Corollary of Chayanov's law: when needs are satisfied one may spend time celebrating life (making friends, dancing, worshipping).

35 A few more words about the non-sense of money: 1) Money increases power because the rich can buy more than the poor and especially can buy from the poor in using his power of being stronger (richer vs poorer). 2) Money allows also to buy what we cannot produce. Complementarity is certainly the reason for exchanges but when the exchange happens at the cost of one partner, something is wrong. 3) Money is also used as a yardstick to measure the wealth of nations (GDP); this is an absurdity because same activities (e.g. repair of a pair of shoes) in different countries are paid at very different rates; many factors cannot be measured by prices, production of weapons enriches more the GDP of a nation than education (paradox!), exchanges rates vary and modify with no reason any comparison between nations, etc.. 4) And before all, value and price are very different things that we tend to confuse. Most of decisions of governments and corporations are made according to prices or cash flow. It is why we buy Chinese products and destroy our own conditions of livelihood by exporting all the activities that can be delocalised in order to get cheaper goods because they are produced elsewhere. We destroy our own resources and become then the slaves of prices.

nobody would then use the others as their slaves<sup>36</sup>. We have to be aware that prices may be unjust and to learn how to discern what is ethically correct; prices are a rough simplification that hides most of the reality. We should see each of our acts in a wider context with all the impact it has on ways of living, for us and for others. And finally, despite and beyond all these negative aspects, it is also important to recognise that money can also present a positive potential. It can as well be a vector of redistribution of wealth and potentials and offer untold possibilities to people who would not have them: subsidies, social help, education, health, etc. Then its use is understood in a wider frame that is based mainly on ethics and metaphysics, and not on profit and accumulation. It is no more the master or the means for oppression; it becomes a tool for more justice and equity and sharing for the common good, because of the maturity that knows how to master its use.

### **Power of finance: speculation and stock exchange as an institutional form of robbery**

Work has always been fundamentally the principal human means to transform resources into usable goods or services and the basic means for satisfying needs and generating what we are used to call wealth, whether in material or immaterial forms. Our present use of money has yet deeply perturbed this basic evidence because it has introduced the possibility for unchecked speculation, it means for a form of play on market values (prices) of “things”. Originally these “things” were goods that needed to be produced, which meant a serious involvement of skills, know-how, effort, work and tools to transform resources. Then progressively the practice of investment (ownership of capital) developed as a trade, not as a necessity for economic activity but as a lucrative business, it means the possibility for richer people to cash in a consistent amount of interests for providing the necessary capital for a given duration of time. Usury has been tolerated in remote times but has been condemned by most spiritual traditions as a long term practice<sup>37</sup>. Now the play with brands has replaced the production of goods. The firm Nike does not produce anymore sport wears. They just define the style of the brand<sup>38</sup> and make it fashionable, i.e. attractive through publicity. Clients are ready to pay much more, just for the label and the illusory prestige it brings to them to consume this fashionable product although it is not very different from the other which has no brand. The corporation becomes free from bother with production; it is simply subcontracted to a small workshops in Asia that does not pay its workers properly. Economy has lost its purpose. Nowadays one does not speculate on production of goods anymore but rather on brands or the stock exchange that play no more with the true process of production but rather with the perspectives of corporations to accumulate more or less profit. This is indeed speculation no more on goods but on profit! The shareholders get then a share of the profit just because they have provided capital. One may get rich while one sleeps! This is evidently a form of robbery as any accumulation of capital is based on profit (i.e. keeping for oneself, above one's merited income, part the value of the good that is indeed due to common effort or knowledge<sup>39</sup>); it

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36 If we divide the total quantity of energy we use in average by the quantity of manpower equivalent that we can provide as a human being (muscle energy of a strong man – about one quarter horse-power), we obtain the number of slaves each one of us uses in daily life: an American uses 110 slaves, a European 60, a Chinese 8 and a Bangladeshi 1 (2008). Only money, and wealth differences, allow us to do so.

37 Islam forbids clearly usury while Judaism asks the lender to cancel the debts on the seventh year.

38 See Naomi Klein: *No Logo*.

39 It is important to make a clear distinction between income and profit:

- 1) Income is the compensation for work (subsistence as a duration) that allows the worker to get his necessary livelihood (for further subsistence and work).
- 2) Profit, by contrast, is the part of value attached to the good which can be detached from it and which is kept for oneself when the good can be sold for a higher price than what it has cost (i.e. after deducting all costs for resources, work, tools, overhead expenditures, etc.). This inherent value should in fact remain attached to the good because it is the value of common knowledge and effort. Profit is therefore a form of robbery that deprives the community from its wealth. Through the generalised practice of speculation this has become a major source of wealth accumulation today. Wealth has indeed always (hard to recognise!) a very suspicious aspect. How can in fact exchanges not create equality of wealth? How can they generate an increased flow in one direction at the

deprives also the workers, who have been involved in the transformation process, from an important part of their share of income. Even worse: now the financial sector tends to speculate on speculation, creating special funds that play on the interests rates of debts or other speculative more or less imaginative “values”. Objectively the proportion of national income from capital tends to grow at the expense of the proportion of national income from work. It means that work loses its “value” while speculation proves to be ever more rewarding. And wealth provides therefore more and more possibilities for income from capital (which can be inherited causing then more differences in wealth between people) and less and less from useful skills and creativity.

### **Each choice is a vote: we elect by plebiscite what we consume, use, promote, do**

Each good I consume is the product of a chain of transformation that implies different resources and many workers (living human beings like us) in given ecological, social conditions. Each time I choose to buy a good, I express hence that I agree with the way it has been produced, with the values it represents, with the impact it has (ecologically, physically, socially, spiritually)<sup>40</sup>. This is my responsibility to choose what is truthful. Without us (i.e. our support as consumers) corporations would be nothing and have no power. Of course we all have the tendency to deny what we know about the true meaning of things when the recognition of what truly is hidden in these goods goes against our interests or privileges.

### **Marketing is based on the whitewashing of corrupt goods produced in unjust conditions**

When produces are aligned on the shelves of our supermarkets, they do not show any more in which conditions they have been produced. Their clean appearance makes them look innocent. This is a form of whitewashing that allows to sell them. If they would reflect the injustice and exploitation (of nature or people) that they went through, we would not buy them because we would feel guilty. Whitewashing of the goods is also the whitewashing of our conscience and the whitewashing of our capacity to choose how we want to live and what matters most in life.

### **Our empowerment is proportional to our inner freedom**

We tend to feel that we are powerless and that we have to adapt in order to earn our subsistence, but we have the power of our own choices that allows us to transform the way we live. We are too often trapped by our own desires and give up our own empowerment for some minor advantages the system provides to us.

### **We are all responsible for the world we are shaping**

The world is what we make it; as people we are the main actors; there are no other actors than us people: corporations are people, governments are people. We cannot blame big corporations because we have indeed ourselves established their power by consuming the goods they produce. We are responsible for the world in which we live because we made it. Even if we do not all enjoy the same level of power, we nevertheless are all deeply involved, especially if we are richer than the average. This fundamental truth does not deny that there is also more fundamentally a basic systemic injustice; the system is shaped by interests of clans or classes and the whole structure of society is

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expense of the one who becomes poorer? How can wealth accumulate in private hands (individuals, corporations) and not flow freely in being accessible to all? Robbery.

40 For instance, if I buy my books online, I get them in a week for the best price but, while doing so, I'm relying on falsified prices and I'm destroying the capacity of local businesses (i.e. local people and services) to survive. Soon in this way there will be no more local bookshop. The price I pay online is based on exploitation (we know in which conditions the slaves of Amazon and similar are working) and I cut also any contact with human beings (money replaces relationships!) because the whole transaction does not involve anybody alive. By contrast if I buy my books locally I will enjoy my contact with the local bookshop keeper which is warm and personal. I'll have evidently to wait longer to get my books and I will pay probably almost one and a half or even twice the price but I'll be living in the truth. Why do we become slaves of prices and impatience and lose any ability to make the right decision?

defined by clan or class privileges, clan or class know-how or ideology and clan or class defence mechanisms or strategies. These disparities need also to be fought against urgently and abolished. Yet the awareness of our involvement and responsibility is the necessary condition for this change.

### **We have to choose between egocentric accumulation and relationships of reciprocity**

In traditional societies the pattern of exchanges is, by lack of money, ruled by reciprocity: I help you repair your roof and you teach mathematics to the son of the neighbour and his mother will provide me with eggs and vegetables from her garden. This is the never ending cycle of reciprocity where each exchange compensates the imbalances resulting from the previous one. The beauty in this system is that it never finishes. As the balance can never be truly established, more exchanges call for more further exchanges which are the opportunity for more and deeper relationships between people. On the opposite money creates a break: it means that each exchange is believed to be compensated for and therefore the payment puts an end to it. It says: now that I have what I want from you I do not need you anymore; disappear! Money replaces relationships.

### **The power of attraction (love) and the energy of relationships (spirit)**

But relationships are the core of life. Matter is in fact insignificant in our universe and this universe is mainly a form of void inhabited by an intense energy (force of attraction) which is holding it together; see how much void in the atom and in the solar system! it means that this Universe is indeed in its essence built on relationships, or more exactly on relationships of attraction i.e. of love. Reciprocity shows us the true way to focus on what is truly human, i.e. our connections, and not on stuff that is lifeless; true exchange or gift represents indeed the person of the other (the *mana* or the *hau*<sup>41</sup>).

### **What are we and what do we want to be: takers, leavers, receivers or givers?**

In our consumption society we have learned to live as takers<sup>42</sup>. We take what suits us for our egocentric needs and do not care much about what is left for others or which kind of impact our taking has on the environment. In traditional societies people have learned to live as leavers: they just take the necessary minimum and care for the equilibrium of their environment because their survival depends on it. We need, it seems, to learn another third attitude: the attitude of the receivers. Everything is given and we could not live without this generosity of nature and society. Each thing we receive is therefore a gift that should foster a great sense of gratitude and wonder in us. When we open to gratitude and wonder, life becomes the true miracle it is: ever new, ever changing, ever opening us onto further evolution and transformation. Only an open mind which is able to receive can be sensitive to the unfathomable wonder of what life is. Then, when we are aware of the generosity of life, we become givers; this is the fourth attitude.

### **Radical generosity as the means to shape our relationships**

Therefore radical generosity is the most powerful tool to change the way we are in relationships one with another. It is by excellence the combination, on one hand, of focus on the preeminence of relationships and, on the other hand, of authentic detachment from material bonds. Generosity allows every gift to flow freely from one to another. It means we may practise a form of fluid exchanges where wealth is shared and circulates, where the Commons remain the collective wealth that makes basic goods and services available for all. Patterns of subsistence and reciprocity are indeed much more creative; they should as much as possible replace market exchanges, avoiding even the use of

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41 See Marcel Mauss: *Essai sur le don (The Gift : Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies)*. The French ethnologist Mauss describes how, in Polynesia, the object that is given is inhabited by the spirit of the person (*mana* or *hau*) who gave it. Beyond superstition there is something deeply true in this insight.

42 Daniel Quinn: *Ishmael*.

money, every time the opportunity presents itself. The produce of reciprocity is grace and “grace makes the face of the other shine”.

