

Rethinking progress and ensuring a secure future for all: what we can learn from the crisis

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Trends in social cohesion, No. 22

Council of Europe Publishing

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FOREWORD

This volume in the series Trends in social cohesion, *Rethinking progress and ensuring a secure future for all: what we can learn from the crisis*, offers us a number of ways of looking at the future, based on various analyses of the current situation.


It highlights the absence of political direction that characterises our societies. Such an absence of direction or leadership has led not just to an economic crisis but also to a crisis of civilisation, and thus of confidence. The common references that in the past have structured our lives and helped to create confidence are now being challenged and are generating uncertainty about our capacity to manage our common existence. Any attempt to define the future when the outlook is so bleak and appears to be devoid of hope calls for a fresh examination of the very fundamentals of human coexistence and dialogue.

One of the pillars of the Council of Europe's social cohesion strategy for the 21st century is that of "building a secure future for all". The Council of Europe therefore wishes to put the present into some form of perspective while recognising that major changes are necessary if common life is to be a source of well-being for all. Restoring mutual confidence between citizens and between citizens and institutions is an essential step along this path. Without confidence, societies are weakened and lose the moral capacity to find answers to common problems.

Confidence calls for joint responsibility for common objectives, which is another pillar of this same strategy, namely "building a Europe of social and shared responsibilities".

Confidence is also the product of a wide-ranging civic and political dialogue in which everyone is assured of the right to express their views and be represented. Promoting this dialogue is the third pillar of the strategy, which embodies a political appeal to reinvest in rights and social cohesion, that is in a form of public life that creates the conditions for the exercise of and access to rights, solidarity and participation.

This volume brings together contributions by intellectuals whose concerns are reflected in the Council of Europe's own commitments: social justice, institutional transparency and the exercise of democracy and rights



Thorbjørn Jagland

Secretary General of the Council of Europe

INTRODUCTION

This 22nd volume of the Trends in social cohesion series, *Rethinking progress and ensuring a secure future for all: what we can learn from the crisis* appears in a period of deep uncertainty. In such a context, it is now extremely difficult to maintain confidence in the future in our contemporary European societies which have become accustomed to the prospect of economic growth and to viewing the promise of greater social cohesion on the basis of trends in a single statistic, GDP. But for some time now, this trend has been undermined by a redistribution of opportunities and wealth in the world, by disproportionate concentration levels, by the inability to maintain jobs for all solely for reasons of competitiveness and, above all, by the limited natural resources and the threat of global warming. The papers presented here show the extent to which the race for growth – spurred on by encouragement for consumption – has also led to spiralling over-indebtedness of households and – today – of states themselves.

Envisaging progress in a context of reduced material resources – following years of counting on abundance – requires a collective relearning of the values and meanings of community and individual life and the creation of new opportunities for dialogue, exchanges, fulfilment and creativity.

For a variety of reasons, the foundations of trust in public institutions have also been called into question. People are no longer reassured by these institutions. On the one hand, their response to citizens' deep-rooted concerns is limited exclusively to security measures, leaving unanswered any quest for an extended form of security, understood as trust in others, in the future, in community action and common goods. The excessive focus on criminalisation, particularly of migrants, to divert attention from deteriorating social equity generates widespread mistrust, with adverse consequences for any chance of building a social vision of the future which pools the efforts of everyone. On the other hand, public institutions act in a piecemeal way, often in competition with each other, making it difficult for citizens to understand and appreciate the action taken. The recent financial crisis has also given rise to imbalances – hard to justify from the general interest point of view – between public aid for private financial structures and support for citizen-based initiatives and proposals.

For their part, the markets and economic stakeholders take risks, and it is the community that suffers the consequences. In addition, major corpo-

rations contaminate government policies, hence the confusion between private and public interests.

In this context of mistrust, the illusion of unlimited material progress and of the possibility of “constant improvement”, ignoring any limitation, even going so far as to deny the foundations and benefits of justice and fairness, makes it imperative to maintain social “peace”, equating to the pursuit of security policies. Such policies are the other side of the coin of growing inequalities.

Rebuilding trust and confidence today therefore means looking for other concepts underpinning community life. As the Bolivian Government recently said at the United Nations, we need to move on from the idea of living better to living well: “Living Well means living within a community, a brotherhood, and particularly completing each other, without exploiters or exploited, without people being excluded or people who exclude, without people being segregated or people who segregate ... Living Well rather means complementing one another and not competing against each other, sharing, not taking advantage of one’s neighbour, living in harmony among people and with nature, more time for the family, friends ... community engagement ... ”.¹

The Council of Europe’s work to promote social cohesion ties in with this approach. In defining it as the capacity of a society to ensure the well-being of all its members on the basis of the principle of shared or co-responsibility, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation, the Council of Europe is calling for democratic reflection on the meaning of the well-being of all in Europe today.²

In addition, in order to rebuild trust, there has to be an acknowledgement that virtually everywhere in our societies there is a debate about the roles of the authorities and a plethora of citizen-based initiatives in various areas of social and economic life, prompting a new vision of living as a community.

In defining the meaning of the concept of the well-being of all, the Council of Europe asked citizens in a number of towns and settings (neighbourhoods, businesses, schools, public services, etc.) to state their views. One

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1. For the complete English version of “The concept of Living Well”, see www.bolivi-aun.org/cms/?page_id=621 accessed on 6 August 2010.
 2. Definition adopted in the Council of Europe’s *Revised strategy for social cohesion*, June 2004; “A new strategy for social cohesion”, Council of Europe, July 2010.

of the big surprises that emerged from the experimental work carried out in several European countries is the strong emphasis on the immaterial aspects of well-being, highlighted as constituting the foundations of life in society. Our fellow European citizens are therefore searching for meaning, recognition, a second chance, creativity, the ability to express their views and be heard in public life, privacy, transparency, reciprocity and so on. They also want towns on a human scale, less pollution, time to spend with their families and friends, and time to engage in enjoyable pursuits with others. These views show certain general principles of living well for everyone, to which citizens subscribe and reflect a degree of unanimity beyond any differences in roles and situations.³

In asking everyone, as citizens, to reflect individually and collectively in small homogenous groups formed for that purpose, the Council of Europe gave both weak and strong players the opportunity to express themselves in one and the same forum, with everybody's views having the same value. These joint deliberative approaches led to the formulation of ideas on how to achieve the well-being of all. The approach suggested by the Council of Europe shows that it is possible to regenerate community energy, embark upon processes to learn about the common good and think about new spaces for sharing, where everyone has a role to play. Citizens are aware of this as individuals and as members of a group.

Nonetheless, there is growing pessimism about the possibilities for being in control of our community lives and for change in order to move towards living well. The roots of this pessimism can be found, in part, in false community aspirations (for instance, increased consumption). It is essential to find the courage to combat the inertia to which this type of pessimism gives rise.

All the contributions in this publication agree – with some slight differences – on a fairly negative analysis of our societies and our behaviour, but at the same time it is not easy to identify the key players and processes required for transformation, as Massimo Salvadori points out in his preface. And for good reason! Trust in the ability of politics to support change is at its lowest.

3. The methodological aspects and results of the experimental trials carried out by the Council of Europe are set out in the publication *Involving citizens and communities in securing societal progress for the well-being of all*, Methodological guide, published in 2010 (French version); see also the SPIRAL website: <https://spiral.cws.coe.int/>.

Overcoming our fears of dealing with the impossible requires us to think long and hard about the attribution and distribution of responsibility. Are we perhaps too dependent on a concept of responsibility based on delegation, thereby denying the need for co-decision-making, co-production, co-responsibility? Are we perhaps too used to a limited and biased concept of responsibility, one linked to specific interests, which is easier to manage and more “convenient” from a number of points of view? Are we perhaps too accustomed to regarding the public institutions as having exclusive societal responsibilities, such as combating poverty, climate change, or the need to build plurality for coexistence in diversity? Are we perhaps so entrenched in doubt that we are unable to act in any other way because our expectations of the conduct of others have not been fulfilled? Are we perhaps incapable of jointly envisaging the world for our future generations?

In attempting to answer these questions, the Council of Europe is exploring the concept of shared responsibility, multi-actor governance and their implications,⁴ that is, the concept of a new political culture of democratic responsibility, confidence and reciprocity. If this new culture is to take hold, it needs not only political legitimacy but also forums for deliberation and trialling new solutions in the management of common goods – including public services – which would ensure a regaining of confidence in each other and in the future.

The authors of the papers in this volume are all well known for their contribution to human welfare-oriented thinking. They have all dedicated their lives and energy to help bring about a more humane and fairer world. Since we have to be able to believe in change and in dialogue for this change, the Council of Europe has asked these authors to help us question the foundations of the crisis and mistrust. We thank them for their contributions.

We must all seek ways to find solutions and move towards the well-being of all, including that of future generations.

Gilda Farrell

*Head of the Social Cohesion Research and Development Division
DG Social Cohesion – Council of Europe*

4. A charter of shared social responsibilities is in preparation.

Preface

1. From the certainties of the past to the outstanding issues of today

That our world is undergoing a radical transformation, in the shape of a crisis that is not economic but structural and epochal in nature, cannot be denied, since that would mean closing one's eyes to the reality that surrounds us. The current crisis is both horizontal and vertical: horizontal since, despite the huge differences between continents, countries, regions and cities worldwide, they are all affected in view of the dense network of ties that now exists between them; vertical since everywhere it brings into play relations between population groups across the social scale. It indeed concerns the rich, the poor and the not-so-poor, the summits of economic power; workers with different levels of skills, jobs and earnings; the employed and the unemployed; employers' and employees' organisations; those enjoying citizenship rights and immigrants deprived of such rights; state institutions; religions and religious bodies, which all over the world – albeit in greatly differing circumstances – are faced with the challenge of asserting in their mutual relations the principles of freedom and equal rights for all religions (unlike the intolerant fundamentalist movements that accord these principles no recognition); the authorities that have to contend with the problem of urban insecurity and terrorist threats. One of the key issues here is the relationship that has emerged between the power of the economic sphere with its intertwined financial, industrial and increasingly media oligarchies, on one hand, and, on the other hand, governments, institutions and parties, in a word – politics. We can indeed say that the present crisis, which has been looming for about 30 years, is the first genuine global crisis, even more so than the one that broke out in 1929.

However, this crisis not only affects institutions, individuals' economic and social circumstances and the multiple loci of power, it also has a significant impact on public opinion, which can be seen to be in the grips of widespread uncertainty and anxiety, leading to a lack of confidence in the future. The economic, social and institutional crisis is accordingly engendering a moral, spiritual and intellectual crisis. This lack of confidence is unprecedented in modern history. Indeed, from the age of the Enlightenment, the reformism of the great 18th-century rulers, the industrial revolution and the American and French revolutions, the allied victory over the Nazi and fascist regimes and Japanese militarist imperialist, the emergence of the welfare state in America and Europe, the West's headlong

economic development in the post-1945 era, the rise of the Communist myth in the socialist states, the promises of decolonisation, right up to the victorious assaults of the neo-liberal offensive in the last two decades of the 20th century, modern-day history has always been marked by a mindset that is the converse of that of today.

The liberals and the socialists, the communists and the fascists, those who opposed state intervention in the economy and those who favoured it to a greater or lesser degree, all were convinced of the human race's ability to take control of its own destiny, guaranteeing the ever-greater expansion of productive forces and creating new types of societies and even human beings in the quest for a better future. It can be noted that this belief was not shattered by the increasingly devastating wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions, nor by far-reaching upheavals in the economic, politico-social and international orders. All the great political forces tending in opposite directions invariably came up with their own infallible solutions for a future social renewal.

In the initial stages of the globalisation era, neo-liberalism promised the universal victory of a new economy, a new politics, a new society, a new ethics founded on individual initiative, relieved of obsolete state intervention and of paralysing state controls, and a burgeoning democracy. However, the resounding failure of the neo-liberal solution – brought to light by the huge depression that began to rage in 2008 – has resulted in serious doubts about the way out of the crisis, the objectives to be pursued and those capable of taking up the task of setting humanity back on track. In my opinion, the most significant sign of the prevailing anxiety lies in the question of the relationship between material growth and the natural environment. From the outset of the great adventure of industrial, scientific and technological progress, unlimited growth in the forces of production was on all sides regarded as an absolute, unquestionable good. The charges levelled against it had nothing to do with its ever-faster pace but with the fact that the distribution of the goods it produced caused too unjust inequalities. No one had even the slightest inkling that the constant quantitative growth could carry within it the seeds of a terribly destructive force, whose fiercest blows were to be the depletion of the natural resources on which our development depends and the uncontrolled pollution of the environment: two consequences which, together, culminated in the great present-day concerns about the relationship between development and its sustainability.

At the same time, there is another key factor which has a significant impact on our state of anxiety. That is the gradually growing impression that institutions – states, international organisations, governments, parliaments – are not equal to today's problems, that democratic institutions, where they exist, are being drained of substance, that a new map is being drawn of powers that evade all oversight and are even doing away with it, subjugating politics to their own aims and interests. This is causing a political transformation similar to that which occurred in the economic sphere: just as the endless growth of productive forces perceived as a source of guaranteed well-being led to disillusion, people have lost faith in politics because it has proved incapable of keeping its promise to ensure the sound running of society. Modern economists and politicians, whether of a liberal-democrat, social-democrat, communist, fascist, reformist or revolutionary tendency, have, for over two centuries, shared and propagated the belief that society is perfectly capable of constantly pushing back the limits of material well-being and building forms of power fit to govern and to master the processes in place conferring order and, ultimately, stability on them. These certainties have now collapsed and huge questions are being raised. People are looking for the answers, but they are proving evasive and very uncertain. We have entered an age of huge, unprecedented challenges. We certainly can no longer assume that we hold the infallible keys of a social science capable of guiding us at present and in future, as too many people mistakenly believed they possessed in the past. On the contrary, we are desperately seeking the right tools that can help us first to understand the situation and then to act upon it. The circumstances are difficult and require not just careful, critical analysis but also active, constructive thinking. Indeed, whatever obstacles stand in our way, in all situations it is necessary to separate the wheat from the chaff, to distinguish between letting ourselves be bent into submission and reacting positively so as to assume our responsibilities toward ourselves and others.

2. Diagnosis of the current crisis and its nature

This book is a collection of essays by scholars from different countries, professional backgrounds and specialist fields. Apart from myself they are, in order of appearance: Luciano Gallino, François Flahault, Claus Offe, Zygmunt Bauman, Tariq Ramadan, Tim Cooper and Philip Pettit. They address three main aspects of the crisis: analysis of its causes, characteristics and effects (what might be termed "diagnoses"), consideration of possible means of countering it and preventing it from recurring and suggestions

as to which actors, if any, can come forward as candidates to set a new course for human history – since that is the dramatic, urgent order of the day – or in other words “prognoses” and “remedies”. It would naturally be desirable for all of these aspects to be addressed with equal certainty. However, that is not and cannot be the case, since the nature of the present crisis makes it far easier to analyse its causes than to determine the means and the prospects of overcoming it. This is because it is not a crisis within the system but a crisis of the system; because the institutions’ functioning, the choices to be made and the desirable individual and collective behaviours are not amenable to proven recipes; in short, because problems such as those pertaining to a bearable form of development, to quantitative economic growth (which too many people would still like to be able to consider limitless), to forms of consumption, to power relations in the economic and political spheres and the ways in which they overlap and co-mingle, to mass migration from the poorer to the richer countries and its implications, to social harmony and security and to new ideological and religious conflicts require a huge, unprecedented effort of cultural, institutional, social and political innovation, since the old solutions can be seen to be largely worn out. Taking this into account, it is easy to comprehend – at least to my mind – that the diagnoses proposed in the essays contained in this book appear pretty convincing whereas the remedies and the prognoses seem to pose difficulties. This can give an impression of prevailing pessimism, which should nonetheless be understood for what it in fact is: certainly not a tendency to capitulate, whether intellectually or politically, but a full awareness of the importance of the issues at stake, concern about the state of affairs, an invitation to initiate the necessary broad public debate on this subject and a call for urgent mobilisation of common energies. The authors’ shared aim is indeed to make a contribution to the debate.

I therefore summarise here the authors’ broadly converging analyses of the crisis, beginning with Gallino and Offe. The former starts from a key hypothesis: contrary to that which Samuel Huntington contends in his well-known paper.⁵ Over the last three decades the tendency has been towards not a clash of civilisations, but rather a process of unification, giving rise to a “civilisation of dimensions never seen before”, “a world civilisation with original characteristics”, which – and this is very important – is not “simply an expanded Western civilisation”, since its basic components are not Western cultures or institutions undergoing an enlargement

5. Huntington, S. P., *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*, Simon & Schuster, 2005.

but, first and foremost, the multiple elements of the chain of mechanisms which, on different levels, has led to the globalised economy. These include: the crossing of boundaries; the evolution and structural adaptation of the sub-systems of social organisation; the interlinking of the economies, labour markets and cultures of different countries, considerably enhanced by the constant development of communication technologies; the growing impact of the strategies devised and implemented by financial and industrial decision-makers in a context of close interconnection between the economic and political elites. All these elements constituted the essence of neo-liberal globalisation, which has gained a firm foothold by crossing all the barriers between democratic and authoritarian political regimes, indeed giving rise to a world civilisation in which, following the years of triumphant growth, a huge economic depression has been brewing, transforming the triumphalism and its promises of growth and security into a far-reaching economic and social crisis and general insecurity. The depression had its "immediate cause in the development of a financial system based on debt", which saw the largest industrial corporations surrender to the lures of frenzied financial speculation. A development of this kind would not have been possible without the emergence of a key factor: public authorities' fundamental renunciation, on account of their subordination to the economic elites, of the exercise of any form of oversight, above all over banks and capital flows, thereby relinquishing a supervisory activity that had in the circumstances become increasingly complex and difficult. This resulted in genuine powerlessness among governments in a context where "rather than setting itself the objective of regulating the economy in order to adapt it to society, politics has committed itself to adapting society to the economy.". We accordingly saw the advent of a world civilisation which, in the situation engendered by the economic depression, manifests itself as a "crisis of civilisation", caused to a large extent by neo-liberal ideology, with its ancient roots, which rejects regulatory intervention by the state in the name of economic agents' full freedom of initiative and claims that it is capable of spontaneously producing a harmonious natural order. This is an argument which "when applied within a democratically constituted society, in reality becomes an argument against democracy". Among political leaders of recent decades the main proponents of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism were, as is well known, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan; however, Gallino rightly draws attention to another aspect, which usually goes unheeded or is suppressed, namely that those who supported the idea of leaving the door open to the liberalisation of capital movements, in sum to deregulation, included not just the UK

Conservatives and the US Republicans but also French President François Mitterrand, Jacques Delors, Pierre Bérégovoy and the Democrat Bill Clinton (one might add Jimmy Carter and Tony Blair). Against this background two very important processes took place: firstly, in the United States and western Europe a true merger of those engaging in high-level business and those engaging in high-level politics occurred, characterised by a revolving door between the two sectors (which effectively triggered their complicity in the weakening, and ultimately the surrender, of all forms of public oversight); secondly, Europe's left-wing parties increasingly yielded to the influence of neo-liberal ideology, paving the way for a long series of electoral defeats considerably facilitated by the fogging of their own political and social reasoning.