## **6 – Beyond restrictively rational science and technology into wider perception**

### **The three stages of evolution: from pre-rational to rational to post-rational**

The personal evolution toward consciousness, as described earlier, can be figured in more detail<sup>43</sup> as an evolution on a ladder with successive steps. All steps have three main characteristics:

- 1) Each new step leads from a more egocentric to a more heterocentric perception which is able to integrate more diversity and interdependence of the parts; one becomes less focused on oneself and more aware of the others, how they are different from us, have other points of view and how we are indeed all related to and parts of the whole.
- 2) Each new step integrates the qualities of the previous steps into the next and adds in depth of perception that becomes more complex (deeper Within in a wider Without<sup>44</sup>) when more subtle aspects of reality are becoming more perceptible.
- 3) Each step represents a radical change of paradigm and generates a new interpretation of the world that also reinterprets and reorganises what has been learned or remembered previously.

Not only we as persons evolve in this way but our society as a whole evolves also according to a similar path from the more egocentric to the more heterocentric, toward more depth and through successive changes of paradigms. One can distinguish three main stages in this global evolution:

- 1) The pre-rational stage as the magic and superstitious behaviour of primitive societies which believe that nature is like a god that punishes them and that has to be made sacrifices to (the avalanche as a destruction wanted by the god, the goat thrown into to volcano to appease it).
- 2) The rational stage as the rational management of our modern society through science, technology and market, that considers the world as a mechanical entity (Newton's clockwork) that has to be controlled and transformed.
- 3) The post-rational stage as the deeper perception of a larger Reality which is not visible but nevertheless integrates the visible world; it can be experienced when one observes the physical reality, when one becomes a witness in the way one is aware of what is, without judgement, and finally becomes one with the whole: *I am That* where the consciousness of the *I* as a distinct entity disappears progressively to be reduced to the only non-dual state of *Being*.

As each precedent stage is always included in the later ones, these three stages may well cohabit simultaneously. They do frequently, even in our modern society where behaviours may represent a vast range of levels of consciousness which may even combine in the same person.

### **Enlightenment and rationalism as the blockage for further evolution**

Our modern society has, since the Renaissance and especially since Enlightenment, been deeply marked by a rational way of thinking. Rationalism is certainly a fantastic tool that has allowed a powerful development of observation, of science and of technology but it is also the instrument of our own imprisonment when we reject anything that does not seem rational. This rejection is caused mainly, it seems, by the fear of falling back into the pre-rational stages of regressive perception (magic, superstition). There are indeed many examples of popular or even institutional religious trends leading to regression instead of provoking the great breakthrough and inner transformation it is meant to be. This danger of regression is evidently real but it does not erase the fact that a further

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43 See Ken Wilber again (reference in a previous footnote).

44 See the previous note about Teilhard de Chardin and the Intention in the Universe (chap. 1 here above).

evolution beyond rationalism (post-rational) is necessary and consists in the next stage of our growth in maturity.

### **The great present confusion between pre- and post-rational stages**

There is also, in our modern culture, a deep confusion in our understanding of the differences between pre- and post-rational stages. By fear of regressing our modern culture refuses to see that it is caught in rational shackles that prevent us from seeing that our reality is much wider and deeper than just what we can see and measure. Evidently we do not want to fall back into magic beliefs and sacrificial practices. But we have nevertheless to escape from our imprisonment and we have to evolve into further stages of consciousness as they have been described. There is indeed a very important difference between the magic beliefs (superstitious practices) and the higher stages of consciousness which open to the invisible reality (observation of the mind, oneness with the whole). It is true that an important part of today's fascination with spirituality does not make a clear distinction between these two forms of perception (pre- or post-). The New Age perception is very often more of the former than the latter type. And many expressions of fundamentalist or even simply traditional religion have fallen into the regression of pre-rational state.

### **Scientific materialism as mental imprisonment**

Science is certainly one of the most fascinating experiences of mankind when it researches and discovers the mysteries of our physical world. It has opened a wide perspective into a deeper understanding of where we come from, who we are and in which world we live. Yet, in a similar way as market has transformed the field of our exchanges into a competition that denies our human generosity and our natural ability to care for one another, science has made of its rational approach an exclusive tool to investigate reality that reduces reality to what it can measure and therefore evacuates other ways to apprehend reality. It excludes anything that is not measurable or reproducible. The quantifiable method lies at the core of scientific practice and is an expression of rigour and a proof of the seriousness of its contribution. Yet the claim for exclusivity demonstrates also the fragility of a one-dimensional approach.

### **Daring to go into the next step of evolution: into world-centric and post-rational perception**

The criticism of this attitude is not at all a negation of rationalism which constitutes indeed a powerful tool for mankind but it calls for the next step of evolution which will consist in integrating rationalism into a wider view that will be more complete and broader and will change fundamentally the paradigm of understanding of the Universe and life; this change of perception will not only happen from the scientific point of view but rather on a much broader level, in terms that describe the general frame of evolution; this other paradigm will evidently not change the results of all physical experiments that constitute the substance of science, but it will change fundamentally the understanding we have of them (according to the three characteristics of each step of evolution that have been described earlier); it will not only propose a new general frame but it will also allow to review the interpretation of accumulated knowledge. As we just explained, our evolution is meant to lead us beyond the rational state of evolution in which we seem to be trapped (i.e. from ethnocentric to world-centric or mature ego's stage that envisages many simultaneous approaches as complementary to one another). It seems that we are, as mankind in general, only halfway in our development<sup>45</sup> before we reach full maturity. Of course this full maturity is not what everybody aims at in their personal life, but it represents nevertheless the further stages of our personal or collective growth if we want to evolve.

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45 At least according to "Wilber's ladder"!

## **To a higher level by cooperation of complementary approaches: science, culture, art, religion**

It has also been said earlier that science, culture, art and religion should be complementary approaches and support each other in getting inspirations from one another, instead of denying what the other approaches may well mean. This is far from being the case nowadays in this world of constant competition and conflict which demonstrate how still egocentric is the attitude of the stage we are in. The stage of evolution that comes just after the rational ethnocentric perception is precisely the change of mind (worldcentric) that consists in considering the diversity of the world. The new understanding, from ethnocentric, becomes multicultural and rejoices in the diversity of perceptions and interpretations each category of people (whether ethnic group, social class, culture, party, denomination, church, club, etc.) is able to bring as its own contribution to a larger polyphonic symphony or view that would be in many dimensions and depths. That does not mean of course that all contributions are of equal values. No, they differ drastically.

## **The hell of technology when it proposes simplistic meanings and offers universal solutions**

Science is the great mother of technology which consists in translating scientific discoveries into practical and technical means. Tools in their variety and complexity and efficiency constitute a fantastic contribution to our well-being. But to be used properly they must remain only tools and remain minimum in their impact. A similar inversion to the inversion of economics (profit above human values) seems to characterise technology: practicality above meaning. Good technology goes together with, and is submitted to, a maturity how to use it. There are mainly three criteria which are essential, under the form of questions we should ask ourselves:

- 1) What is the meaning and the purpose of what we mean to achieve and is this aim compatible with human, ethical and metaphysical values?
- 2) Which are the simplest and most gentle and minimum means which are available to reach this aim?
- 3) What are the consequences of the use of these means onto the environment, the social network, the quality of life and the positive evolution of mankind?

We need indeed to ask these three questions<sup>46</sup> with a very critical mind. This level of awareness is far from being the present practice today. Technology is used in general to call for more technology. For instance facing the disaster of climate change we believe that more technology (prudishly called new technologies) will solve all the problems without us having first to change the way we think and we live. The problem is that technology nowadays replaces meaning. Problems are solved only on the technical level and we avoid constantly the challenging question of what the real meaning is (first question here above)<sup>47</sup>. This purely technical and restrictive<sup>47</sup> approach leaves no place for any change

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46 We could add to these three questions the six interrogations by the Tibetan monk: long ago, there was a monk in Tibet who proceeded to many inventions, but, every time, he put them back into his drawer because he was not convinced it would help and support the spiritual evolution of mankind. Inspired by this wise monk (and by Socrates) we can enumerate a few questions we have to ask ourselves in order to check the adequacy of any process:

1) Authenticity: is it true? 2) Evolution: is it good? 3) Adequacy: is it right? 4) Harmony: is it beautiful? 5) Need: is it necessary? 6) Purpose: is it a help towards human and spiritual progress?

47 Ivan Illich has well demonstrated how institutions such as the health, education or transport systems have developed beyond the stage of efficiency. They have evolved as mechanical entities that have forgotten the true meaning of their purpose. When an institution is confronted to efficiency problems, more subsidies are usually voted to sustain its further development into what it is already (and beyond) instead of reassessing what the real cause for inefficiency is, what the real purpose of the institution is and what the meaning of its rediscovered mission would mean in terms of deep transformation of the whole concept of this institution. For instance city transport has developed to a point where it is constantly in overload; people spend everyday hours in trains or cars, queuing in traffic jams and spending a major part of their time in transport; transport has become the problem, not the solution. The health system is performing high technical interventions but has lost the sense of basic treatment and the awareness of the dynamic of the body as well as of its own capacity for healing; highly chemical or technical treatments generate so many secondary effects that are often worse than the illness itself (see above about the body); the costs explode; the system

of paradigm that should characterise each new step of evolution. It means we are stuck in our faith in technology and it deprives us from any possibility to evolve creatively. Because we are not able to step back and get an overview we cannot see clearly the state of our world. This goes against all principles of science (objective observation) but it is nevertheless the situation into which science has brought us (false ideology). Without connection with ethics and anthropology (i.e. the search for the meaning of life) science is just an objective description (the heavy weight of exclusively rational thinking) that prevents us from taking the necessary stand and step forward. Subjectivity is not the enemy of science; it is its indispensable complement.

### **When tools make us slaves instead of serving a shared quality of life**

Our human intelligence has developed highly performing tools but we have lost the capacity to know how to use them for a right purpose. Transport has developed to some extremes that negate its purpose; cars and planes have completely metamorphosed our perception of space and generated a kind of standardisation of the world according to western modern materialist norms. Cities grow extensively and absorb rural surrounding regions. Cars<sup>48</sup> become some forms of second identity or

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has become the problem instead of providing the solution. In a similar loss of purpose education delivers certificates that make people adaptable to the “needs” for profit of the economic system in general or at least to be able to fit into jobs which are not conceived in terms of human needs; it forgets to give people, as persons with their own gifts and skills, the favourable opportunity to develop in maturity and consciousness; it is no more a support for personal growth but only the fitting of cogs into the big machine. The solution has become the problem here again.