Analysing the state of affairs, Gallino stresses the principal symptoms to be observed: a huge imbalance between economic and technological resources and the living conditions of the world's population as a whole; a way of living which makes human beings subservient to the requirements of industry until they are enslaved by it; the unopposed dominance of an economic model aiming for limitless growth which comes up against the issue of its own sustainability; the accumulation of ever-greater social inequalities, of pockets of poverty, of intolerable standards of living, hygiene and health for too many people. A mentality that, through loud advertising campaigns, exalts the monetarisation of every aspect of human existence, an economic system that regards workers excluded from the labour market as "simply surplus to requirements", swells the ranks of destabilised youth and ensures that the gospel of consumption replaces the rules of democracy in citizens' minds; the progress of a widespread regression into a state of civil and political infantilism which produces what Richard Sennet described as a "corrosion of character" in the victims of "flexible capitalism": these are all essential characteristics of the world civilisation in which we find ourselves. The sociologist's diagnosis is harsh, very harsh, and we must ask ourselves whether it is a true reflection of the reality that surrounds us.

On reading the essays gathered together here it is easy to see that Gallino's diagnosis is largely shared by the other authors, with some minor differences of focus. Let us consider the vital issue of the relationship between an economy dominated by financial and industrial oligarchies and the threats it poses to liberal democracies. Offe underlines the contrast that has emerged between the ongoing affirmation in rhetorical terms of the principles of the rule of law, human rights, social protection of the most vulnerable and international peace and a state of affairs which

reveals how “we often turn out to be entirely unable to enforce and redeem these routinely and widely proclaimed normative standards.” We are in a situation where “a tiny minority of financial market actors cannot be stopped from inflicting severe damage on the global economy”.

Offe then makes an acute observation regarding the similarities between Soviet-style state socialism that proved to be a failure and the capitalist democracies which gave birth to the current great crisis. The latter appear to be the opposite of the former; however, by digging deeper, the link between the two can be revealed. State socialism set out to impose quantitative development strategies which, in the name of future progress, placed heavy burdens and constraints on society in terms of present restrictions of rights and freedoms. In turn, the capitalist societies dominated by neo-liberal ideology “have institutionalized an accounting frame of ‘costs’ and ‘benefits’ that is seriously defective in that it tends to extol quantifiable benefits of efficiency, growth, and competitiveness while leaving large categories of ‘qualitative’ costs (ranging from the humiliation of workers to long term environmental damages) entirely unaccounted for.” It follows that “democratic capitalism depends upon economic growth in the same way as state socialism depends on repression”.

The same questions and opinions recur in the paper by Ramadan, who considers that what is in place is a form of economic globalisation, an approach by the mass media, a material process and spiritual movements which “have brought the individual back to a sense of dispossession which may render the democratic ideal void of substance”. For his part, Flahault notes the ground being gained by economic thinking and political discourse that abandon the quest for the common good and propose a concept of rationality ensuring that the human propensity to excess is forgotten. A form of economic development that, setting itself no limits, feeds an instrumental vision of nature and a utilitarian concept of society. As Offe points out, this idea that laws should be dictated by the economy is common to both Marxism and neo-liberalism, which regards GDP as the principal criterion whereby the common good can be measured and views economic growth – not further qualified – as the yardstick for progress.

But who can still believe that? In asking himself who is responsible for the crisis, Pettit in turn stresses a frequent leitmotif of the papers presented here, which is that the causes lie in a system where the “absence of suitable regulation” paved the way firstly for frenzied competition between economic players and secondly for a lack of oversight by the public authorities. Accordingly, the blame for this “fiasco” lies jointly with the

central banks, which were given full discretion to act as they wished, and with the regulatory agencies, governments and parliaments, which did not impede them from doing so. The governments' serious error was that they allowed excessive financial risks to be taken thanks to a deregulation process which proved to be beneficial solely for the relatively rich.

Gallino describes the effects of the crisis on the existence of numerous human beings as a regression that makes them feel powerless and socially insignificant and in point of fact infantilises them. Ramadan too, in describing the causes and effects of the "profound crisis of confidence" that is afflicting Western society and the entire world, spares no criticism: the nation-state and the cultures that developed within it have yielded before the advance of a globalisation which in social and psychological terms is marked by "strong claims to separate identities" in respect of foreigners and, primarily, Muslims, feeding racism and xenophobia and hence the sense of insecurity. There is a growing loss of confidence in politics, which favours short-term decisions over those concerning structural problems and requiring a broader perspective. Rights and freedoms are being restricted in the name of greater security. Civics education, citizens' interest in institutions and a sense of individual and collective responsibility are in steady decline, with the result that the debate about power, class, social exclusion and growing poverty is losing significance. In the end, active political participation is being replaced by a passive subordination to the messages conveyed by the media, going hand in hand with the emergence of a style of political leadership that is strongly personalised and populist in nature. Economy and finance operate on the fringes of democratic governance and evade the rules of democracy. All these elements "suggest that democratic participation is more formal than actual". This is a road that leads to the spread of political, civil and moral corruption.

Bauman focuses on a "new migration" from the east and the south to the west and on the questions it raises about "the bond between identity and citizenship, individual and place, neighbourhood and belonging". Cities, originally built to meet their inhabitants' need for safety, "are these days associated more often with danger than security". Within the city "mixophilia" and "mixophobia" coexist in an unsettled relationship; wariness, uncertainty and fear of everything foreign are growing. Human rights based on the principle of equality are construed as "the right to remain different"; at best this gives rise to a feeling of tolerance, far removed from one of solidarity. These are attitudes which, having spread from the United States where "it all started", are gaining a firm foothold in Europe too.

Cooper stresses one important aspect, also mentioned by Ramadan, which is the priority given to problems that concern present contingencies, that is our daily lives, without paying sufficient heed to their general implications: "We live immersed in the activities of the moment, too engrossed in what we are doing – whether work, shopping or leisure – to think consciously about connections with the world around us." In short, we disregard the ecological and social implications of the production of goods and services. In this way we develop a short-sightedness that is reflected in a "culture of immediacy." The present devours the future.

3. The regulatory function of a non-utopian vision of progress

So that humanity – that is all of us, whatever country we come from and wherever we are positioned on the social scale, with our own individual personalities and our pending or unresolved problems – can start out afresh on a better course than at present, it is necessary to believe in some concept of progress and to identify the means of achieving it. On the subject of the type of progress possible in these complex and difficult circumstances Offe has some very interesting things to say. His starting point is decidedly negative, since he states that it is quite clear that "our societies are evidently largely incapable of avoiding (or effectively coping with) self-inflicted moral and physical disasters and self-destructive crises". This incapacity necessitates a "progressive alternative", which – and this is really important – can no longer be conceived in line with past ideologies and utopian ideals as a "holistic blueprint of a 'good' society". Offe emphasises that what we need is not new values, new visions or new principles "such as revolutionary theorists of former times were busy spelling out" but rather the ability to use with renewed energy the tools that already exist to cope with the crisis and prevent "civilisational relapses". This is an enormous task, in that it consists in confronting the major challenges of the 21st century – energy, security, the climate – but it is not unfeasible. Like Gallino, Offe notes that the greatest crisis of global capitalism since the Second World War broke out at the very time when "at least in Europe, Social Democrats faced their sharpest decline", pointing out that social democracy embraced the neo-liberal idea of progress which in the end was profoundly discredited. So what is needed is not to sustain the illusion that we must resume the "forward march" in directions that have already proved mistaken, but rather to apply certain brakes "thus protecting ourselves individually, as well as society as a whole, against the tendency of 'sliding back'".

What Offe proposes has nothing to do with the concept of necessary progress: it rather depends on choices that can be made if so wished. The progress he refers to is not the objective outcome of historical developments but something which is “essentially contested”; it is moreover “costly” and involves a “social conflict” between those who are willing to bear the cost and those who do not wish to do so, a conflict which must nonetheless ultimately be resolved. Indifference and fatalism are the enemies of a concept of achievable progress now regarded as politically irrelevant; to revive it there is a need to enhance the “sense of difference” or the belief that “a different world is possible”, which has its origins in the liberal and socialist heritage and without which democracy becomes pointless. To make his reasoning entirely clear, he draws a distinction between what he calls “gross progress” and “net progress”: the former solely pays attention to economic performance and takes no account of negative social side-effects; the latter is “a qualitative measure of the increment of liberation and the enhancement of well-being that results from the process in question”. Net progress is based on two chief principles: firstly that decisions relating to collective well-being should involve “deliberative procedures” guided by an “enlightened ambition” and secondly that the individuals most exposed to the negative side-effects of gross progress should be the key beneficiaries of such decisions.

4. The remedies

We have seen how, sounding out the possibilities of giving the economic depression and the social crisis that are disrupting our lives a positive outcome, Offe calls for the effective exercise of democratic procedures and an enlightened ambition characterised by a sense of responsibility towards the most vulnerable members of society. Here we are directly entering the terrain of the means of preparing to achieve this. On this subject I consider it must be said that, although the authors of the essays seem to be largely in agreement on the diagnosis and sure of their analysis, with regard to the treatment, or better the remedies to be applied, a largely unanswered question arises – not so much what should be done as who is capable of taking on the task of overcoming the crisis? I already alluded to this issue above, but I now wish to revert to it, underlining that the depth of the crisis is in point of fact revealed by the difficulty of correlating on one hand the objectives to be pursued and, on the other, the forces capable of assuming the burden of resolving the problems.

Let us take a brief look at the main views propounded by the different authors. We will see how wide-ranging and extremely challenging they are.

Offe says that an end should be made to growth that threatens the ecosystem, while ensuring a minimum income for all. Bauman emphasises the role that Europe has to play: becoming a true community of nations able to take an active and decisive part in transmitting to a now dangerous world values which tend in the direction of a "commonwealth of humanity", albeit not in the near future, and which foster awareness that the destinies of security, freedom and democracy are now played out on a single stage, that of the planet as a whole; he likewise points out that we are faced with an alternative between the impetuses towards a form of closing in on ourselves and those towards the assumption of a shared responsibility, that our era is one of "political experimentation" that can but take place in "unknown territory", in which it is no longer possible to envisage maintaining existing institutions while merely broadening their scope. Ramadan calls for the restoration of a climate of confidence, for better utilisation of young people's openness to cultural diversity and pluralism, for an effort to revive values of social, human, scientific and technological progress, for a focus on civics education and the effective institutionalisation of cultural and religious pluralism so as to promote co-existence and overcome fear of diversity. Flahault hopes for a revision of the traditional way of conceiving human rights, which, beyond the traditional goal of protecting individuals from abuses of power, must open up to the broader consideration of the "common good", and an awakening of public opinion to the fact that, insofar as they themselves constitute a power, economic activities carried out so freely that they evade all forms of control must also be limited by the political authorities; this requires a reconsideration of the classical theory of the separation of powers as propounded by Montesquieu. It is a line of thought also followed by Pettit. He points out the need to enforce "strict separation of business and government", considered just as important as the separation between Church and State achieved in the West, and to ensure effective democratic control over the actions of both governments and the "powers that rule our economy" which are governed solely by the decisions of private agents. Lastly, Cooper sees a possibility for optimism about the future on the (binding!) condition that bearable sustainable development is made a realistic hypothesis through a "radical transformation in our approach to consumption": this necessarily entails a "greater sense of long-term responsibility" based on a different understanding of the quality of life and achievable by a debate that will make the public better informed and more aware of the challenges to be faced, persuading it that the two major objectives of environmental security and social justice are reasonable and possible.

5. The outstanding issue: which agents of transformation?

In thinking about what should be done and who can tackle the huge job of changing things, Bauman highlights, firstly, how difficult and complex the tasks are and, secondly, how necessary. He stresses that what is at stake is nothing less than implementing “an effective planetary policy” and that this job, albeit difficult, can be done not by “a single planetary government” but by a “continuous polylogue” among governments (I might add first and foremost among the governments of the biggest countries in the world, the only ones that have the necessary resources, if they are willing to use them). Gallino warns that the absence of such a polylogue and lack of agreement in the face of “various forms of unsustainability” would exacerbate the threat of uncontrolled economic development and the threat of new conflicts between states, social groups or segments of the world population. But – and this is the outstanding issue – who is capable of assuming the major responsibilities this entails? This is where the risk of defeat lies.

The dominant note that emerges from the essays gathered together here is a great distrust – on which I have already had occasion to comment – in existing governments and political parties. I will simply cite Offe and Ramadan. Both see lifeless parties on all sides, incapable of the required initiatives, loaded down with current political concerns and deaf to pressing present and future needs, and both set their hopes on civil society movements. Offe writes that he believes that, to return to progressive politics and combat indifference and cynical acquiescence to the regression affecting our society, we should trust not “political parties, but ... social and political movements and civil society actors”. For Ramadan “The solution will probably not come from the politicians themselves, but from civic movements, associations, social workers, students and women (more and more involved on the ground).” It is they who give expression to hope and to the trust that there are, after all, people who can become the bearers of that hope. Gallino’s position with regard to prospects for the future is, however, bleak. Lucid in his analysis of the state of affairs and of what is not working, he nurtures serious doubts about the forces capable of acting to open up a new way forward. The reasoning underpinning his viewpoint is very clear: the crisis is not only social and economic in nature, it does not threaten the environment alone, it does not solely concern the degree of exploitation of resources that the planet can bear, it does not merely generate great inequalities, it does not just place the substantial power of the economic elites at odds with democratic institutions, it penetrates the very fibre of human beings making them,

for the most part, incapable of reacting. This is the effect of the infantilisation process described by Benjamin R. Barber, which leads Gallino to the conclusion that “to expect individuals whose personalities are shaped in this way at a deep level to seek to transform the world civilisation in crisis is not only a vain hope; it is completely meaningless because they are the world civilisation”. And, with regard to the governments which allowed the crisis to brew until it erupted, it is again Gallino who observes that they certainly could and should assume the responsibility of addressing the outstanding problems and taking steps to modify their structural causes, but – to paraphrase a famous quotation from Tomasi di Lampedusa’s *The Leopard* – he fears that the changes they decide are not proper changes and that they are rather seeking to ensure that “everything remains as it was before”. We can but ask ourselves: Who is right – the greatest optimists or the deepest pessimists?

Let me conclude with some personal considerations. I think that the distrust of politics, that is to say regarding the action of governments and political parties, is fully justified by factual observation. The problem of how to counter and overcome this distrust accordingly raises huge questions and just as great doubts. It is certainly true that all over the world there are movements and currents of opinion originating from within civil society that are attempting to make up lost ground, generating interesting and positive discussions, proposing solutions, and voicing their awareness of the seriousness of this crisis of the “world civilisation”. But all this merely comes down to sowing seeds, which is indeed of great help but still requires politicians capable of harvesting the fruits: departing from the metaphor, there can be no impact on operational decisions without institutional players – which can only be organised political forces in the form of parties, parliaments, governments or international organisations – capable of bringing together the voices and demands of civil society, which are calling for a new kind of progress, and of giving them a direction and a future. These players currently seem to be missing, and they are indeed absent or at least very deficient; but if it proves impossible to build a relationship between the two sides, we will only be able to stand by and watch the advent of an era of decline, disorder and destructive conflicts.

The other aspect which I wish to address concerns governments in particular. While witnessing the endless triumphs of science and technology, which offer an increasingly extraordinary potential for humanity, we see governments in the clutches of uncertainty, seized by weakness and a lack of determination to take the necessary decisions which they them-

selves claim they wish to adopt and implement. Faced with bold choices such as those imposed by environmental protection, the urgent need to end frenzied consumerism and a predatory way of life that systematically benefits the strongest and the richest, governments hesitate for fear of challenging too powerful interests and losing voters' support on account of the cost of the indispensable changes. Each government primarily tends its own garden and shows itself to be reluctant or hostile to agree with other governments on the appropriate international mechanisms. There is reason to reflect – and it is a very sad reflection – on the relentless energy states have always shown and continue to show during major wars. When Mars sounds his trumpet, within a few days or months governments impose drastic measures that have far-reaching consequences for lifestyles, the orientation of production, consumption and so on. On such occasions they demonstrate their determination to mobilise, to the point of pain, the energies required to cause death and destruction and ultimately enable their armies to triumph. This raises the question why states and governments are not capable of demonstrating equal vitality with a view to promoting sustainable economic development, social justice and international peace. Where is the intrinsic flaw in a political strategy that fails to meet the needs of humanity? Who will change it? As I have already said, this is the great outstanding question, but – we have to admit – today there are no appropriate responses. The starting point must be to raise awareness of the serious difficulties we have to untangle. It is in order to make their own contribution that the authors of this book have raised their voices in line with the spirit of Kant's call on intellectuals, confronted with those in power, to exercise that "freedom of the pen" which is "the only safeguard of the rights of the people". However, at the same time, we must be aware that the scholars' contribution will remain incomplete if it is not followed by action to change the things that need changing, if it remains a mere premise. Several of the authors have shown how powerful forces are successfully striving around the world to ensure that minds are dulled and the desire for change diminished. This is indeed not an unprecedented occurrence, but today, to reiterate my opening comments, we face new important, difficult challenges that must be taken up by all who believe that a better world is possible and who intend to act, so as to make their own contribution to this effort regardless of the obstacles.

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The idea of progress

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1. The tensions within an idea

If, rather than being gathered here in November 2008 in Strasbourg, at a time of severe international economic recession, we had been attending the inauguration of the Great Exhibition of May 1851 in the London of Queen Victoria, Lord Palmerston and the German exile Karl Marx, the answers to the question “Where is the world going?” would have been radically different. At the time, faith in guaranteed progress, the conviction that the future was bringing humanity closer to certain improvement, which might run up against difficulties but could not be stopped, constituted a common credo for the enterprising bourgeoisie at the head of the process of industrialisation and the workers employed in the new factories, for liberals and socialists. The latter differed in their view of the means of achieving progress, but concurred that it was not only possible, but also unstoppable and could gradually be spread from the European core to the rest of the world, due to the combined conquests of labour organisation, science and technology and politics.

A little more than a century and a half has gone by since 1851, and I think that, looking at the water which has passed under the bridge of history, none of those who are present today could share this view of the world’s future, which is so optimistic as to appear decidedly naive. Progress has since continued on a large scale, some of it staggering, but faith in progress as a global unifier and the certain destiny of humankind has been overturned since the early 20th century. The last century literally swept away the illusion of necessary progress carved in the laws of historical development, which had been the credo of Comte, the father of positivist sociology, as well as Marx, the father of modern communism. Although the former favoured an evolutionistic approach and the latter Hegelian dialectics read with a revolutionary spin, they spread the idea that it had finally become possible to establish a “scientific politics”, to predict and therefore plan the development of economic and political institutions, and to forge a new type of man guided in his actions by the social sciences. I have already said that the 20th century swept away the illusion of necessary progress. It did so because it was the century of the cruellest and most devastating inter-state and civil wars in history, it was

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the century of the great tyrannies, the century of the Shoah and other appalling genocides, and also the century of the great economic depression of 1929. It also did so because it was the century which saw the rise and fall of the communist regimes, which, following the human slaughter and civil and moral catastrophe of 1914-18, had triumphantly seized and re-raised the flag of necessary progress in the name of a genuine renaissance of humankind. The means for achieving this renaissance were to be a policy approach rendered infallible by the science of Marxism, a regime which blazed a trail designated by the party of "progress" and its leaders capable of foreseeing the future, economic and social planning aimed at freeing everyone from material want, unprecedented spiritual well-being and cultural development, universal equality and self-government for the *demos*. History has passed its unequivocal judgment on the Soviet Union and the other countries controlled by communist regimes, laying bare the abyss between the intents and actual events, between the ideology of triumphant progress dictated by the objective laws of human development and the hard facts of the iron hand and despotic rule of the few over the many, with privileges for the former and poverty, spiritual suffering and political irrelevance for the latter. However, if 1914 marked the collapse of the bourgeois and liberal myth of progress, 1989 officially buried the myth of communism, which was in fact stillborn.

And yet the idea of progress had entered into modern history under another garb from that which it was subsequently given, first and foremost by positivists and Marxists, the theorists of its necessity, who were dazzled by the industrial revolution and the new machines which promised the infinite multiplication of the bread and the fishes. It had made its entry in the form not of a blinding vision of future omnipotence, but of a prudent vigilance, not as a fundamentalist theory of historical necessity, but as faith in a possible future always destined to be called into doubt and threatened by counter-reactions. This was the Enlightenment theory, which became submerged in a critical humanism, in reason and the subjective reasonableness of individuals and groups, and in the vision of a progress which had become possible insofar as the civilisation of traditions, the abandonment of fanaticism and dogmas, intellectual freedom, the acceptance of diversity and the politics of reform prevailed. This world view was antithetical to that of a necessary progress which imposed its principles and granted a right to coerce others so as to achieve one's own means and ends. Children of a pre-industrial era and culture, in their quest for the paths of a possible yet difficult and uncertain progress, the Enlightenment thinkers focused on the sphere of human relations, cultures, mentalities, ethics and politics in the conviction that the prerequi-

site for the common good consisted in being consciously determined and minded to improve things. The flame lit by Enlightenment figures such as d'Alembert, Diderot, Voltaire and Kant was by its very nature feeble and in need of being defended against the gusts of wind which threatened to blow it out, whilst that of the theorists of necessary progress, lit by the triumphs of the industrial revolution, was a torch fed by a fire that it was thought nobody would be able to extinguish. The tensions within the idea of modern progress can be perceived in these two opposing visions.

The passage, which was more a transformation, from the idea of possible progress subscribed to by the Enlightenment thinkers, for whom progress was necessarily a matter of human will, to the necessary progress propounded by the positivists and Marxists, according to whom the will could only be vested in impersonal History, was triggered by two revolutions: the French Revolution, which convinced philosophers such as Condorcet that the revolt had sparked off the endless, unstoppable age of progress, and the Industrial Revolution, which led Saint-Simon, the first of the positivists, to believe that it was the destiny of industry and the class of "industrialists", including all the working, non-parasitical social strata, to reconstruct society completely. For Condorcet the tool needed to build the new world was politics cured of its old vices, whilst for Saint-Simon it was positive scientific knowledge and the new economic order.

In 1850 Herzen had warned all those who, whether from an idealist standpoint such as Hegel, a positivist one such as Saint-Simon and Comte or a dialectical-materialist one such as Marx, believed that they had finally discovered the essential bonds which united the past with the future and that they were therefore able to gain a hold over history. He did so using words which deserve to be re-read: "If humanity were marching straight towards some goal, there would be no history, only logic ... If history were following a pre-defined script it would lose all interest ... History ... has neither limits nor preset routes."⁷ The significance of Herzen's theories lies in his emphasis on the role of will, which is to be understood not as a hymn to a voluntarism which knows no bounds, but rather as an acknowledgement that men achieve that which they render themselves capable of doing in practice, that they are not guided by a history that stands above them and manipulates them like puppets, and that they build with their own hands their successes and failures, their advances and retreats.

7. Herzen, A. I., *From the other Shore and the Russian People and Socialism*, London, 1956, pp. 134-135.

2. The lessons of the 20th century

I said above that the 20th century sounded the death-knell for the idea of necessary progress. But it also did so for the idea of possible progress, understood as the reign of the series of conditions which govern individual and collective well-being. The 20th century in fact offered the spectacle on the one hand of sectoral advances on a scale not seen in any other era, and on the other hand of huge tragedies and regressions.

Above all, in the sectors related to the physical and natural sciences and technology, great leaps forward took place linked to a genuine triumph of science and technology, which would have dazzled and consoled Bacon. In these sectors there have not been any hold-ups, but only astonishing successes. Men have equipped themselves with artificial arms capable of reaching the depths of the earth. Medicine has been able to cure our bodies, vanquishing diseases which appeared invincible and opening up the prospect of life expectancy beyond 100 years. The production of material goods for its part has reached great heights. New population groups and new social classes have attained hitherto inconceivable material well-being, have bettered their cultural standards, and have gained access to political participation. The process of decolonisation has freed many peoples from the colonial yoke. Women's rights movements have made historic conquests, even if they are far from having reached their goal. In the most developed countries political and civil rights have been broadened, and these rights have gradually been flanked by social rights to protect the most vulnerable. All of these strides forward have been of the utmost importance. These are the good lessons of the 20th century. But alongside them there are severely, tragically negative lessons.

Never before had human aggression been unleashed as in the 20th century, producing, thanks to the means of destructive power rendered possible by science and technology, devastation that transformed many parts of the world into graveyards. It was the century of the greatest massacres resulting from inter-state and civil wars, of technologically-assisted genocides sparked either by racial hatred or by projects for the future nurtured by planners with delusions of omnipotence. It was the century of totalitarian oppression. It was the century of recurring economic crises, the greatest of which, having its origins in America in 1929, spread poverty and desperation and caused acute political and social tensions, which in Germany paved the way for the Nazis' rise to power. It was the century of fear of nuclear catastrophe. It was the century which showed that the production of wealth continued, as in the past, to divide the countries of

the world and the social classes into those who were too rich and those who were too poor. It was also the century in which the human race's exploitation of the natural world reached a level at which the dangers of accelerating the great fight-back by nature which could ultimately prove man's undoing became increasingly apparent.

These therefore were the positive and the negative lessons of the 20th century, which, taken together, tell us that necessary progress is a fallen myth and that materially possible progress has not realised its potential, other than in a completely schizophrenic manner.

The legacy which the 20th century leaves for the 21st is unequivocal: whilst humanity has never before been so powerful, it has never been so worried about its future because the ways in which it exercises its power jeopardise its very survival. And today we are faced with two great emergencies: unchecked environmental devastation and the worst financial crisis to have struck the world since 1929.

3. The dual face of globalisation

Certain historians tell us that the current globalisation process is not the first in history. They are right. The first globalisation occurred between the 15th and 16th centuries, and it was followed by others, which gradually established increasingly dense networks of relations between the continents. Nevertheless, it is necessary to draw attention to the highly innovative nature of modern-day globalisation; its defining feature, marked first and foremost by the information technology revolution, is that it has granted political leaders, big industrialists and the major financial players the power to make decisions on a truly planetary scale regarding the production and distribution of the principal resources necessary for human life. The information technology revolution, a belated and unexpected vindication for Ptolemy, has made the world flat again, turning it into a kind of massive desktop on which millions and millions of computers are operating at the same time, allowing those at the keyboards, obeying world leaders' decisions, to gather and move capital, to buy and sell shares, to order the establishment or closure of production plants, and to set in motion the enormous ships which ply the seas, transporting endless flows of goods. This is therefore a whole new kind of globalisation. Whilst the great symbols of the globalisation created by the industrial revolution were the railways and the telegraph lines, those of contemporary globalisation are computers, high-speed trains and aircraft. This globalisation has profoundly changed the way in which goods are produced.

The industrial revolution with its developments led to the central role of the great factories, resulting in the concentration of labour accompanied by constant increases in the industrial sector's technical and administrative managerial staff, alongside the various arms of the state bureaucracy, which were themselves growing in line with the expansion and multiplication of the state's functions. Workers, technicians and public and private white-collar personnel worked in industry and administrative entities which guaranteed them a stable job that often lasted for the entire lifetime of the individuals concerned, unless localised crises of one or the other sector or general economic crises broke out. Moreover, and this is of key importance, the controls of the economy were in the hands of the individual countries' leading classes, of governments and of the grandees of industry and finance, who operated against the backdrop of systems not by chance designated the "national economy". The absolute sovereignty of the state entailed the exercise of ultimate decision-making authority over the economic entities located within its territory. Furthermore, taking the path opened up by Bismarck in 1880s Germany, the European countries, America and Australia began to recognise social rights protecting the weakest members of society, which were consolidated and became more widespread above all after the Second World War. These were the policies which, due to the primary – though certainly not exclusive – role of social democratic or otherwise socially inclined governments in pursuing them, came to be known by the name of the "social democratic compromise" between capitalism and the subordinate workforce.

However, starting in the 1970s this context was completely modified by the advent of globalisation and the gradual but rapid elimination of the foundations of industrial society as it had developed for two centuries. Like all the great changes in economic and social systems which have occurred throughout history, globalisation had two sides: one concerned the new modes of production and their organisational and technological prerequisites; the other was the gearing of the entire process primarily to serve the specific interests of those holding industrial and financial power and controlling the ideological structures seeking to legitimise it. The first opened up new frontiers for the production of goods; it intensified production, enormously expanding the labour catchment area by drawing into the capitalist market social classes and countries which had previously remained outside it, such as India, or which had previously been hostile to it, such as the Soviet Union, its empire and China. The second led to the unopposed dominion of small industrial and financial oligarchies and to an accumulation of wealth destined to make the rich yet richer still, un-

der the flag of what has been termed “market fundamentalism”. These are the two faces of globalisation.

4. Market fundamentalism: the ideology of globalisation

With the collapse of the Soviet empire and China’s opening up to ever more intense relations with the Western world, the market has not only grown immensely in geographical terms, but has also scored a resounding political and ideological victory. The battle fronts opened up by communism in 1917 closed in 1989; state bureaucratic planning had shown its own failings. In 1989, more than 10 years had already passed since the rise to power of Margaret Thatcher and eight years since that of Ronald Reagan, named specifically since both these leaders had taken to utmost lengths in their countries the political and ideological offensive of the neo-liberal conservatives whose slogan was, according to Mrs Thatcher’s well-known words, “there is no such thing as society ... there are individual men and women”: a head-on offensive against state intervention in the economy and against social policies linked to the Welfare State and, above all – at a time when the Communist regimes had already been severely battered by the tide of history but had not yet fallen – against European social democracy and the legacy of Roosevelt’s New Deal in America. Neo-conservatives and neo-liberals, who for 30 years remained political and cultural mainstream forces, expressed their ideology through a single word: deregulation. Their programme involved the dismantling of all constraints on full market freedom: first and foremost, lower taxation of the rich because this stimulated investment; politics at the service of an economy in the hands of individuals, since it was the latter who were capable of the innovation and rational cost-benefit calculations which would in the final analysis enrich and energise the whole community and therefore attain maximum general well-being, and because the expansion of market mechanisms, finally given entirely free rein, would spread its benefits from the highest to the lowest classes, and from the richest countries to the less rich or the decidedly poor. The role of individual states was to eradicate any hindrance to the action of the individuals at the helm of the market. This was the ideology of the theorists of market fundamentalism. Moreover, according to the canons of their ideology, just as full acceptance of the free market, as conceived by them, constituted the essential prerequisite for a mature liberal democracy within each individual state, in the same way economic globalisation was the premise for democratic globalisation, which had been made a tangible possibility by the collapse of communism. Globalisation thereby took shape as the new

version of necessary progress, the outcome of which – as was argued by an American philosopher as early as 1989⁸ – following the route of communism, which had marked “the unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism”, was to be “the universalisation of Western liberal democracy”, the full “marketisation” of relations between states and global pacification. The principles of the new order – our philosopher continued, imitating in this respect Marx – were destined to mark “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution”.

The election of George W. Bush as President of the United States in November 2000 led to the formation of a government composed in such a way as to offer within the world’s most powerful country a pure example of politics placed at the service of the priority interests of neo-liberal economic forces, which peddled a new version of necessary progress for which they stood as guarantors.

5. The practices of neo-conservative globalisation

The idea of necessary progress advocated by Soviet Communism was the freedom of all from want, to be achieved through equality between individuals and through state planning. The everyday reality which ended up sweeping away that system was that it was incapable of guaranteeing people a standard of living with even a semblance of decency, was a system of inequality entrenched in rigid hierarchical structures protected by the dictatorship of a privileged minority, and was based on economic planning which ultimately turned out to be completely inefficient.

The neo-conservative and neo-liberal idea of necessary progress was based on a great promise: a society free from state intervention in the economy, which took its most extreme form in communism and a more moderate form, yet one also liable to paralyse the vital energies typical of individual initiative, in the social democratic policies aimed at safeguarding the welfare state, then opportunities for all will finally become reality and true equality will be attained: the best and most active individuals will reap the rewards they deserve from free competition and will serve as examples for other individuals, with growing benefits for society as a whole, transformed into an open playing field capable of making the most of a common vitality. The ethical principle underlying the system’s philosophy was “to each according to his abilities and that which he deserves to receive”.

8. Fukuyama, F., *The End of History?*, 1989.

However, moving on from the slogans to the facts, it can be seen that events have taken a wholly different turn as compared with the neo-liberal prognosis. Private initiative, opened up to all individuals, has not blossomed; by contrast, powerful industrial and financial minorities have emerged which – without democratic legitimacy or any effective control of their actions by states or international institutions – have concentrated in their own hands vast decision-making powers over the production and distribution of resources; these elites have mounted a determined attack on the workers' social protection system and more generally the weaker strata of society; they have also systematically sought to weaken the trade unions. In developed countries they have lobbied for increasingly widespread insecure employment, and in less developed countries for the use of underpaid manpower without any kind of social protection; they have acquired growing control over the mass media; they have established a decisive influence over governments, some of which have become a direct reflection of their will, and they have acted in such a way as to drain away constantly increasing resources for their own benefit. Within this context, the free market has attained full freedom only for individuals holding economic power, who – an inevitable consequence – have become ever richer in a climate characterised by stealthy behaviour deliberately aimed at evading all controls and by unscrupulous speculative financial investments blind to any form of collective interest. All this has caused a crisis of the democratic regimes themselves, since states, governments, parliaments and electorates – which operate on a national level – have been incapable of withstanding the action of the international power brokers who have taken the fundamental decisions on which the fate of the international economy depended. This has reinforced the process whereby in recent decades income inequalities have grown exponentially, to the point where the most wealthy individuals worldwide have in many cases succeeded in equalling by themselves the overall earnings of billions of other human beings. Thus today we have arrived at the most serious economic crisis since that of 1929, which started from the country which had already experienced the triumphs of market fundamentalism during the 1920s: a crisis which today concerns not only the working class masses, but increasingly also the middle classes. The problem which arises and has to be faced is similar to that which Roosevelt had to grapple with after the cult of the "golden calf" had laid low first America and later the rest of the world: as he said in 1932, to prevent private property from being "subjected to the ruthless manipulation of professional gamblers in the stock markets and the corporate system" the economy must "exist to serve individual men and women", rather than them having to

serve it, must not “make industrial cannon-fodder of the lives of half the population of the United States” promoting the “interests of the powerful few”, and must hold back the vast power of “economic oligarchy”.