48 Although cars are the products of a fantastic invention, the way we use them has generated many major problems because of the violence cars carry and because of the illusions they create. We can mention 12 main characteristics:

- 1) By its capacity to reach far places in a short time (speed), it abolishes distances and therefore flattens differences between places and between people or cultures (colonisation).
- 2) By the increasing range of reach it allows, it creates polarities, between places of power and their periphery, and generates an everyday pendular traffic which makes people more and more dependent on centres (waste of time, exhaustion, stress, centralisation).
- 3) By the possibility of speculation which it offers, through transport on long distance, by playing on the differences of prices of goods and workforce, it encourages greed and exploitation, which profit the rich and powerful and destroy the poor, although this potential could be also a tool for fair exchange and cultural openness.
- 4) By its violent invasion of public space (streets, squares), it destroys social life and dissolves the value of commons (public outer space) as meeting places, although this public space and common good should belong to all and remain accessible for anyone; motorised traffic transforms the town into a gigantic highway.
- 5) By its weight and speed, it creates accidents which kill people or traumatise them for life. Although we despise cultures that used to practise human sacrifices, we find right to sacrifice every year many human lives to our goddess Mobility because we believe she is more important than our own children.
- 6) By its use of fuel and combustion, it exhausts natural resources, pollutes our atmosphere and our environment (pollution, noise, climate change), and creates so much disturbances that the surroundings become inhabitable.
- 7) By the dependency it creates on fuel, it generates wars to ensure supplies and it generates pollution of sea and earth when tankers ships sink or when pipelines leak or break.
- 8) By the importance it plays in the economy, it becomes an aim as such which guides human activity according to profit more than to real needs or ideals.
- 9) As a bubble of comfort, it creates the illusion of an artificial cocoon which isolates us from our surroundings (no perceivable effort for covering distance or height, air conditioning, mobile home) and we lose contact with, and awareness of, physical reality (no sweat).
- 10) As a tool driven by external energy, it creates an illusion of, and fascination for, false power which often reveals itself very destructive, because beyond our faculty for control (more speed and power just by a light pressure of the foot).
- 11) By its design and all the little gadgets it proposes, it becomes an illusory representation of the social ego, based simply on the power of money.
- 12) By the small space it offers inside and by the high mobility it provides, it participates in developing our tendencies for individualism and our false representations of what freedom is; it reinforces social gaps between classes, especially between poor and rich.

external false representations of our egos. The information technologies<sup>49</sup> have fostered a kind of virtual landscape that has little to do with reality and into which we are used to escape, cut off from true life. In this way we become the slaves of these tools when they rule ever more our lives instead of these technologies being truly at our service for our personal thriving and for the common good. A deep change of mentality in the way we consider their role in our lives will deeply transform the way we handle them and restore for us a capacity to evolve according to the true meaning of what we think life is meant to be. As truly controlled tools they will be much more powerful to deliver the right service for the right cause.

## **C) THREE CHALLENGES FOR SYNTHESIS**

### **7 – A mature expression of diversity**

#### **Domination is founded on the fabric of the victim and the ritual of sacrifice**

Development on a limited planet with increasing population does not mean infinite growth but implies on the contrary self-limitation in a search for ways of living that bring harmony between all sentient beings (rocks, plants, animals, human beings) beyond and through the great gifts of diversity. Domination of one species or one ethnic group or one social class over the other is never a solution and nonviolence is the absolute rule for solving all conflicts. In order to manage erupting levels of violence our society tends to divert the general tension of conflict towards selected victims and to practise all forms of scapegoating<sup>50</sup>, making victims out of minorities and oppressing

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It is fascinating to notice that each of these 12 flaws, when combined with the idea of slowness and sustainability, becomes in fact, by contrast, a quality for a better sense of community and cooperation. We let the reader re-read the precedent lines and describe these flaws in the negative form: they become real qualities for a thoughtful sense of mobility. E.g.: 1) By its capacity to reach for far places slowly and taking time, and when sun is shining (solar car), it creates a gentle link which is respectful of distance and differences, in harmony with what is made available by nature. And so on...

49 IT technologies create a virtual world and computers allow us to create a world that exists only in our mind. This can be very creative when it is soon or later confronted with the true materiality of our world, but, in so many uses we have today of this tool, it generates an illusion and an escape into pure fantasy and cuts us away from life. Social media are a good example how people project an image of themselves and make it public. What a loneliness in this practice (despite of its intensity of time) when one compares it with a true way of sharing active life with friends we can touch and hug, and with whom we can share our true Self, without hiding behind false constructs. Nevertheless it has to be said too that computer practice, because it is such a extreme simplification of life, can be a relaxing time when it leads us into play or repetitive settling tasks and not into illusion and false beliefs.

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René Girard in *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* explains how mimetic acquisitive behaviours (want for the same things) bring competition and conflict. Since the origins societies have learned to cope with this growing tension by instituting prohibitions as well as rituals of sacrifice. According to old traditions a scapegoat is chosen and loaded with the guilt of the whole community and sent into the desert, taking away the sins of the people. Peace comes back as the community finds a new unity in colluding against the victim. The same ritual happens again and again nowadays, in our modern world, but in a less formal way: oppression of minorities, refugees, strangers, indigenous people, exclusion of marginal people, rejection of religious identity, ethnic cleansing; it seems that our world needs constantly victims to be able to expiate the violence that it generates by greed and want of domination. One of the most fascinating things, from the Christian point of view, that Girard illustrates is how Jesus' death should not be understood as a sacrifice but as a mere murder; there is indeed no vengeful god that a sacrifice would appease; Jesus' mission consisted not in dying on the cross but in revealing pure love. He was confronted to the will of the high priests to get rid of him because he was challenging the power structure and the hypocrisy of the religious authority. He had either the possibility to defend himself and become in turn violent, i.e. an

diverging ways of life. This leads to some forms of sacrifice whether they are truly executed as such (as in religious primitive rituals of goat killing) or whether they support the hidden meaning of it in a social dynamic which condemns a minority (the Holocaust or any process of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia or Rwanda). So many minorities have paid and continue to pay today for the general state of fear, anger and resentment of dominating clans or even of average social groups. We need urgently to look at our common behaviour with open eyes and, with deep honesty, we need to become aware of these terrible hidden currents which lead our unconscious collective behaviours.

### **Search for harmony and awareness of the divine foster the wisdom of traditional societies**

We believe that ancient traditional societies have in general based their behaviour and social rules on the most precious values of human relationships (relation with nature, in a constant search for balance, or even equity, and awareness of the divine). These societies were evidently not perfect and these different priorities were certainly motivated mainly by their fragility more than by idealism. We observe that, by contrast, our modern society has become violently dominant and has used principally materialistic means to impose itself in a simplistic way. Colonisation has not been possible because of any cultural superiority, as it has too often been claimed, but only because the colonisers had good ships, good weapons and little moral restraint. Through domination and violence western countries (we) have brutally conquered “newfound” lands and eradicated most of the traditional societies that existed still a few centuries ago. It becomes urgent now to save what still can be brought back to life. I am aware how much traditional perceptions and know-hows are the fruits of many millennia of human experience in adaptation, with minimal means, to nature, climate, spirituality, etc.. Languages, in their diversity, are the rich inheritance of so many diversified sides of a common humanity that would be lost if we do not protect and revive them. Traditional cultures that have been destroyed by colonisation or dominant expansion of the western way of living, by technology, by attraction for material comfort, by market and globalisation, etc. need to be brought back to life, not as some historical remains or not either as means to better integrate their people into the western way of living but in a fundamentally transforming way which will teach us their own different perspectives on life and help us (not unilaterally or exclusively) to reconvert deeply our degraded ways of living into a form of discovery and wonder that would suit better our true common human vocation beyond diversity.

### **We define our own identity through the monolithic view of “us and the others”**

In the spirit of what has been said about the different stages of personal and collective evolution beyond the ethnocentric perception, I believe that we have urgently to rediscover the fascinating potential of living in diversity like a body made of many specialised organs which all have their specific role to play and their wealth of skills and specificity to contribute. Evolution will lead us

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oppressor, or he could follow the path of pure love and total surrender that accepts that true love is powerless and completely self-giving. He chose the latter way i.e. to be on the side of the victim and became himself a victim. This is the blatant demonstration of the absurdity of sacrifice. There is then no redeeming of sins through a false sacrifice to a false god but there is pure salvation offered because love is total and this powerful offering of one's life in total powerlessness becomes the expression that the true nature of life (and our own true nature) is love also and that we are accepted as we are, with all our twists and flaws; our misdeeds of yesterday and our constant walking away from true consciousness do not matter because we just need to be who we are, here and now. The great transformation in this whole demonstration of love is not so much an action of God which would change our reality; it is rather a change of our understanding and own mentality (change of consciousness) when we suddenly discover the real power of love. Revelation is not a change in God but a change in our mind-heart: we suddenly see what it is all about. One calls it salvation because it is true liberation.

toward less ego-centrism and more hetero-centrism and more inclusion of the others and of the whole Universe into our perception and being; this next step is expected to break the trends of our individualistic culture and to propose the transformation of our society into a true human community through personification and diversification of all its members<sup>51</sup>: not a fusion of all individualities into an undifferentiated whole or magma, but on the contrary the diversification and personification of all the parts in order to gain perfect differentiation, complementarity, capacity for sharing and depth of care and service for one another. By contrast today, instead of accepting this natural form of living together, there is, especially when our behaviour is left to the lead of our raw impulses, an ingrained trend in our human nature to develop an antagonistic and monolithic view of the others (“us and them”) that makes them a caricature in black and white; and, on the other hand, we can easily observe how this hostile projection onto the others has also strong negative repercussions on our own image, in our own eyes, that becomes at the same time more rigid and a caricature itself, by effect of boomerang<sup>52</sup>.

### **Welcoming the strangers is the source of wealth distribution and sharing of a richer experience**

Knowing the others means that we learn how to welcome them and to listen to them and accept to share what we have and what they have. All migrants have always been historically a source of cultural enrichment for the ones who “dared” to welcome them. Migrations have been throughout the centuries the nourishing soil of all civilisations. In our world today of intense communication and mobility these migrations are the response to the extension of past colonialism and present globalisation. They have to be understood as the reaction to the impact the extension of our market system imposes onto local populations in Southern countries. Why should goods and capital move freely if people can't? Why could we fish the resources of East or West Africa without feeling responsible for the way people of these regions can feed themselves when they have been deprived by us of their traditional subsistence as fishermen? And the same about all natural resources we import from Southern countries. Migrations become in this way the natural form of regulation for the

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Teilhard de Chardin describes very well how this development of a real form of living in community is the next step of our evolution. In other words, which are not Teilhard's words, community is the next step on the chain of what one calls “holons” (the box in the box in the box): After combining particles then atoms then molecules then cells then organism then bodies into persons, it comes to build a still more complex body which is community. Like the organs combine to build a body, people combine in their respective special identities to form a wider social body that becomes an entity as such when it relies on the reciprocal care, sharing and love that animate its members (community).

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See the work of Israeli author Dan Bar On: *The Others Within Us : Constructing Jewish-Israeli Identity*. Dan Bar-On's psycho-social approach sees identity as dynamic, constructed in contra-distinction to various “Others”. He depicts through case studies and analysis various stages in identity formation, in opposition to Others such as Diaspora Jews, Jews from Muslim countries, and Arabs who represent repressed aspects of the collective self. Monolithic identity disintegrates over time, in ways that are often confusing and painful. The perception of threat often creates a “neo-monolithic backlash”. Yet there is the possibility of a constructive dialogue, internal and among groups in society, that will give rise to a better-integrated and more inclusive identity construction. This has led Dan Bar On with his Palestinian friend Sami Adwan to organise meetings of reconciliation between descendants of victims of the Holocaust and of Nazi persecutors, as well as between Israeli and Palestinians who tell each other their own “stories” in order to show the resemblances and their common humanity.

sharing of wealth. If we had a right to take the resources of these poorer countries (and we did not and do not restrain ourselves from doing that) there would be no reason why these people should not also desire to share our wealth. From the historical and ethical points of view this recognition of a fundamental right to mobility means that migration should be free in order to reestablish justice and equity between diverse people from the South and people from the North. This is evidently still more powerfully true in case of persecution, but it can be considered also true for just economic reasons or hope for life improvement. But of course we resist this truth because we are reticent to share our privileged well-being, based indeed partly on the exploitation of poorer nations<sup>53</sup> and we are afraid of “the others”.