6. The threat of environmental disaster

The years of globalisation have also been the years during which the environmental alarm has been sounding little by little with greater insistence. Ever since the industrial revolution, men have equipped themselves with instruments capable of increasing the exploitation of natural resources. For around two centuries, from the end of the 18th century onwards, we lived in a kind of “age of innocence” in which humans were perceived as the victorious predator and nature as the meekly subjected prey, whose resources were available to whoever was capable of appropriating them, subject to no limits other than the technical capacities for their exploitation. But then the mechanism broke down, and during the closing decades of the 20th century an awareness gradually emerged that mankind had indulged in plunder that threatened a backlash capable of overturning man’s relationship with nature. Nevertheless, the emergence of this awareness at the very time when it became clear that the measures to be taken to stem nature’s retaliation affected the joint interests of the great financiers and industrialists, allied with a good many governments and influential international political circles, soon provoked vigorous reactions. First, it was denied outright that there was any threat to the environment, then it was played down, and then finally, when it was no longer possible to play it down, it was acknowledged and agreements and undertakings were entered into, albeit very cautiously and to the most limited extent possible. The approach that has therefore in fact prevailed consists on the one hand in announcing programmes and making declarations of good intent and on the other hand in holding back and deferring any form of action. As a result, there is a clear risk that a resolute will to confront the looming question of environmental degradation may emerge only when nature’s rebellion has assumed catastrophic proportions. On this point, I should like to recall the warning of the great historian Arnold Toynbee, who, concluding his book *Mankind and Mother Earth* published in 1976, in which he recounted the entire course of human history, put into words the whole dilemma with which we are confronted. He wrote: “There is no precedent for the power that Man has acquired over the biosphere in the course of the two centuries 1763-1973. In these bewildering circumstances, only one prediction can be made with certainty: Man, the child of Mother Earth, would not be able to survive the crime of matricide, if he

were to commit it. The penalty for this would be self-annihilation." Will Man kill Mother Earth or will he redeem her? He can kill her through the improper use of his growing technological power. "But he could redeem her by overcoming the suicidal, aggressive greed that in all living creatures, including Man himself, has been the price of the Great Mother's gift of life." This is the enigma which Man will have to confront. Two centuries earlier, Diderot had for his part written that the only true riches are man and the Earth. Man is not worth anything without the Earth, and the Earth is not worth anything without man. Today the new President of the United States – who has perhaps read Diderot and Toynbee, but who in any case talks as if he had read them – promises us a genuine change of direction in the environmental policy of his country. Let's hope this time things will go right.

7. Giving a human future to the future of time

It is certain that Mother Earth will have a future. But what future will man have in the future of the earth? I believe that in order to answer this question, it will be necessary to return to the question of politics, of what kind of politics we need. The last half century has clearly shown us that two myths have failed spectacularly: the myth of communism, according to which in order to guarantee human well-being the state must become society's master; and the myth of radical liberalism, according to which society develops most and best when the state is reduced to a minimum and that minimum is placed at the service of the grandees of industry and finance. The first myth collapsed in 1989, and the second in 2008. An essential element of the first was that politics could assume a scientific nature, whilst an essential element of the second was that politics should be entirely subordinated to the dogmas of market fundamentalism. We now see the state and politics flocking to the bedside of industry, seeking to remedy the damage wreaked by financial speculation, to stem the flood of unemployment, and to save what can be saved of people's savings. There are calls for action by states and governments, for politics to return to the driving seat, to give our future a future. But it is at this point that a huge stumbling block appears. The economy is globalised and, regardless of the decisions taken by governments to protect their respective countries, a return to the national economy systems is unthinkable. There is a call for effective rules on a global scale, but the regulators are weak and political systems are strongly subject to the limits imposed by sectoral interests and by individual countries. The challenge lies in seeing whether and to what extent states will be capable of taking resolute steps to raise

their game and reach the necessary agreements. These agreements will have to involve the strongest players – the United States, the European Union (EU), the Russian Federation, China, India and Japan – who will have to show that they know how to work not only for the most developed economies, but also for those which are less advanced, adopting as their primary goals on the one hand development compatible with safeguarding our endangered environment, and on the other hand a much fairer distribution of resources among the various social classes and the various countries of the world.

This is the only way in which progress can take on a new meaning.

8. The possible progress

The idea of necessary progress in its manifold incarnations deprived men of responsibility for their choices concerning the direction to give to their lives. It was a resounding failure because history is not determined by any objective, impersonal driving force. The innumerable advances of science and technology are a given and are constantly increasing, but they are inherently ambiguous in that they may serve both the best and the worst intentions and may further whatever goals and values we wish and are able to set ourselves. These goals and these values are a reflection of our moral compass and life projects, which may be directed one way or another, but which by their very nature are not unidirectional since they bear the mark of the plurality of cultures and the moral systems deriving from them. They must therefore respond to two needs which are not easy to reconcile: firstly embracing and respecting diversity, whilst ensuring that the flowering of diversity does not degenerate into reciprocal intolerance, unleashing an unconstrainable destructiveness, and secondly facing up to a categorical imperative which encapsulates the essence of the human spirit: that of seeking to give the greatest number of individuals, and if possible to all, that *quantum* of material and spiritual resources without which individuals are incapable of developing and protecting their own personality and the watchword “equal opportunities” remains an empty slogan.

The progress we can hope for if we preserve our lifestyle and civilisation is of necessity a difficult progress which can be secured only through the efforts we are able to deploy to that end; it is a progress whose beacons – and here we must pay an immense tribute to the Enlightenment thinkers – we can ourselves kindle or stifle. History, so Herzen said, is not inherently logical; its logics are those we confer on it. The Earth, as Toynbee

told us, may remain Mother Earth if both the spirit of care and attention as well as the necessary determination to stop the violent exploitation of natural resources can prevail over our arrogance and irresponsibility. It is up to us, with our capacity to reason and our sense of responsibility, to avoid being dragged into a nightmare we ourselves have created and from which there may be no return.

I conclude by thanking you for your attention and asking you a question: what is humanity if it is incapable of elaborating and implementing a renewed idea of progress in the face of the great challenges which confront us?

The economic crisis as a crisis of civilisation

Luciano Gallino⁹

For some time it has been commonplace to define “civilisation” as a particular historically determined manner of structuring the economy, politics, culture and the community that can be seen to extend for a lengthy period to numerous societies or states, albeit with significant national differences.¹⁰ In this sense one may speak of “Western civilisation” or of “Islamic civilisation”. In a paper which caused a sensation at the start of the 1990s, since it predicted that a head-on collision between these two civilisations was inevitable and imminent, Samuel P. Huntington identified six other civilisations: Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Slav-Orthodox, Latin-American and perhaps an African one.¹¹

The last 30 years have witnessed the Westernisation of the world, or the extension of certain fundamental structural modes of Western civilisation to all societies around the globe. This accordingly gave rise to a civilisation of dimensions never before seen in history, de facto absorbing all those identified by Huntington. However, in the course of this expansion, the structures themselves were transformed to the point where the possibility of defining the emergent civilisation simply as an expanded Western civilisation is ruled out. It is instead necessary to consider it as a world civilisation with original characteristics.¹² The new civilisation is characterised by three key elements. First and foremost within all societies worldwide there has been a reciprocal crossing of boundaries and a related structural modification of all the principal sub-systems of social organisation. The economy can be seen to be closely intertwined with politics, with culture

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10. The four-fold conceptual division of the social system “society” into the sub-systems economy, politics, culture and community which underpins this paper originates indirectly from the work of Talcott Parsons, and more directly from the complex reworking of it by Münch, R. in *Die Struktur der Moderne. Grundmuster und differenzielle Gestaltung des institutionelles Aufbaus der modernen Gesellschaften*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1984.

11. Huntington, S. P., “The clash of civilizations?”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. LXXIII, No. 3, 1993, pp. 22-49.

12. Here I use the expression “world civilisation” as an updated synonym for the more traditional term “world society”. The issues and sub-issues of the two are largely similar. See Heintz, B., Münch, R. and Tyrell, H., “Weltgesellschaft. Theoretische Zugänge und empirische Problemlagen”, special issue of the *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Lucius & Lucius, Stuttgart, 2005.

simultaneously offering a reflection of this interconnection and serving as an instrument for its promotion; the community, or the socio-demographic system as the physical and symbolic space within which people and their basic forms of common living are reproduced, has been imbued with forms of culture and action that are characteristic of the economic system.

A second key element can be perceived in the fact that the new civilisation on a planetary scale now has no boundaries of any kind. This means that it is no longer possible for it to satisfy its need for resources by trading with other civilisations, or by expropriating them. This need can be satisfied only if it is confined within the limits of the biological and material resources which the planet is capable of regenerating. That is to say, if civilisation consumes resources above that limit today, it thereby deprives future generations of them.

A third element can be seen in the interconnection that has been created between the economy, the labour market and the culture of almost all societies around the world, such that an event of any kind occurring in one of them has close-range and sometimes instantaneous effects on the others. In the building of this interconnection, equivalent to a high level of interdependence, a significant role has obviously been played by communication technologies. However, they have acted as a catalyst, and not as the causally dominant element. The diffusion throughout the world of hundreds of thousands of subsidiary companies controlled in various ways by American and European transnational corporations has had a much greater impact, along with the commercial exchanges set in motion by the World Trade Organization and innumerable international agreements, and finally the distribution on a planetary scale, underway since the mid-20th century but intensified and speeded up by the Internet, of mass culture products – cinema, television and music – originating largely from North America.

The economic crisis which broke out in 2007, following at least 20 years' gestation and various crises on a smaller scale (1987, 1997-98, 2000-03), germinated from the three elements mentioned above. However, its immediate cause was the development of a financial system based on debt. From 1980 onwards, the world economy became heavily "financialised". In other words, the production of money from other money, along with the creation of money out of nothing through debt, largely gained the upper hand over the production of goods using other goods. The propensity for financial speculation also swept up many of the largest indus-

trial corporations around the world. Proof of the race for financialisation can be found in the changed relationship between world GDP and the volume of global financial assets. In comparison with 1980, world GDP in 2007 had only doubled in real terms, rising from US\$27 to 54 trillion. However, the value of financial assets had multiplied ninefold, growing from US\$28 to 241 trillion, equal to 4.4 times the world GDP. The majority of these assets were created by the world's major banks by granting loans, themselves used to purchase financial securities under the assumption that their value would rise without fail. A smaller portion of the assets was created in many countries, from the USA to the United Kingdom and Spain, by encouraging families to take out mortgages to buy a home, again presuming a continuous increase in prices. The increase in both share and house values was fuelled by exactly the same process of headlong buying by indebted individuals who could repay the interest on their debt and – though not in all cases – a share of the principal only by contracting additional debts.

Money is a promise of value. Around 97% of all money exists only as an electronic trace in a bank's computer. A private bank may create sums of money tens of times greater than the deposits made with it, registered simply by recording an electronic trace on a client's account. In theory, under the terms of the Basel Accords, which provide, subject to various complicated exceptions, that a bank should hold assets of at least €8 for every 100 that it lends, a bank should limit itself to lending 12.5 times its own capital. In reality, the technique of transferring credit off the balance sheet by transforming it into tradeable securities, the sale of such securities to companies created by the banks themselves – so-called Structured Investment Vehicles and similar entities – along with other techniques permit the banks to extend credit, and hence create debt, for amounts hugely surpassing their own capital. This is referred to as the leverage effect and, on the eve of the crisis, many US and European banks had reached and exceeded a ratio not of 1 to 12.5, but of 1 to 60.¹³

The problem with money as a promise of value is that at some point it must take concrete form in the power to dispose of a tangible asset. However, if the promises of value in circulation, estimated in dollars, are 4.4 times greater than world GDP – the totality of goods and services actually produced – this means that for every dollar of real goods or services there

13. For a recent study on the creation of money through debt by private banks, see Hodgson Brown, E., *The Web of Debt: The shocking truth about our money system and how we can break free*, Third Millennium Press, Baton Rouge, 2007.

are US\$4.40 created from nothing through debt and which are ready to compete for that dollar of real goods or services. We are in other words confronted with a gigantic financial conjuring trick or, one might say, with deliberately generated world inflation. The financial crisis broke out when a growing number of families, businesses, institutional investors and banks were forced to conclude that the promise of value they were holding in the form of titles of claim (shares, simple and complex derivatives, credit protection certificates, deposit accounts, etc.) no longer corresponded to the quantity or type of real assets which it nominally guaranteed. The problem was further exacerbated by the development of a financial architecture which made the oversight and regulatory activities which the authorities should have exercised over banks (here used as a generic term for the many types of financial body) difficult, if not impossible.¹⁴

This development of a financial system based on debt, in a context of completely inadequate oversight and regulatory structures, would not have been possible if the economy had not woven ever closer relations with politics during the period under consideration. It did so by overflowing, or breaking, the banks within which it had in a way been channelled – “embedded”, to borrow Karl Polanyi’s foresighted expression – for around 30 years after the Second World War.¹⁵ In order to understand how the crisis is at the same time a crisis of civilisation, and more specifically how the current financial crisis is the most evident manifestation of the underlying crisis of civilisation, it is necessary to start from an examination of this encroachment of intersystemic boundaries and its effects. I shall begin with the boundaries between the economy and politics.¹⁶

Many people have observed that the economy forcefully overstepped the boundaries with politics in the course of its financialisation. In general, this is interpreted as a kind of defeat, or sudden overpowering, of politics. The financial system, according to this interpretation, was able to develop new instruments for saving, investment and asset management

14. Crotty, J., *Structural Causes of the Global Financial Crisis: A Critical Assessment of the “New Financial Architecture”*, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2008. On the role of institutional investors in the crisis, see Gallino, L., *Con I soldi degli altri. Il capitalismo per procura contro l’economia*, Einaudi, Turin, 2009.

15. Polanyi, K., *The Great Transformation*, Beacon Press, Boston, MA, 1944.

16. On the global effects of what can be described as the economy overflowing the bed in which attempts had been made to channel it, a work of notable interest is that of the Indian economist P. Shankar Jha, *The twilight of the nation-state: Globalisation, chaos and war*, 2006.

purposes, which blew up out of all proportion finance's incursion into companies in all sectors, as well as into family life. It can be added that information technologies permit the movement of immense sums from one country to another at the flick of a switch, without any government being able to prevent it. It should also be noted that productive processes have been restructured at a global level, which has made it impossible for a state even to control them within national borders. Lastly, the markets for goods and capital do not allow interference by politics, on pain of serious consequences for the current and future well-being of the entire population.

The sole conclusion that can be drawn is that, confronted with the economy's incursions into its own sphere, politics can but take note of them. It has no alternative other than to seek to adapt itself to the situation. It does so by transforming its very aims – since politics, as Norberto Bobbio wrote, does not possess its own immutable goals.¹⁷ Therefore, rather than setting itself the objective of regulating the economy in order to adapt it to society, politics has committed itself to adapting society to the economy. Instead of protecting citizens against socio-economic insecurity, it presents itself as the last-ditch saviour for those most acutely affected. And rather than producing public goods, politics claims that it is forced to offer the economy the opportunity, through privatisations, to produce them in its stead. In seeking to develop an overall understanding of the relations between politics and economics out of which the world civilisation was born, should we choose to pause at this point in our reasoning, the argument that the former has become the servant of the latter would without doubt be amply corroborated.

At the same time, there are grounds for asserting that this current interpretation, according to which politics has been overwhelmed by the invasion of economics and has therefore been forced, against its will, to adapt itself to the requirements of the latter, may indeed make it possible to describe the effects of the invasion with a certain degree of accuracy, but at the cost of ignoring its causes. The events and history of recent decades show that the boundaries between economics and politics were not crossed by the former thanks to its own unrestrainable forces alone, as the above interpretation maintains. It must rather be pointed out that, from the early 1980s, these borders were deliberately thrown wide open to the economy by none other than politics itself, by parliamentarians

17. Bobbio, N., "Politica", in Bobbio, N., Matteucci, N. and Pasquino, G. (eds.), *Dizionario di Politica*, 2nd edn, Utet, Turin, 1983, pp. 830 et seq.

and by the laws enacted by them. The first barriers to be lifted by politics on its own initiative were those which in some way prevented the free movement of capital. Conversely to what can sometimes be read, those amongst the first to do so were not only American politicians, but also some very prominent European politicians.

The bills and the subsequent laws which liberalised capital movements were in fact signed, in the first half of the 1980s, by French President François Mitterrand, his Finance Minister Jacques Delors, and the latter's successor and subsequently Prime Minister, Pierre Bérégovoy. During the same decade British and German politicians adopted similar measures under the governments of Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl, followed by the Italian governments succeeding to power in the early 1990s. In the United States, from Ronald Reagan's first term (1981) to the end of Bill Clinton's second term (2000), Congress and the various federal authorities issued a large number of laws and regulations aimed specifically at removing all restrictions on the movement of capital, the speculative activities of banks and the related production of increasingly complex financial instruments. The initial conditions which brought about the current economic crisis can be identified in these expressly deregulatory initiatives (which generally do not involve the absence of regulations, but rather the replacement of binding regulations with other more permissive rules).