### **The complex process of discovery of plurality as integration of diversity in unity**

Now, having described the principle, it is still necessary to say that the problem is extremely complex and that it involves many parameters that are hard to control. Out of this complexity it is understandable to be also cautious and discriminating in the way we intend to welcome the strangers and we open our borders to migration, in the spirit described above; it is especially delicate to practice hospitality when the reactions of home populations may endanger the newcomers because of attitudes of more or less violent racist or social rejection against the latter. It remains nevertheless true that the integration of foreigners can only help us to recognise the multiplicity of aspects of our common humanity. It will help us to develop a true complementarity in our diversity and, in a much broader sense, to better grasp the diversity of our many own personal and social components: he, she, you, me; body, mind, spirit; art, science, sociology, politics, spirituality; education, self-observation, personal development, collective unconscious; and so many other various perspectives. We need urgently to be better familiarised with what multiplicity means. The more we open to diversity, the richer we will be and the more mature our social construct will become.

### **Diversity inside the community as a pattern for integration of minorities**

More significant for our growing maturity than the welcoming of refugees and strangers (whatever urgent this need is) is probably the need to learn locally how to integrate all the categories of people who are already today part of the local community, whatever contrasting, small or large these categories are. In our so-called democratic countries we are used to a system of decision that imposes the will of the majority. But minorities play a very important role and we need to learn how to improve their ability for expression; not only because they have a right to thrive and to express their specificity but also because they help to break the uniformity of the social construct and bring a form of wider opening onto other ways of perceiving, thinking and living which are also parts of our reality; especially because they are different, which is precisely the cause why they are minorities. It is then rich for the community to be taught by them other ways of perceiving and thinking. This challenging requirement to integrate anybody who is different into the stream of local life teaches us first a capacity to listen to, and understand, these differences and to learn from them; then it teaches us to accept these differences and to learn how to come to a higher level of cohabitation when

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53 Many governments today try to surf on the wave of populism and xenophobia. Fear is always the easiest way to govern and to control dominance and to remain in power, rather than to generate a truly compassionate policy for welcoming the persons in need. Migrants indeed never leave their country if not under threat; each one wishes generally to live at home with their own family and friends, in their own culture, own language, own well-known environment. The best remedy to prevent excessive migrations which are the source of much suffering, especially for the migrants, remains nevertheless equity, justice and good conditions for livelihood at home. As Westerners we are therefore responsible for helping these countries to implement good conditions of life for everyone. When we promote globalisation and import of natural resources or export of harmful activities, we participate in creating unjust situations and are then first responsible for the deterioration of good livelihood conditions in these countries. Equity requires a fundamental change in all our activities and ways of thinking. This is probably the first condition to help people to stay home where they are rooted and well integrated. This does not prevent later to develop fruitful exchanges that can be grounded on equity and care for all.

sensibilities and beliefs seem to be very different and when there is nevertheless a will to share and live a common life as far as community is concerned. We mainly consider differences of opinions and of ways of living as problems although they are truly sources of opening and enrichment because they teach us to include antagonisms into harmony and to make plurality a living force of cohesion. Authentic development does not consist in endless growth but it constitutes a progression on the evolution line toward more maturity and depth. The learning process of living in diversity is certainly a major step on this path.

### **Diversity, because of differences of levels of consciousness, does not mean that all is equal**

It is important to understand that diversity is not the plurality that puts everything, flat and without distinction, on the same level. Diversity does not give up discernment; it does not justify all kinds of behaviours or beliefs in the name of differences; there is no acceptable levelling in the name of diversity, no flatland that would consider all as equal and equivalent in maturity; in most cases conflicting differences are not fostered by differences of origin but they are rather the fruits of contrasting levels of personal or collective maturity and of consciousness. The neo-nazi and the wise monk are not at all at the same level of consciousness and cannot therefore be accepted in equal ways or considered as of “equivalent” weights. Diversity is fascinating because it has many possible sources; it can be caused by origin, by ethnic or cultural context, by belief, by social belonging, by personal experience, by character, by genes, by gender, etc. but it becomes finally mostly visible in contrasting expressions that are in fact rather related to different levels of evolution, of maturity and of consciousness. On the ladder of evolution of consciousness and personal growth we are not all on the same rung. Some people behave in a regressive and primitive way, with violence and hate, while others are welcoming and tolerant because they can recognise with a sharp eye the wealth of potential in the other. To live harmoniously in diversity we need to develop our faculties of discernment. Discernment is not necessarily judgement, but it is rather a capacity to understand in a more subtle way what the causes and conditions are of what one sees.

### **The growth in consciousness has only meaning if it translates into transformation and love**

As it has been explained earlier, what matters most is our own transformation, more than reaching the highest levels of consciousness, and the way we practise what we have discovered, i.e. how we implement in our lives the new paradigm of each new stage. Our discernment should allow us to see where each one of us in our diversity is standing and this degree of maturity is therefore essentially measured in relation to the practice we make of it. Who practises love? Who has been transformed? Our discernment tries then to identify authenticity. The theory about consciousness is meaningless if it is not translated into acts of real life. Beliefs are guiding us but they have no value as long as they are not fostering changes in our daily life, or not impacting onto our incarnated reality as human beings among other fellow beings. Our transformation is then measured in terms of heterocentric attitude, of practice of kindness, of attention to the other, of ability to integrate the others, or even to transform our life into the service of these others.

### **Growth into maturity as self-discovery or discovery of the pearl that is hidden in us**

Each of us is truly on a path of personal evolution that develops slowly and reveals step by step the treasures we have in us and which we discover for ourselves progressively too because we do not know ourselves fully. We are aware of what is possible (because it is in us) and we yet still don't know exactly what it is (because it is not fully actualised). In this way we are at the same time on different levels of maturity or consciousness, one is potential (unrevealed but perceivable) and the other is more fully expressed (made visible). Full expression is probably never reached. Yet without knowing exactly where we are going we know nevertheless what the path is. It is why the ladder of evolution is indeed no ladder because the treasure is already in us and there is no climbing but there is yet an opening to it, which means progression; climbing is only the metaphor linked with the

image of the ladder. The pearl of knowledge is in us, as a seed. This authentic potential that is hidden in us is probably the true root of our capacity to love and to be loved; this is the true ground for growth and diversity; then we are all in charge to make this potential more explicit, at the highest possible level of maturity, and this is the task of the community to help each one to develop fully their own potential and make it available to all. In this way there is acceptance and integration of all, but it does not mean that all behaviours or all beliefs are acceptable; some acts are indeed very harmful. We learn also in this way to make a distinction between the person (with their full unknown potential) and their acts and behaviours (with their temporary awkwardness and violence that is not acceptable but may evolve into more depth and awareness)<sup>54</sup>.

The great challenge of diversity is indeed to be inclusive without being permissive.

## **8 – Community and consensus as a shared social vision**

### **The land makes visible a network of relationships as present reality and future potential**

As the composite body of many contrasting tendencies local communities are much more than just the groups of people who consume at the same shops or use the same services. The land in which the community is rooted makes indeed visible the network of relationships that creates and expresses all the conditions of everyday living and offers also all the further potentials for tomorrow. It is the potential of today and of tomorrow, in action or in latency. The land is truly the visualisation of the network of local relationships, past, present and future; it becomes then the ground for our living in relationships. In a similar way as the body is a visualisation of what happens in us, the landscape is indeed the expression of who we are collectively. It makes also visible what happens in these relationships between people and this clear visibility allows us to act upon them when they need to be changed or improved. Local community life has a transparency that we lose when we integrate too much into the globalised world of anonymous exchanges.

### **Consensus: a form of compromise for expression of diversity, cooperation and empowerment**

Any local community needs to develop means of internal dialogue between all members and these same people have to reach, between them, a minimum degree of consensus to thrive. Consensus does not mean that all members have to agree absolutely about everything. Consensus is rather made possible by the level of compromise people are ready to make in order, on one hand, to integrate all parts of society including minorities with their real originality and, on the other hand, to keep control collectively over their own common destiny, yet within a maximal possible diversity. The rule of consensus is simple: what the consensus does not succeed to include will indeed be controlled by external actors in their own profit, i.e. very probably against the interest of the local community. It is why consensus is vital for a local community: it provides the means first for deciding what the local community chooses as priorities and secondly for implementing the necessary conditions. Consensus includes also the faculty to review the terms of agreement and step by step to re-examine how far the aims defined previously have been reached, and to re-adapt consequently the procedures. It is a dynamic process. Consensus is true empowerment and maintains the necessary transparency for all members. It trains the members to become more aware and responsible, and more open to diversity.

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54 One could say that there are three (or more) main scales of evolution in us: 1) The Buddha nature or Image of God is hidden in us and represents a kind of spiritual DNA that guides our evolution as an inspiration rather than as a constraint. It is at the origin only a small seed but it may later grow into a huge tree. 2) The level of consciousness that follows the apparent ladder (which is no ladder) that has been described earlier. 3) The level of practice that expresses the correspondent level of maturity. For instance (it is only one example) Mother Teresa of Calcutta is indeed more advanced (if one can compare them!) than the writer who knows everything about consciousness but does not practice it in the world. Washing the poor and the dying is certainly the sign of the most evolved perception and way of being. Of course this higher level of consciousness can also translate in many other contrasting ways of being.

It is at the same time a learning process of education, of discovery, of imagination, of expression and of listening that allows to develop and to deepen most aspects of life. Local life is the ideal field for developing these faculties of consensus because they reflect clearly and concretely what happens with, as already said, a quality of transparency that more global issues do not present.

### **Human rights are the fundamental basis that requires each one to take their responsibilities**

Since the end of WW2, especially with, among others, the movements of independence of colonised countries and the different social struggles for racial emancipation and women liberation, the Declaration of Human Rights (UNO 1948) has had a very strong impact on the way we understand the fundamental needs for each person and human group, including minorities, to live in decent conditions and to access full expression of their own potential. It has led to a better restraint of racism, sexism, ethnocentrism and other forms of ostracism. Yet in our egocentric and individualistic society it has as well soon been turned into greed and self-promotion at the expenses of others. If our evolution toward deeper consciousness requires truly that we mature into more heterocentric forms of cohabitation in building true human communities based on care and sharing, we need urgently to develop also a sense not only of our rights but also of our responsibilities<sup>55</sup>. Responsibilities are much more than duties<sup>56</sup>. Unless they are focusing on the defence and promotion, by the community as a whole, of the rights of the others (some oppressed categories of marginal people, ethnic minorities, exploited workers, etc.), rights are rather egocentric while responsibilities are genuinely heterocentric. The sense of what the community truly can be as a body that provides for each one but also needs each one to contribute to (Commons) requires that the sense of responsibilities be dominant as a necessary complement to the awareness of given rights. This is evidently a huge step in our evolution that will take us out of our selfish imprisonment.