It should be noted that during the period under consideration – from the early 1980s to the present day – the borders between politics and economics were not only crossed, in both directions, by industrial and financial activities or by legislation. There was also an intense exchange of personnel between the two sub-systems. Senior managers from private financial institutions became ministers or the holders of important public office in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy; former ministers became the heads of large banks. In many cases only a few weeks, and sometimes even only a few days, passed between the individual's departure from a high-level position in a bank and his or her appointment to a senior government post, and vice versa. A high proportion of former members of parliament – for the United States estimated at around one third – became consultants for companies to which they recommended the best ways of influencing parliamentary committees on which they themselves had long sat. In recent years, as soon as they left office following the expiry of their mandate or their resignation, a number of European heads of government found employment as experts for major companies with which the government they presided over had previously negotiated complex energy or environmental issues.

In mentioning this revolving door between politics and the economy my intention is not to allude to the simple fact – which however cannot be entirely excluded – that one sector's interests may be transposed to the other, along with the person concerned, from business to politics and vice versa. My aim is rather to draw attention to the shared language, ways of reasoning and reacting, sensitivity regarding certain questions and insensitivity to others which is emerging amongst vast numbers of those engaged in politics and business, thanks to the repeated exchanges between the two.

The unchecked cross-border movements between politics and the economy could not have taken place without the intervention of an ideology which, after having come to pervade the entire cultural system, promoted and legitimised such crossovers, and itself engaged in them *en masse* as regards the lines dividing it from all the other sub-systems. This ideology is neo-liberalism. It is common knowledge that the role of ideology has always by definition been to rationalise and legitimise not only political but also economic action. But perhaps no ideological structure in history prior to the neo-liberal ideology has been able to cross the borders which it shares with politics and the economy with as much determination and purpose.¹⁸

Neo-liberalism incorporates into contemporary society that which, within its own field, physics has for generations been seeking to attain, but without success: nothing less than a theory of everything. In the first place, understandably, neo-liberalism is a political theory which categorically asserts that society spontaneously tends towards natural order. Therefore, it is necessary to prevent the state, or the government on its behalf, from interfering with the implementation and proper functioning of that order. This is a long-standing argument, as it was used at least from the 17th century onwards in order to oppose the autocratic power of sovereigns; when applied within a democratically constituted society, in reality it becomes an argument *against* democracy.

At the same time, neo-liberalism is an economic theory, according to which economic policies must be based on a handful of axioms as well as faith in three perfect processes. The axioms stipulate that continuous growth in GDP of at least 2% to 3% per year is indispensable also for

18. For an analysis of the various aspects of neo-liberal ideology, see Saad-Filho, A. and Johnston, D. (eds.), *Neoliberalism. A Critical Reader*, Pluto Press, London, 2005. A classic critique of that ideology is naturally Polanyi, op. cit. See in particular, Part 2, Chapter II.

societies which have attained a reasonable level of well-being in order to continue to guarantee it; to this end a proportionate annual increase in consumption is therefore necessary, which is obtained by creating needs through goods and mass communication. The three processes, of which the existence and beneficial effects cannot be called into question, are: markets regulate themselves; capital flows to wherever it is of greatest utility; and risks (whatever their nature – insolvency, price decreases, interest rate changes, etc.) are fully calculable.

Unstintingly adhering to its stubbornly totalitarian vocation, neo-liberalism also proposes a theory of employment, of income distribution and of the individual in the face of employment.¹⁹ According to this theory, the economic system automatically decides what level of employment is most conducive to general well-being; income distribution is determined exclusively by the remuneration of the factors of production, which the capital and employment markets will, in every economic phase, ensure are the fairest; the unemployed are those who happen not to have the requisite training, or those who do not accept the work on offer, or who simply do not want to work. It is for this reason that the active employment policies fostered by neo-liberals in the EU member states insist on the need for everyone to take responsibility for his own destiny on the jobs market. This line of neo-liberal thought includes, amongst other proposals, the idea that families should consider themselves genuine businesses and function as such. It can be seen that the labour market reforms implemented in Germany through the Hartz laws within the ambit of Agenda 2010 contain both repeated references to “self responsibility” (*Ich-Verantwortung*), and calls on families to view themselves and operate as if they were joint stock companies (*AG Familie*, where AG stands for *Aktiengesellschaft*).

Neo-liberalism also incorporates a comprehensive theory of education. The sole and ultimate goal of education at every level and of all kinds, so the theory goes, consists in giving individuals the occupational skills that make them productively employable. At university level, neo-liberally inclined economic theories have been dominant for decades in two senses. Firstly, at least four fifths of core courses, specialist courses and doctoral studies are dedicated to spreading neo-liberal theory amongst students

19. Indeed, as a totalitarian conception of society, the individual, the economy and politics, neo-liberalism does not have much to envy the concept of totality espoused by Marxism. For a comparison, see Jay, M., *Marxism and Totality. The adventures of a concept from Lukács to Habermas*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1984.

of economics. Secondly, governments and local authorities press for its application also in order to assess the contribution of each department or academic discipline – including, for example, mediaeval history or political science – to the university budget. Lastly, neo-liberalism entails an opposite theory regarding public goods, asserting that whatever assets the individual or society requires for the purposes of cohabitation or social protection, it is more efficient, and therefore necessary, for them to be produced by the private sector. To sum up, the neo-liberal ideology neither recognises nor possesses boundaries; it is precisely to this that it owes its effectiveness in helping to reorganise the world in economic, political and cultural terms over just 30 years.

Naturally, it does not owe its success to the above situation alone. One of neo-liberalism's extraordinary characteristics is in fact that it is, at root, a form of faith. Polanyi for his part already referred to it as a "credo". As James K. Galbraith pointed out, recalling the early 1980s when he was Executive Director of the Joint Economic Committee of Congress, his dealings with the conservatives – it was only later that they began to be called neo-liberals – were particularly frustrating for him as a young liberal. "However much one disagreed with them, these were people who *believed* [original emphasis]. They were idealists. They had the force of conviction. Worse still, they were setting the agenda. And there was the thought: Suppose they were right?"²⁰

For this reason, that is because it can be regarded as a form of faith, it is a cultural and political error to label neo-liberalism as if it were merely an instrument in the service of an economic power – although there can be no doubt that it qualifies as such – or as a political ideology in the traditional sense, or else a contemporary mythology regarding the foundations of social order. This special nature also explains the grip which the neo-liberal ideology has had on the imagination and policy agenda of European left-wing democrat parties, from the British Labour Party to the German Social-Democrats, and from the French Socialists to the successors of the Communist Party in Italy. These parties could perhaps have adopted, on a case-by-case basis, the aspects of neo-liberal theories that helped reinforce the significance of the term "democrat" used to designate them, while discarding those which appeared to be in stark contrast with the sense that should be attached to the label "left". However, confronted with a faith, the left-wing democrats chose to subscribe

20. Galbraith, J. K., *The Predator State. How Conservatives Abandoned the Free Market and Why Liberals Should Too*, Free Press, New York, 2008, Chapter 1.

to it as a whole. In doing so they paved the way for the political, and later electoral, defeats they have now been suffering throughout Europe for a number of years.

Whilst as regards social sub-systems the world civilisation is characterised by the ongoing disappearance of their respective borders, as far as the environment is concerned its current and short-term future status can be summed up by a single figure: the ecological footprint of the planet reached 1.3 in 2008. This means that our planet is consuming one third of the resources of a second planet in addition to its own, and hence that this unsustainable rate of consumption is destroying the ecosystems which maintain life. Should current trends continue, it is estimated that by around 2050 the world civilisation would require a whole second planet alongside our own in order to satisfy its consumption of natural resources – including the capacity to absorb or recycle the waste which is produced. However, it should be pointed out that this figure is an average. If the emerging countries were to reach the consumption levels of the EU member states, we would already need 2.1 planet earths to meet our needs. If the whole world ended up consuming at the rate of the United States, we would need another four planet earths alongside our own.²¹

Breaking down the ecological issue into its constituent elements, the situation can be seen to be even more problematic. In this connection it is possible to cite the destruction of the original forests, which is continuing at a rate of 13 million hectares per year (equal to half the surface area of the United Kingdom); climate change, which the former exacerbates; air, soil, river and sea water pollution; the erosion, desertification and salinisation of soils; the loss of biodiversity of plant and animal species, which threatens the genetic pool of the human race itself; and finally the accumulation of toxic waste. These are all aspects of a systematic degradation of the earth's environment, the direct and indirect result of a civilisation which, on the basis of the economic theories which inform it, attributes value principally to the consumption of natural resources, taking no account of the value of their production and regeneration by the earth.²²

21. See the collective work, *The Great Transition*, New Economics Foundation, London 2009, pp. 20 et seq.

22. A documented overview of the global risks arising from the concept and practice of unlimited growth was already proposed around 10 years ago by Nef, J., *Human Security and Mutual Vulnerability. The Global Political Economy of Development and Underdevelopment*, International Development Research Centre, 2nd edn, Ottawa, 1999.

At the close of the first decade of the 21st century, the world civilisation whose main features I have described here can be seen to be undergoing a crisis on a global level in various ways: a) the vast imbalance between its technological and economic potential and the actual living conditions of the planet's population; b) the human way of life and the individual personality or character this civilisation is generally geared to produce; and c) a growing number of signs that the current relationship between use of natural resources and an economic model based on endless growth is unsustainable and that the time available to transform it is dramatically shortening.

a) Long ago, in 1932, Max Horkheimer, one of the founding fathers of the critical theory of society, wrote: "The world now has more raw materials, machines and skilled workers, and better methods of production than ever before, but they are not profiting mankind as they ought. Society in its present form is unable to make effective use of the powers it has developed and the wealth it has amassed."²³ Today this gulf is greater than it was 80 years ago. With global GDP, notwithstanding the crisis, of around US\$60 trillion, the world has economic, technological and organisational resources which would be largely sufficient to ensure a decent life for its whole population of 6.5 billion individuals.

However, with these immense resources the world – the world civilisation – ensures a decent life for around 1.5 billion people living in the most developed countries – where the poor in any case number tens of millions – plus those who belong to the upper classes in the emerging countries, and a life that can in various ways be regarded as indecent for the remaining 5 billion. Numerous indicators show this is the case; many of them significantly worsened from 2007 onwards as a result of the financial crisis. The poor who live on one dollar a day (or, to be more precise, US\$1.25 based on 2005 purchasing power parity or PPP) are now estimated by the World Bank to number 1.4 billion. The World Bank itself had also previously calculated that globalisation had reduced the number of poor living on less than a dollar a day to under 1 billion, but new calculation methods, new data and the transition from the dollar at 1993 PPP

23. Horkheimer, M., "Notes on science and the crisis" (1932), now in *Critical Theory: selected essays*, The Continuum Publishing Company, New York, 2002, p. 3 (English translation copyright 1972 by Herder & Herder Inc.).

to a dollar at 2005 PPP led to the issue of this new estimate in 2008.²⁴ According to International Labour Organization statistics, around 1.3 billion workers receive wages that are insufficient to raise themselves and their families above the poverty line of US\$2 a day per capita (again PPP), affecting a total of 3 billion people.

At the same time, income distribution worsened to the detriment of salaried labour. Between the early 1990s and 2007, employment grew worldwide by an average of 30%. In spite of this, in 51 out of 73 countries for which information is available the proportion of salaries as a share of GDP dropped by 13% in Latin America and the Caribbean, by 10% in Asia and the Pacific countries, and by 9% in the most advanced economies. The percentage points lost by salaries were picked up by income from capital.²⁵ At the same time, but not solely as a direct consequence of the reduction in the level of salaries as a proportion of GDP, income and wealth inequalities between the bottom 90% of the population constituting the middle and lower classes and the top 10% forming the upper class reached unprecedented levels, both internationally and within individual countries. In the USA, for example, the share of income earned by the richest 10% of the population rose from 33% in 1977 to slightly less than 50% in 2007. During more or less the same years, that is between 1979 and 2007, the share of income of the richest 1% of taxpayers grew from 8.9% to 23.5%. This means that around 3 million American citizens (taxpayers and their families) out of a population of more than 300 million earn an income corresponding to nearly one quarter of the total share of GDP received by all families. Similar trends were observed in the United Kingdom after the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and in Australia.²⁶

There are also more direct indicators that the living standards of vast swathes of the population may be considered to lie somewhere between mediocre and terrible. Consider those who live in the slums (or in *favelas*, *bidonvilles*, *tugurios*, shanty towns, etc.) of the hundreds of conurbations

24. On globalisation's dubious effects in reducing extreme poverty, see Kaplinsky, R., *Globalization, Poverty and Inequality. Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005.

25. International Institute for Labour Studies (International Labour Organization), *World of work report 2008: income inequalities in the age of financial globalization*, ILO, Geneva 2008, pp. 1, 8 et seq., 41 et seq., and 50 et seq.

26. Palma, J. G., "The Revenge of the Market on the Rentiers. Why neo-liberal reports of the end of history turned out to be premature", *Cambridge Working Papers on Economics* No. 0927, June 2009 version, fig. 6, fig. 7 and fig. 10 (www.econ.cam.ac.uk/dae/repec/cam/pdf/cwpe0927.pdf).

with between 5 and 20 million inhabitants, each of which developed extremely fast in Africa, Asia and Latin America from the 1980s onwards. It is estimated that in 2005 this population passed the 1 billion mark. They do not correspond to the poor who earn less than one dollar a day, since not all of the urban poor live in slums, and not all inhabitants of the slums are poor.²⁷ Overall, more than 2.5 billion people live in dwellings without the most basic sanitation, a number which would rise to 4 billion based on the standards of the EU 15. At the same time, according to estimates by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other bodies, the number of people suffering from hunger as a result of the recession has passed the 1 billion mark, up from 840 million in 2006. More than 1 billion individuals live at least 1 kilometre away from a source of water and consume 5 litres of non-drinking water per day, compared with the 300 litres of drinking water consumed daily by each citizen of the EU. Against the backdrop of similar data, there is a situation which in a sense is worse still: the high level of socio-economic insecurity affecting billions of people, which the recession has increased also in the developed countries. These people anxiously ask themselves whether next month, or even tomorrow, they will still have a job, an income, a home, the possibility to send their children to school or at least enough food for themselves and their children.²⁸

b) The sociologist Richard Sennett has coined the expression “corrosion of character” in order to describe how an individual’s personality is affected by working under “flexible capitalism”, where everyone and everything – starting with capital itself – is impatient; the whole of society seems to be geared towards the short term (for contracts, projects, possible gains); institutions, starting with businesses, appear to be in a state of permanent fragmentation or are continuously being restructured.²⁹ In these circumstances it becomes a tall order for the working individual to develop a sense of identity, since this calls for a long and patient search within oneself. The pursuit of long-term goals does not appear to be an option. The development of reciprocally demanding social relations within the workplace and the community becomes difficult.

27. See Davis, M., *Planet of Slums*, Verso, London and New York, 2006.

28. The author has commented on the theme of global socio-economic insecurity in Chapter VII of *Con i soldi degli altri. Il capitalismo per procura contro l'economia*, op. cit., pp. 159-76.

29. Sennett, R., *The Corrosion of Character. The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, Norton, New York 1998, p. 10, and obviously *passim*.

However, this form of corrosion of character through work is not the worst thing that can happen to a person within the world civilisation which flexible capitalism, synonymous with financial capitalism, has contributed to developing, since labour flexibility is a corollary of the extreme speed with which capital circulates. The worst thing, as Hannah Arendt said already half a century ago, is to find oneself part of a society in which motivations, the sense of identity, social recognition and life paths have been entirely constructed around work, and especially around salaried employment, in an era when it is becoming scarcer. In this sphere, the new world civilisation appears to have brought to a close the modern project which entailed "a theoretical glorification of labor, and resulted in a factual transformation of the whole of society into a laboring society. The fulfilment of the wish, therefore, ... comes at a moment when it can only be self-defeating."³⁰

At present, a cause of delusion is the fact that the monetisation of every aspect of human existence (both individual and collective), that is its transformation into a financial entity, has now reached its limit. There is almost nothing left to monetise. This means that it has become impossible, starting from the most advanced societies, to carry on creating new salaried employment. The recession has strongly accelerated this process. The tens of millions of jobs which have been lost since 2007 in the USA and the EU may be recovered only in part, and only extremely slowly. An expansion of the mass of wage-earners unprecedented in human history, when measured against population levels, has gone hand in hand with a shrinkage of production – precisely the production which should have guaranteed their employment. Thus a growing proportion of the work force faces the prospect of permanent unemployment. For the economy of the world civilisation they are now simply surplus to requirements.

At the same time as it deprives a growing number of people of any possibility of employment, after the essence of the modern personality has been built around work, the world civilisation, in which all boundaries between the economy, politics, culture and the community have been dissolved, incessantly produces young people with corrupt values, adults who have remained in or returned to an infantile state and citizens who have internalised the gospel of consumption instead of the rules of democracy. The fact that the systematic mass production of similar human personae reflects not a mere change in values, but rather a dramatic decay of the political sphere was pointed out by Herbert Marcuse as early as the

30. Arendt, H., *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 4.

1960s, when he described the characteristics of the “One Dimensional Man” and his Happy Consciousness – a consciousness which brings him to describe his deepest feelings, including both affections and dislikes, using the language of advertising.³¹ A detailed contemporary analysis is offered in a book by the political scientist Benjamin R. Barber, the title of which – *Consumed* – sums up the issue in a single word.³²

The contemporary economy, Barber notes, produces too many goods and too few consumers, that is, individuals capable of purchasing those goods. In an attempt to re-establish a greater equilibrium between surplus production and the lack of consumers, in 2009 the world spent a little under US\$550 billion on advertising. An equivalent or greater sum was spent on gadgets, the plethora of superfluous micro-objects which now accompanies every macro-object that enjoys a certain degree of success, whether it be a film, book, toy or television series: a form of portable advertising the cost of which is borne by consumers. The total, it may be noted, is equivalent to more than four times the annual sum which would be necessary to achieve the 2015 Millennium Development Goals set with great solemnity by the UN in 2000 – and it is now certain that half of these goals will not be achieved by around half of the countries concerned.³³ The fact is that if the manufacture of needs rather than of goods is a primary task of consumer capitalism, Barber writes, then massive advertising and marketing budgets make sense.³⁴

However, neither advertising nor gadgets are mere means of information that are useful for driving the economy. They mould the personality of individuals right from their infancy, following them step by step throughout their life with the goal of keeping them as infants. They distort the educational process, which should result in the creation of a well-informed citizenry determined to assert at every level of social organisation, and in all of its spheres, the principle that political freedom either means the

31. Marcuse, H., *One-Dimensional Man. Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1964, Chapter 3.

32. Barber, B.R., *Consumed. How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole*, Norton, New York, 2007.

33. On the costs of the Millennium Development Goals, see Gallino, L., *Tecnologia e democrazia. Conoscenze tecniche e scientifiche come beni pubblici*, Einaudi, Torino 2007, p. 290 et seq.