### **Empowerment consists in the way we live: each choice is a vote that plebiscites what we choose**

In this way we may give shape to our local community as a place for responsibility, empowerment and consensus about our common future, a place of resilience (self-reliance). We may consume local goods and services, in order to restore our faculties for creativity (trades) and for sharing, making our land a place that would integrate all dimensions of life where to live fully, for our youth and the future generations; we may reorganise the local life in order to become more self-sufficient, not only in terms of what we produce for ourselves locally but also in terms of skills and means of creativity we may offer to the different members of the community, especially youth. Another extreme priority is also to restore the systems of regulation of our land and climate (forests, water, soil, ocean, sun, wind). We believe that our empowerment consists in the way we live and in the choices we make every day in each act of our life: our own life is in fact our true power. Our society tends to believe that big corporations are powerful<sup>57</sup> but the picture of all-powerful corporations does not represent

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55 There is a *Universal Declaration of Responsibilities* that has been accepted by the UNO in 1998, but it is far from having the same range of impact as the *Declaration of Human Rights*.

56 “The word *duty* indicates compulsion; the word *responsibility* indicates freedom. Duties lead one to demand rightfully; responsibilities lead one to command respectfully. Sense of duty is out of attachment; sense of responsibility is out of love. Duties can be thrust upon others; responsibilities are taken up by oneself. There can be unwillingness in performing one’s duty; responsibility is always taken up willingly.” (Maa Purnananda).

57 They control most of our economic development and influence strongly most political options, because of their influence and pressure through lobbying and their important impact through their own financial means. A few most powerful corporations control the main sectors of food production and distribution (e.g. Nestle, Unilever, General Mill), of OGM and seeds (e.g. Monsanto, DuPont, Syngenta), of pharmaceutical (e.g. Johnson, Pfizer, Roche, Novartis), of banking (e.g. Bank of China, JPMorgan, HSBC, Paribas), of information technology (e.g. Apple, Samsung, Amazon, Microsoft), of fossil fuels (e.g. Shell, ExxonMobil, BP, Total), of media (e.g. Walt Disney, Fox, CNN), etc. which turn into kinds of quasi monopolies. These sectors are in the hands of these giant firms which, according to the law of greed for maximum profit and power, manage their interests at the price of our well-being. It means that most aspects of our lives (how we feed ourselves, how we take care of our health, how we communicate,

exactly the truth; we are in fact all together the real actors who make these corporations so powerful, a little bit more every time we rely on their services and goods<sup>58</sup>. Because we form all together the body of consumers and citizens, we are truly empowered to decide to whom we want to confer power. This is the slogan we already mentioned: each choice is a vote<sup>59</sup>. Our empowerment consists precisely in being aware that each of our choices is a vote that encourages a type of good, a way of producing, a way of thinking, or the intellectual, ethical and spiritual values that are embedded in the goods or services we consume: what we eat, we watch, we read, we love. The same is valid for what we provide and the conditions that are attached to it.

### **Politics consists in a wider vision that describes what our community is meant to become**

Politics, instead of being the competitive field of struggle for power it is presently, is meant to be, by contrast and by nature, the common place where we should meet as citizens to foster the society we want. Politics is at the same time a guiding vision of the social quality we wish to implement together as a community (consensus) and a place of debate and invention for the ideal forms of implementation of this vision. It is the frame that helps us collectively to control the evolution of our community (whether local, regional, national, international) and to channel our many diverse forms of creativity. By excellence it is the field where we learn how to master economy and technology, or similar specialised fields of activity, in order to keep them at the service of the community and avoid their destructive dominance. It is also the field where natural leaders arise, not because they have been elected but because they have a superior level of maturity and understanding<sup>60</sup>. Democracy is not a system (regular elections and law of majority)<sup>61</sup>; it is a culture that needs to mature through

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how we move, what we think, etc.) are strongly influenced if not shaped by interests that do not care for our well-being. This is the big inversion: clients are no more kings; they became slaves of their providers.

58 It is evident: each one of these firms would be nothing if nobody (we) would not buy their products. Of course our ability to choose what we consume is not an easy power to handle because our desires lead us to make compromises and to concede the power these firms have at the price of the advantages we get out of what we buy from them. This is precisely where our power lies. The law of cumulative effects says that everybody is responsible for their own part of individual choices, although each personal choice has only a very small impact on the surroundings and although each personal sacrifice seems personally huge, especially in comparison with its real effect.

59 The local food shop that answers our basic subsistence needs (if it is not a big shopping centre) is not at stake. The problem arises rather for goods of secondary necessity when we are faced with choices: which providers are ethically trustworthy (fair-trade)? do I buy my goods online or do I support local businesses? etc.. It will cost me more to buy fair-trade or locally but I will at least sustain the quality of fair exchanges or local living instead of killing our local skills in buying Chinese in order to save a few dollars... and get in any case worse quality. Our main problem is that we have servilely accepted the simplistic logic of market which reduces the wide range of criteria of all natures to the one measure by the price that is said to summarise them all; we have lost therefore our ability to judge according to qualitative aspects such as work conditions, social security, wages, ecology, equity, creativity, beauty, etc.. On the other hand the money we pay for foreign goods will escape far away and not sustain local life and power to circulate wealth; the cheapest way is never the cheapest on the long term. The bill comes just later!

60 Nikolai Berdyaev described how in tsarist Russia a fascinating social force had taken shape that was called the *Intelligentsia*. It was not a group of privileged intellectuals but on the contrary a kind of social force that had developed across all divisions of classes or contrasts of education, wealth, status, power, or differences in ages, genders, beliefs, etc.. The members could be indifferently simple workers or farmers as much as academics or thinkers or scientists, poor or rich. It formed a kind of "monastic" order that was in search for the best form of society based on justice and equity and it plaid the role of a kind of "external" critical eye on society as well as a force of positive invention. This historical example is very inspiring for us because it calls us to take a public stand and to express our views and to prevent politicians from taking control, by action or by neglect, of our lives. We are therefore invited to form this new *Intelligentsia*, across all social divisions and distinctions, that may generate the deep vision of a future and that may challenge the existing powers to conform to that vision. By essence the *Intelligentsia* is independent in its way of thinking because it is geared by the thirst for truth and justice and not by personal interests. This description seems an ideal perception of an unrealistic hope, but it nevertheless should inspire our participation in the transformation of our social construct and the way we understand and practise politics, i.e. as a tool for reflection, imagination, creativity and courage inspired by the best human values.

61 When we look at our present practice, we can notice that there is no more elaborate system of participation than our modern society which involves such a vast world network of exchanges: the most participating system of all! Of

experience and it is a dynamic practice in which all members of the community should be involved. The search for consensus is its strength and cohesion.

### **Friendship as a link: being truthfully who we are and accepting others as authentic beings**

This better perception of complexity and healthy collective dynamic can only help us to practise communication in a way which does not depend so much on technology<sup>62</sup>, but rather in a way which may on the contrary generate true links between us that allow to develop authentic forms of friendships: a quality of trust where we dare to reveal ourselves as what we are, instead of trying to elaborate a false image of persona that aims at being as much impressive as it is false. When we know ourselves and the other, and reciprocally, including with our many respective weaknesses as well as our skills and qualities, we can become true personal supports for one another, someone to rely on, and reciprocally. And we can feel then relieved to be free to be simply what we are with our vulnerability, without pretence, and to be accepted as such. Friendship is indeed truly an art, especially in our modern society where everything is preventing friendship to grow naturally through everyday life. It must then be a willing awareness to reestablish this quality in our relationships<sup>63</sup>.

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course each one of us has not the same range of power but, in our western world, we often have in average, each one of us, much more power than most people in poor countries and our power grows in general proportionally to our standard of life (which is also ethically very problematic but emphasises our increased responsibility!). While living in a democracy and in a liberal market system we are “free” to choose what we consume and the price we are ready to pay (in dollars, in remorse or nightmares, in joy of sharing and being responsible, or even in having to pay the price of our freedom of mind!). We are free to create the society we want. It means that we are made responsible for the state of our society: we have made collectively what we get now. We are all involved, as initiating or as resisting forces because initiative and resistance are the two means for our creativity. This freedom depends on our maturity and spirit and how we nourish them.

62 I.e. at the opposite of what we practise nowadays with social medias which are the opportunities for all kinds of excesses: from bullying to the spread of hate and violence or to the exploitation of personal data.

63 Money (replacing kinship), technology (replacing meaning), individualism (replacing sense of belonging) are the tools of our own ejection from life and social interdependence which are meant to form the core of our experience in life. Everything we need is indeed provided by our market society and social state, and paid for with money: through private businesses (with cash) or through public services (paid by taxes). We have then lost the possibility to provide for our own needs through direct action shared with our neighbours (dependents, friends) in similar needs. We are indeed ejected from society because it provides everything for cash and we can then only be involved as consumers. When we reverse this movement of expulsion and try to reintegrate our real place into a network of interdependent relationships, we have the opportunity to rediscover the true meaning of friendship. As long as we do not reverse this tendency, friendship will only remain a leisure activity. We will enjoy good time together having a glass of wine, a delicious meal, a BBQ, a swim, a ride, a dance or watch a show, listen to a concert. But none of these activities will provide the opportunity to be truly concerned with or involved in each other’s life. Nothing in leisure relationships confronts us with the test of veracity of what we share (mainly talk). In this way of life there is no direct confrontation with the true nature of reality or with the hard struggle of life in its materiality. By contrast true friendship means interaction and involvement of each one in the life of the other. Involvement should be here understood in a positive way as meaning a deep concern for what the other experiences and how s/he does that. Involvement does not mean intrusion or invasion. Privacy remains what people wish it to be, at the degree they wish it to be. Just more concern means more understanding, better listening, more empathy and also, inevitably, a wish to participate where there is room for participation. Friendship means in this way deeper sharing and involvement because there is something to share through life experience. If I’m involved with you in some building work, I will know you better than if together we spend only time around a table, drinking and eating and talking. If you visit me when I’m sick, you will discover aspects of my person, of my fragility, you would never know without me being sick. Accompanying people in terminal illness is certainly a very powerful way to connect deeply on a level that touches the essence of life itself. Yet, without looking for such extreme situations, we notice how a practical involvement in one another’s life creates the spark that produces the real light.

## **9 – The search for a new anthropology**

### **Living in the truth instead of conforming to the values of the dominant surrounding society**

This quality of relationships with friends and with anybody who belongs to the same community, even if they are very different from us and think in a kind of opposite way, can only become reality if we are free enough to develop our own personal and collective vision. Our personal responsibility consists in trying to live in the truth<sup>64</sup> instead of conforming to the values of the surrounding society. Living in the truth is evidently not a clear definition of what should be. It is rather a spirit of search and questioning that aims at being in tune with the Universe. Truth (capital T) remains nevertheless mysterious and inaccessible. Yet in our efforts to search for Truth we do the best we can to find glimpses of it and to reshape our personal lives in consequence. When they are constant and thoroughly persistent, these attempts and their fruits bring us soon in contradiction with many of the practices of our society. Our new personal insights generate indeed inevitably a radical change of perception or of attitude. In a certain way our new insights may well lead us to adopt an attitude of resistance to the dominant trends of our society as soon as we start living according to another way of thinking, another mindset, as soon as we make the choice to live in the truth. Resistance is not grounded in a principle of opposition to society but this change of attitude toward the social context rather happens as an inevitable step and the natural fruit of the inner changes of mind and heart that call us to adapt our lives to a deeper vision. More than an opposition stand, this is a new (re-)creation.