34. Barber, op. cit., p. 11.

right “to be a participator in government” or it means nothing.³⁵ Rather than achieving this outcome, the gospel of consumerism produces individuals for whom political freedom consists in the possibility of choosing between hundreds of products on the supermarket shelves that are practically identical with regard to their use value, or to wear items of clothing which through their designer labels display an infantile subordination to the calculations of marketing departments. In this regard, Barber writes, within the context of the project to “infantilise” the individual, aimed at preventing him from becoming a citizen, nothing has greater significance than “the ideology of privatization, a fresh and vigorous expression of traditional *laissez-faire* philosophy that favors free markets over government regulation and associates liberty with personal choice of the kind possessed by consumers”.³⁶ To expect individuals whose personalities are shaped in this way at a deep level to seek to transform the world civilisation in crisis is not only a vain hope; it is completely meaningless because they are the world civilisation.

c) One might well argue that the world has a few years more than the 100 months (starting from August 2008: just 8.3 years) predicted by the New Economics Foundation experts before one single but crucial aspect of the degradation of life-sustaining ecosystems – climate change – becomes irreversible, causing incalculable damage to hundreds of millions of people. Nevertheless, it may be assumed that the time actually available is not much longer. The reason for this is that the available indicators not only point to an extremely serious degradation of the ecosystems, but almost all of them show that the degradation has been exceptionally fast, is due entirely to human activities and could very soon turn out to be irreversible.

The services which the ecosystems provide to the world’s population include the supply of food, water, wood and textiles, regulation of the climate and of water levels and quality, the disposal of waste, support for vital processes such as the formation of fertile soil, photosynthesis and the food cycle. According to a comprehensive report by the World Resources Institute, approximately 60% of these services which ecosystems have provided to the human species since its origins have been degraded over only 50 years or have been used unsustainably during this period.³⁷

35. This is again a superb idea of Arendt, H., *On Revolution*, The Viking Press, 1963, p. 218.

36. Barber, op. cit., Chapter 4.

37. World Resources Institute, *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment*, 2005. *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Synthesis*. Island Press, Washington, DC, p. 6.

The consumption of fresh water is chief among the ecosystem services used at levels far beyond those which could at present, not to mention in the future, be regarded as sustainable.

It is not only the high rate at which non-renewable resources are depleted or consumed for good which throws a critical light on the civilisation of limitless economic growth. There is also the possibility, considering the damage which over-consumption has already inflicted on them, that sudden non-linear changes with potentially cataclysmic results may occur. The report cited specifies in this regard that: "Nonlinear changes, including accelerating, abrupt, and potentially irreversible changes, have been commonly encountered in ecosystems and their services. Most of the time, change in ecosystems and their services is gradual and incremental ... However, many examples exist of nonlinear and sometimes abrupt changes in ecosystems. In these cases, the ecosystem may change gradually until a particular pressure on it reaches a threshold at which point changes occur relatively rapidly as the system shifts to a new state. Some of these nonlinear changes can be very large in magnitude and have substantial impacts on human well-being."³⁸

Overall, there is therefore good reason to say that the world civilisation which has developed over recent decades has entered into a crisis on four fronts: economic, political, human and ecological. The economic crisis, which has now lasted from 2007 to 2010 and could continue even longer, has helped to bring the systemic unsustainability to light. Since there are no longer other civilisations external to it with which the world civilisation could enter into conflict on a planetary level, it is possible that its various forms of unsustainability will give rise in the near future to a number of endogenous conflicts, whether international (between countries or groups of countries) or intranational (between classes and social groups within individual countries), or even global (between classes and groups within the world population). It is up to the parliaments and governments of the world to ask themselves where, when and on what scale such conflicts may break out. It is to be feared that the question "if" has already found an answer in the fundamentals of the crisis. The best solution would appear to consist in confronting the problem of how to change the latter. The worst choice would be to take steps to bring about changes intended to ensure that everything remains as it was before.

38. World Resources Institute, *op. cit.*, p. 88. See also the whole section, pp. 88-91.

Conceiving the social bond and the common good through a refinement of human rights

François Flahault³⁹

Introduction: Why live in communities?

What is good for society? Two, somewhat contrasting, answers in the spirit of our times are “growth” and “community living”.

The first stands to reason: growth is synonymous with a healthy economy and hence a healthy society. Economic and financial activities – analysed by experts, run according to their guidelines and justified by their rational science – can be perceived as both society’s foundation and its goal. Those in government vindicate their decisions by asserting that they take them for the economy’s sake, just as in the Middle Ages they referred to the Church and theological science.

Unlike growth, the second watchword, “community living”, seems pretty vague. Often found alongside references to the social bond – another fairly hazy expression – the term “community living” aspires to a form of cohesion among well-intentioned, or at least well-wishing, individuals. But why is it a good thing to live in cohesive communities? For lack of a clear, reasoned answer, the economic view of society continues to prevail.

This observation brings to mind a criticism often levelled at human rights, regarded as individual rights: What do individuals have to do with one another? What binds them together? What is their common good?⁴⁰ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights leaves these questions unanswered. Human rights are described as the foundation of any law-based state, while states are, by definition, the guarantors of the common good. *Res publica* – public affairs – can be defined as that which concerns all citizens. Human rights should therefore be linked to a general concept of the common good or of community living. States are required to uphold human rights; how then could they simultaneously be allowed to neglect the common good? The idea that can be formed of a good society (and consequently of the road forward) cannot be based on human rights

39. Research Director, CNRS (Centre national de recherche scientifique, France).

40. Common, from the Latin *communis*, has as its roots *cum* (with) and *munus*, a responsibility, an office or an obligation, but also a service rendered, a good deed or a gift. This dual meaning refers to the underlying concept of reciprocity.

alone, disregarding a philosophy of the common good. Human rights are indeed the answer when it comes to the remedies that each individual must be afforded against all forms of abuse of power. However, they do not address the issue of what is at stake in human relations and life within society. They say nothing about the non-utilitarian goal of human societies. In short, they fail to answer the question: "Why form communities?"

The dominant economic thinking does not prompt concern for the common good. Why should citizens and their representatives concern themselves about it since the common good is achieved merely as a matter of course, thanks to the invisible hand of the markets? GDP could therefore be regarded as the best measure of it, and progress could be assessed in terms of economic growth. It comes as no surprise that those who subscribe to such an optimistic viewpoint, relieving individuals of their responsibilities, are those who benefit from it. However, for those outside this circle it is harder to believe in the providential influence of the markets – especially the financial markets. It is also difficult to believe that GDP offers a satisfactory reflection of well-being and of how well-being is distributed. In fact, virtually everywhere, questions are being raised about the need for new regulations and people are attempting to develop new wealth indicators. However, this cannot be done without referring, even if unwittingly, to a certain concept of humankind and of society. We shall see how the scientific knowledge amassed in recent decades is radically changing accepted ideas and contributing to debate on social ties and the common good. We shall also see how this knowledge can be used to address the criticisms raised regarding human rights' specifically Western slant.

The agenda for this debate cannot be equated with an agenda for action. An action agenda is of course necessary in view of the sufferings of countless human beings worldwide. However, the urgent need to act should not lead to the conclusion that debate is pointless. On the contrary, a refinement of human rights is necessary. René Cassin, one of the members of the commission that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, said it should be "a sort of table of the law given on Mount Sinai", constituting "a guiding beacon for the global community."⁴¹ Although one may concur with this desire, there is no denying that the principles of human rights were not handed down from heaven. It was clear to Cassin himself that they derived their strength

41. Cited by Pateyron, E., in *La Contribution française à la rédaction de la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme. René Cassin et la Commission consultative des droits de l'homme*, La Documentation française, 1998, p. 125.

solely from a human consensus: “It is public support that is the cornerstone of human rights”, he wrote in 1947.⁴² The Universal Declaration of 1948 arose from combined human efforts in the wake of the Second World War. The work that gave rise to it therefore need not be regarded as complete. It can and must be continued. To arrive at an agreement, the commission wisely avoided the thorny issue of the foundation of human rights. The time has now come to raise this question. As we shall see, it is by means of such further refinement that the link between human rights and the common good can be brought to light.

1. Criticisms of human rights

Human rights’ fundamental aim is the peaceful, or even fraternal, coexistence of human beings. On this basis, their scope is transcultural, providing a remedy against all abuses of authority. At the same time, since they bear the mark of a specifically Western rational fiction, they propound individual primary rights at the risk of giving free rein to economic and financial powers, thus potentially allowing them to dominate society. These inner contradictions leave them defenceless vis-à-vis the question of what interconnects individuals apart from commercial links – in other words, the question of the common good. As we shall see, these contradictions can be lifted by anthropological knowledge acquired over the last few decades, requiring an overhaul of the fundamental conception of the individual in human rights doctrine.

However, before summarising this revolution, it should be pointed out that criticism of human rights has long pinpointed the difficulties arising from this conception of the individual.

Some of the criticism has too obvious an agenda. For instance, when Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew disputes the validity of human rights in the name of “Asian values”, it is rather obvious that he is using these values to justify his own authoritarian regime.

Other types of criticism emerging in the wake of the French Revolution countered the putative dangers of equality and democracy with a more organic conception of society, as defended by Edmund Burke, Joseph de Maistre, Louis de Bonald, the Schlegel brothers and Johann Fichte. This illustrated the recurrent fear in the 19th and 20th centuries of the crumbling and fragmentation of society. Karl Marx shared this fear: “none of

42. Ibid., p. 84.

the so-called rights of man ... go beyond egotistic man, beyond man as he is in bourgeois society, an individual ... separated from the community."⁴³

In a more nuanced manner, Alain Caillé has recently written that ultimately, the ritually brandished democratic and human rights ideal serves more often than not to stigmatise that which still offers resistance to commercialisation than to foster genuinely democratic political regimes and societies.⁴⁴ However, it is not human rights which Caillé is criticising here, but the prevailing discourse – a doubly profitable discourse: while providing a commercial society with a little “spiritual extra”, thereby raising that society’s self-esteem, it combines individual freedoms and the free market into one great vague concept.

On the other hand, the legal philosopher Michel Villey does indeed criticise human rights themselves.⁴⁵ His critique comprise two strands. Firstly, drawing a careful distinction between law and ethics, Villey regards the fact of combining them as a most unfortunate confusion. He thus seems to disparage the authors of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and their avowed ambition to imbue moral principles with the force of law.

Villey’s second criticism of human rights is more justified. It concerns the paradox of a declaration striving to base human relations on the concept of an individual who has no links with his fellows. Villey harks back to the Franciscan William of Ockham (first half of the 14th century) to challenge his so-called “nominalist” doctrine, which reduces reality to individual substances. Villey sees in this reflection on individual substances a kind of prequel to the Robinson Crusoe story and a misreading of a major anthropological fact. He also agrees (albeit unwittingly) with Marcel Mauss’ *Essai sur le don*: in human cultures objects do not exist for themselves – they are intermediaries which flesh out and preserve relations with others. These relations thus constitute a reality which is no less essential than objects and individuals. The justice concept first of all refers to this basic nature of mutual relations, which involves recognising the Other as an alter ego. It secondly refers to the fact that such relations must be mediated by objects (whether tangible or intangible) attributed to each individual; and lastly, it refers to third parties responsible for regulating and arbitrating these attributions.

43. Karl Marx, *On the Jewish question*, 1844.

44. *Dé-penser l'économique – Contre le fatalisme*, La Découverte, Paris, 2005, p. 264.

45. Villey, M., *Le Droit et les droits de l'homme*, PUF, Paris, 2008.

Even the keenest human rights defenders were far from comfortable with the idea of rights inherent in the individual by nature, as witnessed by the discussions on duties in the Constituent Assembly in 1789.⁴⁶ Many of the members of this Assembly, who were accustomed to considering man in his social existence, no doubt subscribed only partly to the fiction of a state of nature. To them, the rights of one person depended on the duties of other persons, and vice versa. Closer to home, during the preparatory work for the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, René Cassin and John Humphrey stressed the importance of duties, like their Chinese, Latin American and Soviet fellow commission members.⁴⁷ Gandhi too ascribed major importance to duties. In India, as in many other cultures, individuals develop by acknowledging their debt to their ancestors and to society; therefore it is not solely by asserting their rights that they uphold their dignity and their place among the rest, but also by accepting their duties.

As we can see, the point at issue in the controversy between primary rights and rights associated with duties is the nature of the social bond: is it purely contractual (and therefore external to the constitution of the individual), or is the relationship with others constitutive of the individual him/herself (in which case rights and duties are indissociable)?

Marcel Gauchet touches on this issue in his examination of recent developments in the human rights field. These rights were first and foremost a response to Nazism and then to communist totalitarianism, he writes; but however necessary they were, they do not resolve the social problem confronting us. On the premise that first and foremost there are individuals, that initially there are only individuals, how are we to conceive of their coexistence?⁴⁸ How are we to conceive what unites us, and what we have to do with one another?⁴⁹ Human rights do not provide the answer to this question. This is why human rights politics could well prove to be the downfall of politics.⁵⁰

In that case, if we challenge the specifically Western dimension of human rights – the primacy of the individual and his rights – is there any

46. See Gauchet, M., *La Révolution des droits de l'homme*, p. 92.

47. Pateyron, E., op. cit., p. 129.

48. Gauchet, M., "Les droits de l'homme ne sont pas une politique" (1980) in *La Démocratie contre elle-même*, Tel, Gallimard, Paris, 2008, p. 15.

49. Gauchet, M., "Quand les droits de l'homme deviennent une politique" (2000), in *Le Débat*, No. 110, 2000, p. 348.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 368.

alternative to returning to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, as advocated by Michel Villey? Blandine Barret-Kriegel also concludes her book *Les droits de l'homme et le droit naturel* with the idea that, where the very development of human rights is concerned, we must get back to natural law⁵¹ as it was conceived prior to its individualist reinterpretation. There is certainly some truth in the ancient and mediaeval concepts, but that is not enough for us to succumb to nostalgic wishful thinking and adopt the responses of the past for our future.

We would like to be able to redefine what human beings should do without having to rethink what they are, as if Enlightenment thinking had enlightened us definitively. Any answer to the question “what unites us” and “what do we have to do with one another” presupposes a specific conception of the human being and society; this conception requires analysis. It is right and proper that we should seek in Aristotle and the other major thinkers of our Western tradition what we have forgotten because of modern scholars’ influence, but it is insufficient. We must take account of the new findings of recent decades, because it is in point of fact this knowledge that is currently revolutionising the conception of the human being which underpins human rights – as well, in fact, as the economic sciences.

2. A scientific revolution: the new vision of man and society

Decisive new findings about the origins of man and society have emerged over the last few decades. These are therefore something of which the authors of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights had as yet no inkling, although they would have found this new knowledge – a veritable scientific revolution, whose consequences are now only just being realised – extremely useful. The new findings have revealed the existence of a natural sociality which developed over millions of years.⁵² The vital role of this process in the emergence of *Homo sapiens* provides an incipient answer to the famous question of the foundation of morality, which is also that of human rights. The new findings simultaneously provide the missing link which prevented the natural law theorists from taking ac-

51. Barret-Kriegel, B., *Les droits de l'homme et le droit naturel*, PUF, 1989, p. 99.

52. See Thierry, B., “Social Transmission, Tradition and Culture in Primates: from the Epiphenomenon to the Phenomenon”, *Techniques et cultures*, Nos. 23-24, January-December 1994; Dominique Lestel, *Les origines animales de la culture*, Flammarion, 2001; Wrangham, R., *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human*, Basic Books, New York, 2009, and “Ethologie du langage” in Dessalles, J.-L., Picq, P., Victorri, B., *Les Origines du langage*, Le Pommier, 2006.

count of the fact that human and social relations are not founded solely on utility but are also an intrinsic good. The new vision thus constitutes an indispensable basis for conceiving of the common good.

The result is one of the main features of the human condition, namely an interdependence which is not only utilitarian but genuinely ontological.⁵³ Becoming oneself involves others.

Why have I not simply presented this conclusion without subjecting the reader to the empirical findings which led up to it? Because it is necessary to form an idea of the realities to which this constitutive interdependence corresponds if we wish to avoid the common pitfall of diluting it in lofty sentiment. Although this interdependence constitutes the origin of moral sentiment, it also prompts desires and behaviours which run counter to the latter. The interdependence is already present in the primates, driving them to affiliation but also to confrontation.⁵⁴ It is the source of altruism, but also of malice, envy, jealousy, hatred and cruelty.

Now, although one cannot become oneself, or even quite simply exist, without the others, the latter are just as much an obstacle as a support. The fact of having to find a place among the others in order to exist means that one's assigned place is limited by theirs. So, on the one hand, our inability to exist outside a coexistence environment prompts us to respect the latter, to put ourselves out to maintain it, to feel a sense of belonging to the others and to show altruism. But on the other hand, our life force and desire to exist also induce us to increase our power and well-being beyond the limits imposed by coexistence – and therefore at our fellow creatures' expense. By dominating, enslaving or killing them, and ignoring or enjoying their suffering.

This explains the origin of the moral requirement of reciprocity which has grown up in human societies. It has two immanent sources. The first is the constitutive coexistence and interdependence of all human beings, of which the moral sense is the natural extension. The second is, on the contrary, our propensity to non-limitation, which, because of its destructive character, necessitates the restraints which education and social organisation attempt to put on it. In small societies based on mutual

53. This reflects the image proposed by Raimundo Pannikar based on Indian philosophy, that is, an individual seen as a knot in a piece of cloth.

54. Frans de Waal clearly highlights these two aspects of the relations between primates in *De la réconciliation chez les primates*, Flammarion, 1992, and *Le bon singe*, Bayard, 1997, and *Le singe en nous*, Fayard, 2006.

acquaintance, the moral requirement usually applies only to members of the group, which leaves them free to ill-treat those who are not recognised as affiliated. Large societies, whose members are usually unknown to each other, found that they had to go beyond this restricted morality; if society was not to self-destruct, the requirement of reciprocity and justice had to be generally applied. This naturally led to political and legal institutions. It also presupposed the promulgation of the golden rule by the major moral and religious reformers. Lastly, it highlighted the vital role of writing in the dissemination of these norms in societies which were too large for the spoken word to cover. Human rights are obviously an extension of this general trend.

The fiction of a state of nature in which everyone, in the image of God, was just him/herself without any others, provided no explanation for the fact that life in society is where each of us experiences our desire to exist. Nor did it clarify the human sources of morality and human rights. On the other hand, this fiction supported the optimism of the Enlightenment, on which we still depend today. If we think that we enjoy the feeling of existing in and through ourselves, we might think it possible to eschew passions and behave as rational individuals; we might believe that human relations really only involve interests⁵⁵ and that the latter need only be harmonised (by an invisible hand). Thus, borne along by progress, reason and noble feelings, why should men not live in harmony?

Voices are currently being raised against the belief in the individual existing in and through himself on the basis of the finding of our constitutive interdependence. However, as they still hark back to the optimistic humanism of the Enlightenment, they see such interdependence as a sound reason for living in harmony, forgetting that interdependence nourishes in us the desire to exist both with and against others.

Freud's clinical experience led him to combat such forgetfulness. He did not believe that a proper understanding of interests could overcome passions, and stressed the fundamental ambivalence of our relations with others. He was criticised for affirming what we so gratefully accept from writers. And yet well before Freud, in the guise of "self-esteem", the desire to exist struggling against the need to involve others was a subject for debate by the 17th-century moralists (including La Rochefoucauld). And

55. I would refer the reader to the excellent work by Albert Hirschmann, *The Passions and the Interests. Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph*, Princeton University Press, 1977.

the Ancient Greek tragedies had already portrayed characters who laid claim, in the name of justice, to rights to which they were not entitled, driven by blind, limitless desire into destructive relationships.

Even further back in time, at the beginning of the 7th century BC, Hesiod's *Theogony* also addressed the chaotic propensity to excesses and, combating the latter, the gradual emergence of a world in which the multiple forms of living experience could be unfurled. This heralded a space for coexistence in which each individual had his place. A cosmos where *dikè*, justice, would quell and replace *hubris*. Hesiod's *dikè* was superior to the gods themselves; it assigned to each individual not the goods which he possessed, but, more fundamentally, his place among the others. *Dikè* was primary in the sense that the unlimited is equivalent to nothingness and that coexistence brings forth that which, consequently, can only be had via mutual limitations. In this respect, the philosophy established by the *Theogony* and other oriental cosmogonies proves more profound than such rational speculations as those of Locke, which have played such a prominent role in the development of natural law. Locke conceived the individual as already extant, and he was not alone in this view. Consequently, there was no reason for pondering the foundation of the person – his *raison d'être* in a psychological space, his place among and in the eyes of others, but only his right of ownership and therefore his relationship with a geographical space over which he exerts a dominium which is legitimate despite predating any relationship with others. This conception of the individual will be symbolically and extremely influentially illustrated by the figure of Robinson Crusoe.

The founding role assigned to *dikè* in the *Theogony* has an equivalent in the *Maât*, the ancient Egyptian system of justice. This was a justice which was inherent and immanent in humankind, and was therefore a system of justice which the gods, although they had not created it, endeavoured to promote. A god could judge the dead, but was not empowered to decree what was just.⁵⁶ The three great monotheistic religions ascribed the role of legislator to the one and only God: God gave Moses the tables comprising the Ten Commandments. Yet was the distinction between just and unjust really created by God? Is God not rather the supreme authority in whose name justice must be respected? It is difficult, even for the believer, to accept that God could equally well have made what is unjust just. The lawyer Hugo Grotius (a 17th-century precursor of international

56. Jan Assmann has conducted an outstanding analysis of the meaning and scope of the Egyptian *Maât* in *The Price of Monotheism*, Stanford University Press, 2009.

law) considered that natural law would be valid even if God did not exist. This was no doubt an instance of the same intuition which drives a small child to shout "That's not fair!", as if even the powerful could not escape this verdict from the weak.

I have shown that the source of morality and human rights is to be found in the human condition itself, and more precisely in the fact that coexistence precedes the personal existence of each one of us and is its founding condition. Therefore, the natural origin of the moral requirement and the sense of justice does not prompt relativism, far from it. Nor is it contrary to faith, because if God created man, He necessarily also established the founding order which underpins man's existence. It now remains to be seen how, drawing on the primacy of this coexistence set-up, it is possible and necessary to conceive of the common good.

3. The common good

a. The primary good

We have seen that the human state of nature is the social state, that there has never been a human being who was not embedded, as it were, in a multiplicity. This necessarily means that relational well-being is the primary form of common good. Just as the air is the vital element for the survival of our bodies, coexistence is the element necessary for our existence as persons. The common good is the sum of all that which supports coexistence, and consequently the very existence of individuals.

In order better to grasp the nature of the common good as experienced by humans, we should view it in relation to commercial goods and common goods (in the plural) or public goods. Commercial goods meet two criteria: they are not free (they are bought and sold) and they are produced in a specific quantity, which means that there is a direct link between supply and demand: x units purchased reduces the available supply of units by x . Common or public goods differ from commercial goods: everyone has free access to them and they prompt no rivalry, as the quantity available is not reduced by the number of users (this latter criterion is not always applied absolutely; while sunshine and TV programmes are not affected by the number of persons enjoying them, road services and the well-being produced by a beach diminish when a specific number of users is exceeded). We can draw a distinction between tangible common goods (public lighting, streets, a landscape, water, etc.) and intangible ones (trust, different types of music, cooking recipes, languages, subjects

of conversation, institutions, etc.); but in fact both are usually combined (music takes on tangible form in sound and mountains and seas manifest their beauty in the minds of those gazing at them).

The “atmosphere” prevailing in a group, of whatever size, constitutes an intangible common good experienced by the members of that group. This kind of common good meets the same criteria as the others (free access and non-rivalry); plus a third criterion: the fact of being several persons not only fails to decrease the well-being experienced by each one, but on the contrary, it is the precondition for the existence of this common good.

It follows that the enjoyment of such a good is simultaneous with its production. It bestows reality on the present. Accordingly, while each individual experiences it as a present and personal feeling of existing, it is intimately connected with the equivalent feelings on the part of all the rest. The most common example of this primary good is probably the pleasure of meeting up with familiar faces and chatting in an atmosphere of complete trust.⁵⁷

b. From the mediation of human relations to the political sphere

The natural state of man (being with several others) always requires cultural elements (not transmitted by the genes). It is impossible to be with others without the assistance of cultural common goods. What is called a group’s “identity” is made up of cultural common goods internalised by its members.⁵⁸ If a newborn baby is to take its place in the others’ world, they must grant it this place, consider it as a person, install it within a filiation process, give it a name and speak to it – all of which involve culture. All human relationships are thus mediated by a third party: a cultural common world made up of things tangible and intangible.

This ternary character of human relations sets us aside from the other primates. Like them we exist in symbiosis with an ecosystem consisting of the others and our physical environment. However, unlike these cousins

57. I presented and analysed this concept of the common good as commonly experienced by people in *Le Crépuscule de Prométhée. Contribution à une histoire de la démesure*, Mille et une nuits, 2008, pp. 261-281.

58. This explains Eleazar Barkan’s thesis in *The Guilt of Nations* (W.W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 2000): “People cannot enjoy full human rights if their identity as members of a group is violated”, for “cultural and social ties ... often exist prior to choice. The individual is never an individual in the vacuum, but one with obligations and solidarity that constitute her identity” (pp. XX and 339).

of ours, our ecosystems are also made up of a great cultural world of tangible and intangible objects. This opens up vast possibilities for us. Everything that mediates our relations with others (starting with language, which permits the development of thought) also nourishes our personal existence and enables it to support itself without needing the constant physical presence of others. This shows that the distinction between goods and bonds, which is generally geared to enhancing the latter at the expense of commercial goods, must not be pushed too far. For there is a risk of imagining that bonds can be created and maintained without involving (tangible and intangible) goods, which is an illusion; and that the only things necessary are those which meet our physiological needs – another illusion. In this case, behind a critique of the consumer society lurks the belief in individuals who exist in and through themselves and who are able to connect directly with others, without mediation. This misses the point of the fundamental, and very delicate, function of human cultures, which is to produce the tangible and intangible mediations without which the psyche is destructured and self-awareness is reduced to a feeling of non-existence.

While the unavoidable mediation of human relations produces a wealth of possibilities, it also makes our condition particularly problematical. Firstly, because the requirement of meeting our physiological needs is compounded with the need to internalise the cultural world which we share with others, a *sine qua non* for achieving and preserving our humanity. The fact is that this assimilation process is extremely vulnerable, and any obstacle to it produces any of a number of forms of mental poverty. So mental poverty is not the same thing as material poverty, even if the two are usually combined the world over.

The human condition is also problematical because, as can be seen every day, not everyone shares the same common world, which leads to disaffiliation, fragmentation, discord and conflict, posing a constant threat to coexistence and, where they destroy the latter, wrecking individual lives. If we belong to a fairly privileged class, we do not share the same social and cultural world as those worse off than ourselves. This allows us to be scarcely affected by their misfortune, if at all. Excessive proximity of human misery is dangerous for our well-being, so that we spontaneously tend to keep it at arm's length. Although this disaffiliation and distance protect us, it is at the cost of deteriorating the social coexistence environment. This is obviously disastrous for the underprivileged, but in the long term it is also negative for the well-off, because they must cut themselves off from much of the social environment – in other words from much of

reality – in order to preserve their material and mental security. Bottom-up desocialisation is thus matched by top-down desocialisation.

We have just seen that for each of us, coexistence and life in society are the primary common good, and that this good is produced and preserved thanks to a whole range of cultural common goods. The political sphere, with its concomitant institutions, is manifestly one of these common goods. However, it is a special one: politics is the sphere of human activity with responsibility for looking after all the other forms of common goods, foremost among them the interaction of all in a coexistence environment and in social life. Without political organisation social life collapses. To that extent we might even opine that “everything is political”. We cannot, however, say (except in a totalitarian country) that “politics is all”, because politics serves (or should serve) life in society, which is itself the living environment for each one of us. As Confucius said,⁵⁹ a good government must not only ensure prosperity but also maintain confidence.

The word “coexistence” calls for some clarification. In the struggle to conceive the sovereignty of the people and combat the Divine Right of Kings, the latter was replaced with a covenant freely entered into by individuals, a social contract which founded political power. Consequently, whereas the imaginary world of the *Ancien Régime* was that of filiation – with its three paternal figures, namely God, the king and the head of household – the democratic approach conceived of the social bond as one among contemporaries (ideally among brothers). This is to overlook the fact that in human societies, individuals can not only be contemporaries but also belong to different generations. The social bond is therefore an intergenerational one. Moreover, the coexistence of individuals of different generations obviously does not alter the fact that every generation will eventually be replaced by the next one. And so parents must anticipate their deaths in order to leave room for their children. Therefore, to have a sense of the common good is not just to accept being only one of a number of contemporaries, but also, and perhaps above all, to accept one’s own death, as this is the price of transmission and of the social bond in its temporal dimension.

c. *Common goods and the free market economy*

Why do we have a moral and political duty to safeguard the common good? Because, while living in society is a natural human state, all the

59. Confucius, *Analects*, Chapter XII, paragraph 7.

means by which it is nurtured and developed are not. One of the major problems of the human condition lies in the fact that our human character can only exist in and through culture. However, the goods of all sorts that this concept covers must continually be produced, preserved and passed on. Even if concerted, sustained efforts are made to achieve this, the results are fragile, imperfect and unstable.

If culture is regarded as a series of goods (in the broadest sense), a distinction must be made between those that are exchanged and those that are kept. Those that are exchanged give rise either to commercial transactions or to gifts and gifts in return. Those that are kept are made up, on the one hand, of personal assets that can be passed on to future generations and, on the other, of assets that are shared by contemporaries and/or a succession of generations.⁶⁰ As coexistence and individual existence are inseparable, the last two categories, although legally distinct, often overlap in practice. Many personal assets are also common assets. My mother tongue is as much a part of me as my own body and yet it is also an asset which I share with millions of other people. The knowledge I have acquired, the things I like (music, films, objects, food, landscapes, the town where I live, etc.) and the institutions on which my identity is based and which protect me as a person, are all part of me but, at the same time, things that I share with others.

In any attempt to shed light on the relationship between the market economy and the common good – which is embodied by common assets⁶¹ – it should first be pointed out that, according to neo-liberal economic theories, there is no need to concern oneself with this matter at all. The common good is presumed to come about spontaneously as a result of the self-regulation of the markets. Adam Smith may have devised the theory of the invisible hand (a metaphor which originally meant Divine Providence) but in fact, as Amartya Sen pointed out, he only attributed a limited role to the market. Economists such as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedmann

60. Simple as they may seem, these distinctions are the result of lengthy research by anthropologists. Reference can be made in particular to Mauss, M., *Essai sur le don (Essay on the Gift)* (1925), published by PUF in 2007; Weiner, A., *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1992; Godelier, M., *Au Fondement des sociétés humaines. Ce que nous apprend l'anthropologie*, Albin Michel, 2007; Warnier, J.-P., *Alliance, filiation et inaliénabilité: le débat sur le don à la lumière de l'anthropologie de la parenté*, www.revuedumauss.net/spip.php?article580.

61. In the context in which I use it the expression “common assets” should be considered synonymous with “public assets” or “collective assets”.

showed much more confidence. Being advocates of the struggle against communist influence, they believed that it had contaminated Roosevelt's "socialist" policy of the New Deal and the thinking of Keynes. Therefore, the collapse of the communist bloc, far from signalling the end of their project, meant that they could claim victory. Now, not only were all consumer goods markets supposed to be self-regulating but so were financial markets as well. Politicians themselves, finally convinced by this good news, also came to identify the common good with growth and with the idea that the economy should be ruled by purely financial considerations.

This equation is made all the more tempting by the fact that it is partly warranted. Economic prosperity is undeniably a common good. The converse, however, is not true. The common good does not boil down to economic wealth. Two very different examples should be enough to illustrate this.

It is clear therefore that common assets play a vital role in ensuring that this primary good of community living is established and maintained. We no longer live in an era when we can say, as John Locke did, that "God has given us all things richly."⁶² If we do not look after our common assets, whether they are provided by nature, culture or society, no Divine Providence will do so instead of us. For their protection and preservation, they need to be managed. This can be done by user groups but it must also be supervised by states.⁶³

Of course, commercial goods also play a vital role. It is well-known, however, that beyond a certain level, increased purchasing power no longer adds to well-being or happiness.⁶⁴ If the growing dominance of commercial goods or of money, which comes to the same thing, works to the detriment of common assets, the quality of community living, and hence most people's well-being, deteriorates.

The complementary relationship between these two types of asset depends on the balance between them, and this is not self-perpetuating by any

62. John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Civil Government*, 1690, Chapter 5, paragraph 31.

63. See the work of Elinor Ostrom, winner of the 2009 Nobel Prize for economics, which follows in the wake of the reactions to Garret Hardin's famous article on overgrazing on common land, "The Tragedy of the Commons", *Science*, Vol. 162, December 1968.

64. This was, of course, an idea which the members of the Stiglitz Commission (brought together at President Sarkozy's request) dealt with. The commission's report can be consulted at the following address: <http://stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/en/index.htm>.

means. It is for citizens and governments to sustain it. When, as we see today, the power of the economy and finance tends to grow at the expense of that of states, the latter have less strength to impose their role as guardians of the common good (supposing, that is, that they actually want to play this role, which is not, of course, always the case).⁶⁵ Public opinion can pressure governments to preserve the common good or, in practice, the common assets through which the common good is achieved. However, these still need to be accorded their fair value by the public and the public's representatives. Yet, despite their vital importance and their diversity, which stems from the fact that they are connected with all the aspects of human existence, less attention is paid to common assets than to commercial goods. Commercial goods are in the social spotlight, satisfying or shaping people's desires, while common assets melt into the background. At the consumer ball, common assets are just wallflowers.