### **Seeing the flaws of our own (individual and collective) perceptions and behaviours**

We need to be aware that we can only discover more about truth if we are first ready to see the flaws that impregnate our own usual perceptions (our personal ones as well as the ones dictated by conventional wisdom). It is indeed when we notice some flaws in ourselves, in our way of living, in our social construct or when we experience some suffering that we start to observe and think differently. Without breaking the shell of appearances we cannot see the light that comes through the cracks<sup>65</sup>. Most spiritual teachings are in general rich in making us aware of the flaws of our perceptions and teach us how to “observe or examine the nature of...”<sup>66</sup>; nature of anger, nature of desire, nature of suffering, nature of relationships, nature of our context, nature of love, our own nature, etc.. We have to observe the nature of.. (something) because we know very well that our first perception is not correct and induces us into error or suffering. This is the flaw. By observing the nature of... (something) we learn how to become aware of the flaws and probably also how to correct them slightly in some way.

### **The role of ideology not as a totalitarian tool but as a wider vision that guides our evolution**

We are then awakened to notice how much the dominating surrounding ideology is indeed damaging our human evolution. Ideology has been always a powerful tool of totalitarian regimes because it tries to confer an appearance of coherence to the totalitarian project and put pressure on citizens to conform and be involved in the common madness of totalitarian behaviours. Yet ideology is also a

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64 Vaclav Havel: *The power of the powerless*, This text has been written in 1978 by the founder of the Charter 77, ex Czech “dissident” and first President of the Czech Republic after the fall of the Wall. It is addressed to the Polish trade union Solidarnosc to help them find the right attitude in order to be free witnesses and not reactive to any form of official power. Havel describes the path of living in the truth as the true power we have when we do not engage in the conflict but stand rooted in truth. This text is fascinating because it can be read on many levels: 1) historically as a political paper of that time, 2) politically as a description of the role of ideology and the attitude of resistance under totalitarianism, 3) philosophically as a demonstration of what true freedom is, independently whether the ideology involved is totalitarian or market oriented, and 4) spiritually as a (only implicit) description of what our personal evolution and growth means.

65 Leonard Cohen

66 HH the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama

very strong tool in our western rich societies that includes also its part of madness. It is not imposed here in such a blatant way but it is more subtle and insidious: the myths of pleasure, of limitation of effort, of wealth, of power, of prestige, of youth, of speed, of fashion, of consumption, etc. are widely accepted and they represent clearly endorsed leading energies in our rich societies. We need therefore to notice how these energies impact on the way we live and the evolution of our relationships; especially how they become the vectors of distortion and inversion of our life conditions when they are not grounded on care and sharing. If we choose to adopt the attitude of resistance to these energies, it is not because it is good to oppose but only because it is a question of survival. This constant effort to live in the truth becomes our personal responsibility, a question of freedom, of ruthless self-honesty and of courage.

### **An urgent need to protect recessive feminine (Yin) values and attitudes**

To live in the truth we need more gentleness. It seems difficult to find this gentleness in our modern society because our culture is very much oriented and driven by male (Yang) values. This male domination deprives us from being more receptive, more understanding, more caring. Therefore, I believe, such feminine (Yin) values need to be protected and given more opportunities for expression, for the good reason that the Yin values are generally recessive<sup>67</sup> when they are confronted to Yang values; and they tend to lose their creative potential when they are marginalised or even repressed by stronger dominant Yang trends: competition prevents cooperation; domination excludes welcoming; noise destroys silence; exploitation hinders care; action diminishes our faculty of being; etc. We understand that the oppression and violence toward women is also rooted in this same repressive masculine force that negates or exploits, through domination, a form of rather hidden and resilient femininity.

### **Femininity (Yin) as a necessary complement to dominating masculine (Yang) values**

We need urgently to integrate, into our rather imposing and competitive attitudes, more feminine (Yin) values such as cooperation, care, sharing, listening, welcoming, slowness, self-limitation, etc. in a society in which masculine (Yang) priorities are dominant and are given priority. The strange thing is that this priority for Yang values is given by women as well as by men, and our social construct conforms therefore principally with a male dominant model. These Yang values or priorities can be for instance listed as the following attitudes (respectively in contrast to the previous enumeration): domination (vs cooperation), control (vs care), profit (vs sharing), dictating (vs listening), exclusion (vs welcoming), speed (vs slowness), accumulation (vs self-limitation), etc.; they are indeed in deep antagonism to the Yin qualities mentioned above but they could yet combine with their opposed equivalent if these latter qualities were given some protected space for their own expression, because they are not exclusive of one another. It is clear that, in the frenetic way of life we have, self-limitation and gentleness, care and sharing, as the vectors of a general attitude, will help us to redefine our needs into something that makes more sense, is sustainable and does not generate disparities between people. To help these feminine attitudes to come to expression, we need to create a protected space where they can thrive: a space of silence, of care, of tolerance, of listening, of inclusion, of gentleness, of slowness, etc. Without this protection, which means indeed a way to better control and restrict Yang energies, these qualities are lost: no silence is possible where there is noise, no tolerance where there is exclusion, etc.

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67 The word *recessive* should not be understood as the expression of a weakness; it should rather be described as gentle. It is inspired by biology and Mendel's laws which say that certain genetic characters are recessive (like blue eyes) when they need two similar genes to combine one with another in order to bring the character to expression while dominant genes (brown eyes) can combine with similar (brown) or different ones (blue) and nevertheless bring their own character (brown) to expression. The term *recessive* describes then a situation where the expression of this recessive (gentle) character must be protected if one wants it to be expressed. Yin attitudes are here considered as recessive (gentle) and need conditions of protection to be expressed.

## **Gender issue and present unisex model: a hindrance to the true expression of gender identity**

Beyond this question of the deep imbalance between feminine and masculine attitudes, we can notice how much our modern society has in fact a deep conflict with all kinds of gender issues. Since the women liberation movement has impacted so positively on our critical views of gender imbalances, we are searching creatively for new forms of expression for each gender. It seems that, without questioning the imbalance between feminine and masculine attitudes (Yin and Yang) as leading forces, we cannot find a satisfying answer to gender issues. We can observe so far how, in order to propose a new form of equality, we have rather developed at this stage a form of unisex pattern of development, more than true patterns of authentic and diversified expressions for each gender. Our market system has certainly a great part in this forgery. This new pattern consists indeed for each of us in adapting, whatever our gender is, to becoming equivalent cogs in the system. It means there is no more gender difference. All people are meant to work in the same way and make the machine run smoothly. This represents in fact the total victory of the male oriented system that searches only for efficiency, domination and profit as well as the domination of masculinity over femininity.

## **Our experience of life is rooted in our respective gender experiences (or differences)**

Our modern world has indeed abolished the differences between genders. They do not matter anymore. Only sex remains as the residual pleasure of a form of reciprocal exploitation that has lost the sense of the rich treasure that is hidden behind our (gender) differences<sup>68</sup>. This poorest possible practice of gender relationships we practise today calls for a drastic change in the way we can reinvent true relationships between women and men. We should face an evidence: gender is not a choice; it is given but we have still the choice how we want to experience it<sup>69</sup>. The need to combine a balance between Yin and Yang attitudes and the recognition that gender inevitably impacts drastically

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68 By contrast traditional societies have always recognised, from the origin, a differentiation between people that is rooted in genders. These societies recognise, because they have no choice not to, that gender differences foster in fact deeply one's personal experience of how to handle life and consequently how these differences define roles and ways how to cope with daily tasks, especially when they have to face rough survival conditions in a constant confrontation with the harshness of natural settings. The experience of each gender is evidently, in its respective deep essence, very different; to have life developing in one's womb or to have to structure a secure environment for one's own growing family are two very different roles that natural processes impose unto each of us, even in a modern world, according to our own gender. Even if we want to, we cannot change these fundamental differences; men cannot become pregnant! women have a different physical metabolism that allows better resilience but lesser mere physical force. Of course the social construct that has been created around these differences has fostered, beyond a mere and rich difference, a form of hierarchy of roles, and often a terrible exploitation of one gender by the other. Yet originally, in these differences, there is no supremacy of one gender over another but culture has created a form of domination which is indeed not always as evident at first glance as it seems. There are many societies where women are nevertheless all powerful in their role, behind external appearances of being submissive. And there are still today examples of matriarchal societies where forms of domination look still different. Or cases like our modern societies which seem to be egalitarian but treat women in the worst possible ways, for instance through the image of publicity or as sex objects.

69 In these recent years there has been a tremendous movement of liberation of gay people and this is a very happy development. Yet it seems that there is also, mixed with this authentic need for a necessary liberation, a deep confusion about the possibility to choose one's own gender. Some authentic gay people need truly to be in same sex relationships because they feel like being of the other gender in a body that does not fit with this other gender. But, in an apparently quite similar way, some other people seem to turn to same sex relationships, not because it is in their genes, but mainly by confusion because they had bad experiences with the other gender. By need for tenderness or need for love, which is very legitimate. In this case the cause is not same sex attraction, it is rather other sex repulsion. The choice to undergo a change of gender by surgical operation seems also to develop nowadays in incredible proportions: is it natural or is it cultural? It seems it is rather the latter than the former, beyond of course the consideration that the absence of strict repression (thanks to the movement of liberation) allows now many more people to come out. All these signs are evidently the expression of a deep confusion and corruption of gender relations. It calls for a deep and radical way of reconsidering the whole question in rooting it first in the original gender difference that is given by nature and cannot be denied. From there we will be able to reinvent a new practice where each gender and each person should be able to find their path and ability for authentic expression.

on the way we experience life will, both together and in a new combination, help us to redefine a new path where each gender can be valued and may contribute with its own attitudes, aptitudes, perceptions and special qualities for the common good of the community. Certainly, instead of us being all identical cogs in a system, there is a way to practise each work, skill, creation, etc. in a special way that would be at the same time related to our own gender and to our own personality, it means in a unique way for each of us and therefore in a way valued also by all as special. There are indeed many ways to be mother, father, builder, lawyer, architect, nurse, neighbour, clown, shopkeeper, and even to be oneself! And especially feminine and masculine ways, and also personal ways.

### **We need to search for a new anthropology, endless search for the meaning of life**

This other ways of looking at who we are truly and what matters most in life opens new ways of creation. I believe that we need more broadly to rediscover a new anthropology, it means new ways to rediscover the meaning of life. Life is more than a simple physical and chemical process; it is more than pure survival or economic achievement. It has a meaning and a purpose that remain a mystery. We do not know this mystery and we will never be able to agree about what it is. The diversity of our respective traditions, cultures or religions is a sign of this diversity of perceptions and interpretations; this diversity of understandings shows the complexity and multiplicity of aspects of the mystery; but it is, in the too often declared antagonism of these different approaches, a blatant expression of our lack of reciprocal tolerance or ability to learn from one another. We need urgently now to rediscover how to search for diversified meanings in our diversity, yet in unity. Even if we accept that we will never come to a common answer, we can nevertheless all agree that it is a priority to try to rediscover what this meaning could be, and to do what we can together to make this search a priority in our existence, leaving to each of us the responsibility for the respective answers we may well find personally. And sharing them in a way to confront and also stimulate each other's discoveries.

### **The search for the meaning of life, and not the answers it proposes, generates the right attitude**

This new priority for a search for meaning will radically transform the way we understand life and the way how it will guide us on paths fundamentally different from the present materialistic and pragmatic path we follow nowadays. This is indeed only a way to search for a true anthropology that can provide sketches of answers and help us to make real choices in our lives. Climate change, violence, state of war, oppression, hunger and poverty are not problems which can provide their own answers by themselves as long as we do not dare to ask beforehand what the meaning and purpose of our way of living is or should be and in what our common humanity consists. I propose then here to engage onto a path that asks rather questions than provides answers. All of us, as persons or as communities, can then make their own opinion and make their own choices that will ensue out of this other way of understanding the world. This is another way to find what the links are between the Ground of Being (the Source), the way this source is made visible through the forms of the Universe (the Expression) and the projection of our own understanding onto the surrounding world we shape in consequence (the Interpretation we make of it)<sup>70</sup>; it is also the opportunity to integrate these three dimensions of our life (Source, Expression, Interpretation) into a never ending dance. A search for a new anthropology is a search for meaning and meaning is the ground on which we build our lives; it

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70 This is a metaphor (see for more detail in the annex about Matter and Spirit) that describes 3 Worlds. 1) World 1: The Ground of Being is the Source of all that exists and lives; it is the core of Reality, yet, although it is essential, it is not visible. 2) World 2: The world in which we live (our natural and social surroundings) is the only thing we can see and experience; it is what makes the Source and its expressions and influences visible; it is its Expression. 3) World 3: We inevitably tend to make ourselves a representation of the world we experience in daily life (Source and Expression) and we interpret the world and try to find a meaning to it; this is the Interpretation or the explanation and representation about life according to which we act and try to adapt the world to what we think it should be. W1 and W2 and W3 are like the three dimensions of space; each one needs the others to exist. This is a 3 dimensional dance.

is evidently a subjective interpretation but it is also the only guide we have to find our way through life and we can trust it when we build it on truth instead of on fear as it is too often the case nowadays.

## **D) THREE STEPS: STARTING A MOVE TOWARDS CHANGE**

### **10 – Breaking resignation and passivity**

#### **Life is not a belief but simply the practice of truth in everyday life: choosing how to commit**

It is important, at the end of this text, to emphasise the fact that the search we propose here does not have to generate a new well fenced chapel; no, all in contrary! it has to generate unity in diversity and differences, at a higher level of consciousness. What we learn through this search for meaning should be translated into a manifold practice of this diversity. Without practice any knowledge is just an empty theory. It is why the Strategy is finally the real bone of this Vision because it has to invent forms of cooperation beyond our differences and these forms have to be enriched by our fabulous complementarity and our different ways of being, thinking, living. Certainly the text above expresses things in a peculiar way that is sometimes very much related to a personal and specific experience and does not answer in all details our usual need for complete agreement. But, behind the peculiar expression, should appear as a watermark, I hope, the shape of a truth centred on the preeminence of life as a flow of energy and an ever moving experience that should be at the focus of our personal and common social perspectives. The summary or core of this Vision should well show which are the core values which can bring us together to propose concretely new meanings and new ways of living in a fracturing world. How shall we act this truth out? Each one, as a person, in his/her own community, is now invited to choose which will be the leading threads of this new creative life priorities and to commit publicly to these Options by signing the Vision and the Strategy. These Options will evidently have to be revised and re-adapted regularly. This will be, I hope, the dynamic of a spreading movement which does not intend to create a new group of people but, on the contrary, wishes to inject a fresher energy into what already exists in our daily living, without creating new distinctions but on the contrary generating more unity in diversity.

#### **The start for a move towards change as a change of mind and a break of resignation**

As it has been said, our big handicap is not that we do not know the problems we are confronted to or how to find the right solutions; we know all that but we miss the courage to take a stand, to break out of our resignation and inertia, and to dare to start a move towards change. The problem is not the change but the start. Among many other forms of awareness we know for instance that our well-being and happiness depend on the welfare of our community and on the care we take for, and love we give, one another; and yet we care principally for our own egocentric comfort. We know also that life is more than survival and that it is sacred; and yet we focus mainly on material and practical issues. We know also that as Westerners we consume forty times more than the other half of world population; and yet we want more and remain dissatisfied. We know also that our over-consumption is generating climate change and that the differences of wealth between rich and poor are the source of increasing violence; and yet we remain starved of more things to consume and believe than all our needs are essential. We know also that our own blindness will finally kill us; but nevertheless we do not change. And the list of what we know can go on for ever, without us yet noticing fundamental changes in the way we live. It seems we wait for being awakened by something strong; we believe or hope it will come from elsewhere, from outside, and shake us, bring the ready-made truth and bring happiness with the recipe. Market has trained us to become consumers. Spiritual teaching has much developed this tendency as well in us because we think that teachers are meant to lead us onto the path to salvation.

## **The need to think freely and find the right words of expression in order to become free**

But this is a huge mistake: we are ourselves in charge of our own lives and we are the agents of change; change comes from inside each of us, from our own personal maturity, from our own heart and mind, how we feel about life; the true energy of change is our own love for life, and nothing else; and we are responsible for our own awakening. In short, there is nowadays a numbness in the air, especially in our modern western libertarian world: an incapacity to take a stand or to commit to something, mainly by indecision, by ignorance, by laziness, by lack of ability to think by ourselves because we wait for the thing that will make it for us but never comes. The numbness hence remains. We need urgently to learn to think by ourselves without imitating others. We need to learn to forge our own personal understanding and make our own personal opinion (our own anthropology). Freedom of mind and of spirit is the key. We not only need to learn how to think freely but we need also to have the courage to act according to our thinking and beliefs and hopes. We need even to learn how to do that independently of the support others will bring to us or not. It means we have to learn to bear the consequences of our stand and to pay the price for our freedom, if our stand provokes animosity or even more or less direct forms of repression. We need to be able to go on, even if we are not helped by others. Even if we are the last Mohicans who will think as we do, we will continue doing it, even alone. It may sound pretentious and wilful, but it is not; free thinking is indeed not of our own creation; it is not like our projects based on our own egocentric desires and representations. Free thinking is the fruit of independence to recognise what is, as it is. This is evidently a huge step not only into freedom but also into clear-sightedness and courage. Free thinking means also expressing what we see as we see it. It means we have also to rediscover the power of words, of words which are not twisted by a false use at the service of power and corruption but on the contrary free speech as a powerful force to reveal truth as it is. Words have also the power to help us to discover truth because they are conceptual tools that forge our reality. We learn to use our own words to describe what we see and what we believe in. Words are essential tools of our subjectivity in the exercise of our freedom. Freedom is the path but truth is the content. This is the path which follows the content, and not the reverse.

## **11 – Our relation with evil and suffering**

### **Mimetic behaviour as a form of confuse collusion with inertia and evil**

This state of numbness that paralyses us and prevents us from free thinking is as well reinforced by our tendency to mimetic behaviour. We tend all to adopt the values and habits of our own society as if they were truthful fundamental laws. We want to belong and therefore we are ready to conform in order to be loved. This is a basic trend of all societies that we imitate each other in order to belong but also in order to excel. Mimetic tendencies seem to provide a very strong energy for conformism which is also at the same time blindness because, in this way, we lose our ability to observe, to understand, to find words that will express our perceptions; we lose the creativity to design our own path, to dare to take a personal stand. More important, in conforming endlessly, we lose the possibility to distance ourselves from the evil that inevitably impregnates many aspects of our society, especially when it is evident and well-known that our western way of living generates so numerous imbalances, forms of exploitation and destruction. In remaining passive and following the herd we make then ourselves co-responsible of the evil that our society commits. In any totalitarian regime this tendency to follow the herd is evident and frightening for the ones who are forced by coercion to conform; but this collusion with evil is also strong in our market society where the whitewashing of goods and processes hides from us the true conditions of production and exploitation. Whether by own interest in order to preserve our privileges or by fear of repression (or just of being different) we remain in the herd and follow sheepishly or just lazily. We become in this way involuntary actors in a process that we disapprove or, more probably, we refuse to make a connection between the way we behave and what we know about the impact of our way of living,

such as climate change, destruction of nature, injustice, exploitation, gap between rich and poor. In our way of thinking there is a deep split between on one hand what we know about the consequences of what we do and the other hand how we decide to do what we do. This tendency to perpetrate evil without wanting to be involved is a form of personal resignation or even of submission to the dominating agent. Of course we know it is not right but we nevertheless do it. We never stop indeed consuming what is polluting, or produced in conditions of exploitation.

### **The banality of evil: the enemy has come in slippers**

How can we break this terrible and humiliating compromise and resignation and truly awake now? How can we become aware of what we are truly doing or participating in? As soon as we may rediscover our freedom to think independently we can then see clearly again the frightening gap between our wisdom and our practice; we become then able to react, to tell the truth and to take a stand but the great difficulty seems yet to be able to awake before we open to other ways of being. Awakening is difficult because nothing in our everyday life offers a powerful and striking revelation. Evil is indeed banal and without much distinctive impact that could be clearly noticed; evil is sneaky and acts in hidden forms; evil is no striking event; it comes in slippers, slowly, discretely, without being noticed; and then it is here, in our lives<sup>71</sup>. Evil is empty and boring<sup>72</sup>. It is ugly, not clear in what it is, disguised, incomplete, rarely radical, on the contrary very often just insignificant and banal. We do not see it coming. Especially if our attention is diverted towards other concerns: our next holidays, the well-being of our children, the necessity to pay the mortgage, etc. We are mainly good and generous people but we too often refuse to have a wider look at the surroundings. This capacity of evil to penetrate our lives and to be accepted as a minor flaw is what Hanna Arendt<sup>73</sup>

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71 Hubert Butler: *The Invader wore slippers*.

72 Thomas Merton: "There is nothing interesting about evil as evil. Evil is not a positive entity but the absence of a perfection that ought to be there. Sin as such is essentially boring because it is the lack of something that could appeal to our wills and our minds. What attracts men to evil acts is not the evil in them but the good that is there, seen under a false aspect and with a distorted perspective. The good seen from that angle is only the bait in a trap. When you reach out to take it, the trap is sprung and you are left with disgust, boredom—and hatred. Sinners are people who hate everything, because their world is necessarily full of betrayal, full of illusion, full of deception. And the greatest sinners are the most boring people in the world because they are also the most bored and the ones who find life most tedious. When they try to cover the tedium of life by noise, excitement and violence—the inevitable fruits of a life devoted to the love of values that do not exist—they become something more than boring: they are scourges of the world and of society. And being scourged is not merely something dull or tedious. Yet when it is all over and they are dead, the record of their sins in history becomes exceedingly uninteresting and is inflicted on school children as a penance which is all the more bitter because even an eight-year-old can readily see the uselessness of learning about people like Hitler, Stalin, and Napoleon."

73 Hannah Arendt: *Eichmann in Jerusalem; a Report on the Banality of Evil*. Adolf Eichmann was the man who, under the Nazi regime, was in charge of the transport of the Jews who were sent to be executed in concentration and death camps. Although he was not in a very powerful position, with an incredible zeal he organised with a few collaborators the transport of millions of people to the death camps. In his court case in Jerusalem in 1961, he did not show any regret but expressed only a sense of zeal to conform to what was expected of him in the criminal logic of that time. Hannah Arendt, in her report of the trial, described this attitude as the banality of evil. She described also how even Jewish leaders had participated in the selection of those to be executed, mainly by fear of being themselves taken to the death camps, but also by zeal of trying to integrate into what seemed to be the new coherence of their society; they tried to adapt to what was required from them, without wanting to see what was really at stake.

Eichmann represents of course an extreme case of collaboration in extreme totalitarian conditions (Nazism). Yet the teaching of Arendt's book concerns also our modern society because it describes a destructive tendency for collaboration with evil acts, which we could call the Eichmann's syndrome, and which we could define as the tendency to conform freely with the logic of our society, even when it perpetrates the most destructive acts; the Eichmann's syndrome seems to describe our general tendency for integrating the destructive logic of our social group as part of something we cannot fight against. This other logic seems then not only unavoidable, but it becomes even a necessity.

This ability to conform with the destructive and evil logic of our social milieu is made possible by our incapacity to adopt a free moral personal stand and by our inability to understand deeply the stand of others, of the ones who think

called the banality of evil.

### **Our fundamental familiarity with evil in our own lives**

Evil is a dreadful energy. We do not want to have anything to do with it. Nevertheless it is all the time present in our lives, in one way or another, most of the time in a very discrete and insidious way. We have then to learn to recognise this presence in ourselves although we know we are not fundamentally bad. It is a very challenging question to ask why evil may take these many forms and how people (the others but also ourselves) may commit such dreadful acts. It seems we all of us practise a form of collusion with evil without being truly aware of it. It is for me a deep enigma how some people can act in such a destructive way although they probably know very well that it will not bring happiness into their lives. It is always impressive to try to trace back the origin of evil in the lives of evil doers. It seems there is always a root of suffering at the origin, or a form of direct repression or existential threat, that may well explain the origin of the violence, although it does not excuse it. We may recognise in ourselves the diverse forms of suffering which are the cause of angry or jealous attitudes or feelings, even if we learned to master these negative reactions. The example of the Cistercian monks of Tibhirine who have been killed in Algeria in 1994<sup>74</sup> illustrates an inspiring lucidity about this connivance with evil we all know too well.

### **Our own search for meaning fosters our own resistance to totalitarian influence**

In order to resist this sneaky form of evil we need to reconnect with meaning; hence this necessity to go on the path of anthropology which is by excellence the search for meaning. It is why the summary of this long paper can be caught in one single word: rediscovering meaning. We all know that the strength of any totalitarian power relies mainly in its capacity to destroy meaning. In concentration

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and live differently, because they belong to other social classes or groups (the Jews, the Gypsies for instance), to other cultures, or they practise another religion or other moral values and therefore have adopted another logic that is incompatible with the dominant logic. These other ways of understanding life are excluded as being the peculiar ones of marginal and strange people who do not belong to the dominant social group, to the dominant logic, even when it happens that this dominant logic is pure evil. Conformity means in this case rejection of the ones who are different as well as adaptation to the law of the strongest and evil one. The Eichmann's syndrome is more a characteristic of a monolithic society. Diversity is its antinomy or antidote.

The problem is that we are imprisoned in the logic of our own social context, to such an extent that we accept its destructive behaviour as unavoidable. As shocking as it can appear, our behaviour becomes an expression of what I have called here the Eichmann's syndrome; it happens each time we are conforming to a destructive logic, representation or behaviour of our social group, even if we are not aware of the impact of our attitude. Even if our behaviour is much less harmful than the one of a Nazi executor.

74 In 1994 the GIA (*Groupe Islamique Armé*, a fundamentalist terrorist organisation in Algeria) abducted and killed the 8 monks of a Cistercian community (Tibhirine) which was living in great harmony with the local Islamic people in the Atlas. The abbot of this community, Christian de Chergé, wrote before dying his will where he expresses his deep love for, and connection with, the people with whom they were sharing their lives and the deep engagement in his choice to stay among these people despite the explicit threat of being killed that had been clearly expressed to them. His will is the following: "Should it ever befall me - and it could happen today - to be victim of the terrorism swallowing up all foreigners here, I would like my community, my church, my family to remember that my life was given to God and to this country. That the Unique Master of all life was no stranger to this brutal departure. And that my death is the same as so many other violent ones, consigned to the apathy of oblivion. I've lived enough to know I am complicit in the evil that, alas, prevails over the world and the evil that will smite me blindly. I could never desire such a death; I could never feel gladdened that these people I love be accused randomly of my murder. I know the contempt felt for the people here, indiscriminately. And I know how Islam is distorted by a certain Islamism. This country, and Islam, for me are something different. They're a body and a soul. My death, of course, will quickly vindicate those who called me naïve and idealistic, but they must know that I will be freed of a burning curiosity and, God willing, will immerse my gaze in the Father's and contemplate with him his children of Islam as he sees them. This thank-you which encompasses my entire life includes you, of course, friends of yesterday and today, and you too, friend of the last minute, who knew not what you were doing. Yes, to you as well, I address this thank-you and this farewell which you envisaged. May we meet again, happy thieves in Paradise, if it pleases God, the Father of us both. Amen. Inch'Allah. *Tibhirine, 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1994*".

camps people are arrested for no reason and punished for what they have not done (or just for being who they are) and they are forced to work in processes that have no meaning at the limit of absurd. By breaking our sense of meaning the totalitarian power breaks our humanity and our capacity to be a human being. Resisting consists therefore in reconquering meaning<sup>75</sup> for our own lives. And meaning is inevitably a link between people because the meaning of life depends on the quality of our relationships and on the intention that leads our life together. In societies dominated by market and technology there is indeed the same crawling extension of absurdity and therefore the same need for rediscovering meaning. We believe our society practises freedom, but in fact it has just abolished meaning. Everything seems possible and of equal value, i.e. meaningless.

### **Do not resist evil; make your own freedom and self-chosen powerlessness the invincible force**

Some sacred text<sup>76</sup> prescribes not to resist evil. At first glance it seems to be in deep contradiction with wisdom. Yet this instruction not to resist evil does not mean we should abide and let evil act freely. It instructs us rather that, if we intend to resist evil, we will have to resist on its own ground and adapt to its strategies and use the same weapons, which is contrary to what is needed. It is why we should not resist it on the same ground. Our strength is our own freedom to be creative. Life and love are the real weapons to undo evil. Our vocation is then to be fully alive and loving, to stand on the side of the victim and to remain powerless. Freely chosen powerlessness is our true strength and power that does not rely on force but on the contrary on the energy of life as an energy that nothing can destroy. Light destroys obscurity; but obscurity does not impact on light. So is it with evil too. Life destroys evil; evil does not impact on life. It can kill our body but it cannot destroy life.

## **12 – Truth and reconciliation**

### **Nonviolence, forgiveness and reconciliation are the necessary tools for solving conflicts**

This incredible power of life over evil is well demonstrated by the power of forgiveness. Anger, resentment, need for revenge are the main forces that are constantly pouring fuel on the fire of conflicts. It becomes soon evident that there is no solution in violence. Violence can only foster more violence; and it becomes then ever more difficult to escape the vicious circle of violence and to find solutions to conflicts. There is indeed only one path: nonviolence. And nonviolence is based on telling the truth. Truth and reconciliation go hand in hand. Desmond Tutu, the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town (South Africa), who was the chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, explains it very clearly in the report of the same commission<sup>77</sup>: while a court case encourages the culprit to hide the truth because he wants to escape punishment, a true process of reconciliation tries to express the truth and even the whole truth because forgiveness is given only when truth has been expressed fully; and the victims are there to testify that it has been done. Hence a true process of reconciliation brings the two parts together in telling the truth and learning from it, while a court case invites opponents to take diametrically opposed positions that become irreconcilable; the conflict remains total. The former process aims at restorative justice (repair) while the latter aims at retributive justice (punishment). The restorative process heals in this case the perpetrators as much as the victims. The retributive process increases the tension and fosters new violence.

### **Four necessary forms of detachment: 3 Ps, projections onto others, change in time, self-image**

In order to act in such a contrasting way to the usual mode of solving conflicts in our society, we need first to undergo a deep inner transformation (personal as well as social). We have to learn to let go of old habits and discover new ways of reconnecting with truth. It seems first to be a great loss

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75 See Victor Frankl: *Man's Search for Meaning*.

76 In the Bible: Matthew 5: 38-42

77 1998 – see Vol.1 chap. 5 – Concepts and Principles

because we are so much accustomed to these conventional forms of behaviours and attitudes. Yet we soon notice how they are empty inasmuch as they lead only to dead ends. It means that, when we abandon these old ways of doing, we do not lose anything but only gain the opportunity to live in the truth and to discover new horizons that open onto authentic freedom and not illusions. This other way is indeed a tremendous transformation. It is certainly not here the place to describe it; but we can nevertheless give a short descriptions of some of its major aspects. We may describe it as a process of letting go; and to better illustrate this process we can describe four main ways of detachment, when we become free from the following behaviours which are deeply ingrained in us:

- 1) The three Ps = Pleasure – Power – Prestige, in other words greed. We believe our happiness depends on what we can get. We want more of it. We do not see that it imprisons us more than it opens us to true life.
- 2) Projection onto the others. We project our expectations onto reality and others. We expect others to behave in a way that fits our desires. We have so much the tendency to write the script for other people, how they have to behave and what they have to provide for us. But they have no reason to do so. We are then disappointed and angry because of these unsatisfied projections onto others. We prevent them also from being who they are.
- 3) Change in time. We remain stuck in the past. We refuse change. We do not want to let go of what we have received. We are attached to what was and the loss of it prevents us from seeing what is given in the present. We mourn our dead friends or partner instead of rejoicing about who they were and of living enriched by these many gifts. We grieve about our losses more than we appreciate the memory of what we have lost.
- 4) Image of oneself. We have created an image of ourselves and cannot detach from it. If we cannot see ourselves as a well-defined entity, we feel lost and naked. Our true being is yet not our body-mind-memory; it is rather a point of awareness in space and time. We are nowhere or everywhere at the same time; only our body is in a given place and time. Yet we are incarnated and we travel with this body-mind-memory. What a strange tension!

When we learn to become free from these four forms of attachment, we discover freedom in detachment; we are freer to live in the truth, i.e. searching for meaning.

### **A flexible Strategy made of personal self-chosen Options in order to be free and creative**

This Vision will evidently change neither this difficulty we have to break our own resignation, nor this situation of collusion with evil nor this difficulty to practise nonviolence, nor to learn detachment. But it can yet offer to each of us, and especially to you, the reader, the opportunity to resonate with what is said in these pages and to become more aware of the need for a new anthropology that will help us to better focus on the meaning in our lives and to reorient our lives according to that new understanding. Each one has to be responsible for their own life and stand. It is why the purpose of this Vision is not to explain what is; it is only to create an opportunity to start a move towards change when the readers recognise that this is their own call (from inside, from his/her own heart-mind) and feel impelled (in their own heart-mind) to develop all together new forms of living. Reader, the ball is in your camp. Will you respond and join us? It is not about idealism; it is just about our own life, mine, ours, yours: the choice to live fully and bring life to others too, and save the planet from destruction. I believe it will be a very rich experience, a new discovery, a path of liberation.