The fact is that commercial goods have a price. Their value can be expressed in figures (in dollars, euros or yuans). Therefore, because they can be directly compared to one another, they provide the perfect medium for the interplay of rational choices. Conversely, common assets do not lend themselves well to evaluation in terms of prices. This makes it difficult to compare their value with that of commercial goods. Nor is it easy to compare oneself with others in terms of common assets. I breathe the same air as my neighbours, am a citizen of the same state, am governed by the same institutions, am lit by the same public lighting and am steeped in the same social values. Once again, these assets simply form a backcloth. Furthermore, many common assets are attained by means of commercial goods or services (the work of Bach is a common asset, but pianos and concert tickets have to be bought).⁶⁶

Tangible common assets fall even more easily under the control of money, one example of this being forests sacrificed to the timber trade.⁶⁷ Tangible common assets which do not have any recognised monetary value are no

65. The public money with which members of government pay or bail out a private company costs them nothing, whereas the advantages that the same company can pass on to them benefit them directly.

66. The opposite case, in which a personal asset is made accessible or has its value enhanced by a common asset also occurs. In such cases, the value of the asset is clear to the user. In the eyes of a farmer whose rice paddy depends on a communal irrigation system, as is frequently the case in Asia, the value of this common asset is obvious.

67. See Grundmann, E., *Ces forêts qu'on assassine*, prefaced by Jane Goodall, Calmann-Lévy, 2007.

better treated, as the economic activities which are carried out at their expense do not incorporate the environmental (or social and cultural) damage they cause into their costs. Most of the services rendered by biodiversity are public services (carbon absorption, soil stabilisation, drinking water and food supply and the potential for ecotourism). However, as there is no price attached to these services, they are not recognised and nor is any of the damage incurred by biodiversity.⁶⁸

Lastly, there is a belief that also prompts people to forget the value and even the existence of the primary common asset which coexistence, or the fact that we are connected with others, constitutes. This is the belief, profoundly ingrained in Western culture (and American culture in particular), that individuals innately possess the source of their own being within themselves.

Nonetheless, it should be stressed to what extent this belief, which is one of the crucial components of economic thought (“*homo economicus*” never concerns himself with questions of being, only of having), has also been incorporated into management theory. Generally speaking, as explained above, economists tends to consider common assets as externalities (in other words items which do not enter into account). Yet, the time people spend in their workplace can be assessed from two different viewpoints. The most obvious approach is, of course, the economic one, namely the relationship between the cost of the work performed and the market value of what is produced through this work. The other viewpoint does not give rise to a quantifiable value; it is the sense of well-being or discontent felt by everyone during their time at work. From an economic viewpoint (which is of course the one to which employers give most credence), this is an externality. However, from the employee’s viewpoint, time spent working is time spent living. Having a job means having a place in society and hence having a *raison d’être*, in the most literal sense.⁶⁹ Doing a job that you like surrounded by people you get on with is a pleasure, and this is why what counts for employees is not just how hard the work is in relation to the salary they earn, but also whether the atmosphere at work is good or bad, whether they are

68. This aspect is dwelt on, in particular, by the Indian economist, Pavan Sukhdev, who is leading a study on the economics of ecosystems and biodiversity sponsored by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (interviewed in the French newspaper *Libération*, 23 October 2009).

69. See Linhart, D., *Perte d’emploi, perte de soi* (in collaboration with Rist, B. and Durand, E.), Érès, 2009.

fulfilled or drained by their work, whether they have the feeling that they are part of a team, or on their own and whether they are made to feel that they exist or that they are nothing.

In this area, work organisation and management methods have a considerable impact. It is not in employers' interests for workers to be united, because where they are, they acquire a strength which can be used against the management's interests (and, beyond management, against those of the shareholders). Consequently, for several decades management has been devising strategies to place the emphasis on the individual, making use of tools such as adjustments to working hours and pay, post rotation and the development of rivalries between employees, and also fostering belief in the sanctity of the individual. Training courses for employees, generally drawing on North American ideas, attach value to people's egos and promote a psychology-based approach to problems, conveying a message that is often more seductive than that of the trade unions. Employees are invited to draw on their own innermost resources to meet the challenges they face, and this naturally discourages a sense of solidarity or of being part of a collective whole. If they fail to reach the targets set by an often distant and inaccessible management, their remaining ties with their colleagues can become even weaker and they may come to feel that they count for nothing. And since the conception they have of themselves was at stake in the challenge they were required to meet, this self-image can collapse.⁷⁰

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that Irene Kahn, the former Secretary General of Amnesty International, had to remind companies about the need to apply human rights to their workers (particularly multinational companies, which are sometimes more powerful than states).⁷¹ In targeting consumers, advertisers would like it to be forgotten that they are also workers; and growth, which is supposed to enhance general well-being, actually occurs at the expense of the well-being of many of these workers.

70. See Alter, N., *Donner et prendre. La coopération en entreprise*, La Découverte, 2009; Linhart, D., *Travailler sans les autres?*, Seuil, 2009; Dejourn, C., *Suicide et travail: que faire?* (in collaboration with Bègue, F.), PUF, 2009, and *Souffrance en France. La banalisation de l'injustice sociale*, Points, Seuil, 2000.

71. Interview published in *Le Monde* on 29 May 2009. See also Jacques, G., *Les droits de l'homme et l'impunité des crimes économiques*, Cerf, 2009.

d. The “good life” and the role of the state

The path I have been following finally brings me to a question which is often discussed in works of political philosophy, which is whether the state is entitled to impose a concept of the “good life”, or whether it should allow citizens the freedom to define it as they wish. The answer usually given by liberal thinkers, particularly American ones, is that notions of the good life belong to the private sphere, so the state must confine itself to guaranteeing individual rights. This answer is satisfying if we confine ourselves to the commonly accepted anthropological viewpoint that, as all individuals exist in their own right, like plants which grow independently from those standing next to them, their freedom lies in being able to realise their own potential. However, if, on the other hand, it is assumed that to germinate and grow, each separate plant must be rooted in the fertile soil of coexistence, then the plant develops its potential thanks to that of others and in relation with others. From this standpoint, being reduced to one’s own devices means being stripped of all one’s potential, and the freedom to do whatever one wants becomes a negative force, incapable of sustaining the feeling that one is truly alive and enjoying life. By contrast, the positive side of freedom grows as people take on the activities and the tangible and intangible objects which connect them with others. If freedom and self-fulfilment are brought about by the means of coexistence that are provided by community life and culture, the latter can be regarded as assets in themselves. The criteria of individual freedom and fair distribution of private assets among citizens are not enough to conceptualise the common good, of which the state must be the guarantor; the concept also includes those aspects which give content and substance to life in society. Any policy of civilisation that was anything other than an empty formula would follow this line of thinking.

However, liberal political thinkers have got at least one thing right. It is not the state’s role to predetermine the activities and objects which will provide citizens with the means of coexistence. Instead it should give free rein to the individual freedom and creativity which fuels community life and culture. Provided that the impact of the activities, objects and attitudes through which individuals or groups feel that they exist is to foster better general coexistence, the authorities have no reason to interfere, other than to give encouragement and support. However, where the manner in which some people’s sense of existence is sustained leads to a deterioration in the prevailing state of coexistence, it is right for the state to intervene.

In presenting you with these arguments, I of course side with those who stress the importance of social rights.⁷² However, I do not believe that these will ever be able to impose themselves simply because some thoughtful individuals find them justified. The converging pressures exerted by moral authorities and by institutions are most certainly necessary, but they are not enough. It would be unrealistic to think that they will triumph merely because they have reason and the common interest on their side. In fiction, the strong always take the side of justice in the end. In real life it is unity which provides strength. And much unity will be needed for the weak to overcome the alliance of special interests.

72. In addition to the economist Amartya Sen, reference should be made to philosophers such as Richard Rorty and Martha Nussbaum together with Jean-Baptiste de Foucauld and his summary report of the colloquy on "Social rights and poverty" (Lille, November 2008), entitled "Droits de l'homme et droits sociaux" and published in the *Revue du MAUSS*, No. 13, 1999.

What, if anything, may we mean by “progressive” politics today?

*Claus Offe*⁷³

What is “progress” in the day-to-day use of the term? Someone makes progress in recovering from an illness or in preparing for an exam. A company makes progress in increasing its market share, and new computer software marks progress over its predecessor. Or progress occurs in some military action towards defeating enemy forces. Such overuse of the term is ubiquitous and equivalent to the notion of “taking steps in a desired direction”, whatever the respective desires, and the steps taken, and by whom, may be. This foggy and over-extended use of the term is entirely unhelpful in political contexts.

Instead, the political discourse of progress bundles three core ideas (see Sztompka, 1990). First, progress is the outcome of collective intentional effort driven by reason. “We” are united in what we want and try to achieve it through some co-ordinated effort. That is to say, progress is not the evolutionary outcome of the blind forces of change driven by the market, technical change, or encompassing societal “rationalization” (Weber). In contrast, evolutionist views of social change – be they sociological modernisation theories or doctrines of the “objective laws of motion” of capitalism (Kautsky) – leave at best limited space for the category of progress. In contrast to evolutionist views of change, “progressive” perspectives see change as voluntaristically driven by social forces and agents; the political efforts of which result in legislation and the free exchange of arguments and expression of interests from which it emerges. Progress, in this view, is the declaration of rights and the effective enforcement of such rights, which authorise public policies and programmes. Progressive lawmakers and the social forces supporting them think about society in terms of a difference – the difference between conditions as they are and conditions as they should and can become through transformative efforts. It follows that progress takes place in a state and due to the state’s capacity to implement its laws and programmes. (This implies that weakness or deficiency of a state’s capacity can severely preclude the possibility of progress.)

Second, progress consists in the liberation (or “emancipation”) of collectivities (for example: citizens, classes, nations, minorities, income catego-

73. Professor of Political Science, Hertie School of Governance, Berlin (Germany).

ries, even mankind), be it the liberation from want, ignorance, exploitative power relations, and fear or the freedom of such collectives to govern themselves autonomously, that is, without being dependent upon or controlled by others. Furthermore, the freedom that results from liberation applies equally to all, with equality serving as a criterion to make sure that liberation does not in fact become a mere privilege of particular social categories. To that end, the equality of the opportunity to enjoy freedom is just a means to enforce and *universalise* liberty. Equality is valuable because – and to the extent that – inequalities can interfere with the liberty (the liberty to pursue well-considered life plans, that is) of those who find themselves in an inferior distributional position. Egalitarians want to provide people with the means and conditions that they need to achieve freedom. Hence equality of rights and “real” equality of opportunity is not a goal in itself, much less a rival of liberty, but a mode of granting and achieving liberty. (Given this association of the ideal of liberty with universalism, that is, the notion of not just “real” but also “equal” freedom, it is odd – and an intended oxymoronic provocation – that an electorally quite successful Norwegian political party – as well as a former sister party in Denmark – has chosen to name itself “Progress Party”. For this party combines in its populist programme libertarian anti-tax positions with xenophobic anti-immigrant demands, thus on both counts providing us with an extreme version of liberty-as-privilege.)

Third, progressive change is essentially contested. The typical configuration of forces is that progressive change is opposed by those who are averse to it (“conservatives”) as well as by those who actively try to reverse previous change (“reactionaries”). Progress is costly and involves social conflict between the proponents of progress and those who feel, rightly or wrongly, that they will have to bear its costs (Shils, 1981). Hence reactionary opponents of liberating progressive change have resorted to demonising it as a destructive, counter-productive, fateful force that threatens to undermine tradition, social order or even the interests (“rightly understood”) of those who advocate progress (Hirschman, 1991). Progress will be made only to the extent that those conflicts can be overcome, be it through the use of revolutionary methods or be it through democratic institutions and deliberative procedures, and eventually settled and reconciled.

The idea of progress is a modern and secular one, virtually unknown prior to the 18th century. Before that, we had utopian visions, on the one hand, and on the other the idea that the Christian God will save our souls

as well as the world according to His plan that is beyond human insight, reason, agency and intent.

The recent revival of the discourse of social, economic and political progress (see Cramme and Jaroba, 2009) emerges from the widely appreciated fact that the almost universally accepted and institutionalised yardsticks of progress and the approximation of a “good” society, as they have been established in the second half of the 20th century, have become subject to three interrelated kinds of doubt. First, at least some of these standards are seen to be plainly misguided and normatively invalid because the costs and unanticipated consequences involved in their realisation affect even those who are the presumed beneficiaries of progress, not just its enemies. Progress can involve costs which, at least in retrospect, put its desirability in question (Bloch, 1956). Some notions of progress have clearly been rendered obsolete or profoundly controversial. The development of and reliance on nuclear energy is a case in point. Thus the first dilemma of progress is that we do things in spite of some evidence that the consequences of doing them may well turn out to be undesirable and detrimental in normative terms. We do things that we cannot do in good conscience.

Second and reciprocally, we fail to do things that we might do in good conscience. To the extent standards of progress can be defended as normatively valid (that is, “worth” the costs and efforts), societies and their institutional systems grossly fail to enforce them and to live up to those standards. We fail to do things that we are both able to do and that we routinely invoke as being highly desirable and beneficial in normative terms. The elimination of diseases, hunger and extreme poverty are obvious examples and failures of enforcement that occur while mere lip service is being paid to progressive objectives. Yet such standards are being betrayed or compromised even by the progressive forces that (claim to) act in their name.

Third, under the impact of these two discrepancies (which are mirror images of each other) people in modernised societies such as those of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) world have largely abandoned (and often become cynical about) the notion of progress itself, that is, the difference between conditions as they are and some (assumedly collectively preferable) conditions as they could and should be created through political reform. The notion of progress is being dismissed as no longer relevant at the political level. This sense of difference, the thought that “a different world is possible”, is constitutive

for the forces of both political liberalism and socialism. In fact, the very idea of democracy would be rendered rather pointless if such difference were to be radically denied. Today, progress, as premised upon such difference, appears to have yielded to a post-modern sense of indifference and fatalism, a view according to which, as things cannot be changed anyway due to complexity, interdependence, short-sightedness and the failure to solve problems of collective action, and, as progressive proclamations are seen as empty rhetoric anyway, we have to accept conditions as they are, and history has come to an end.

Let me elaborate on all three of these points.

(1) The end of state socialism has demonstrated beyond any doubt that some putative progressive strategies can in fact turn out to be regressive in their results – and to such an extent that “progress” is no longer worth its costs. Intoxicated by their own ideology of progress, state socialist regimes turned out to be incapable of perceiving and coping with their own looming disasters. Supposedly progressive strategies can place burdens and constraints on members of society which, in the name and for the sake of some future (and, at that, often illusory) liberation, deprive them of their present rights and liberties. If such imbalance obtains, a “progressive” regime can become addicted to repression on which its survival is held to depend yet which, in fact, rather undermines the very conditions of that survival. The Berlin Wall and its eventual fall was a graphic illustration of this dialectic of repression. It seems unlikely that proponents of progressive policies are in danger of forgetting these lessons any time soon. Yet in capitalist democracies, a somewhat analogous mechanism of self-subversion can be observed. These societies have institutionalised an accounting frame of “costs” and “benefits” that is seriously defective in that it tends to extol quantifiable benefits of efficiency, growth and competitiveness while leaving large categories of “qualitative” costs (ranging from the humiliation of workers to long-term environmental damages) entirely unaccounted for (Judt, 2009). Some of the guiding principles underlying Western political economies – such as the yardsticks of technical “progress”, efficiency, productivity, economic growth and “security” – are arguably ill-considered in the first place. The assumption that the further development of the “forces of production” is axiomatically linked to progress, enhanced well-being, and liberation is hardly any longer in need of demolition. Rather, the burden of proof is on those who claim the existence of such a link in specific cases. In fact, it does not require deep analytical insights to understand that allegedly beneficial economic growth as we know it does not automatically lead

to enhanced well-being and that, even to the extent it may, it does not lead to sustainable well-being (Stiglitz et al., 2009; Jackson, 2009). The prevailing obsession with efficiency results in the paradoxical pattern of cutting costs whatever it may cost in terms of “non-economic” negative externalities which are “factored out” by established modes of measuring “progress”. Democratic capitalism depends upon economic growth in the same way as state socialism depends on repression. Growth, like repression, is as much the precondition of short-term stability as it is unsustainable in the long run. Yet the use of this distorted and biased frame of self-observation may well amount to a critical deficit of awareness concerning the subversion of stability.

(2) Much more acute is perhaps the second doubt about progress. While progressive standards of equal liberty (which include the institutions of the rule of law, human rights, liberal democracy, international peace and social protection) are widely endorsed and proclaimed throughout (not just) the developed world, we often turn out to be entirely unable to enforce and redeem these routinely and widely proclaimed normative standards. This is arguably not just a matter of some weakness of will of human agents, but also one rooted in inherent structural weaknesses of liberal democracies, such as the limited temporal scope of elites and non-elites alike. It is also rooted in deficiencies of state capacity, that is, the constrained capacity of democratic states to tax and to regulate. The progressive normative framework of liberal democracies is well entrenched at the level of proclamations and aspirations, yet in reality it suffers from a huge credibility gap. In Germany, 15% of children grow up in conditions of poverty. About the same percentage of mankind (that is, one billion people) suffers from hunger or severe malnutrition, solemnly proclaimed millennium goals notwithstanding. A tiny minority of financial market actors cannot be stopped from inflicting severe damage on the global economy while hijacking major parts of national budgets in the process. Each year, many thousands of people, in Africa and elsewhere, die from diseases that can easily and cheaply be prevented. African “boat people” drown by the hundreds every year while trying to make their way to Europe across the Mediterranean. In the meantime, wars are waged at stupendous costs that are evidently as unwinnable as they are illegal by standards of international law. Considerations of human rights are suspended, in Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, and elsewhere once they appear to be in conflict with the imperatives of a “war on terror”. Established modes of the production and consumption of wealth threaten climate and ecosystems on a scale that borders on a design for the self-decimation

of mankind. Chernobyl and New Orleans are names that remind us of self-inflicted disasters of commission and omission. And so on.

My entirely unoriginal point here is that none of these events and developments can be defended and justified by reference to the norms we still (virtually) all endorse. For instance, it is probably not easy to find a reasonably civilised person who would be willing to advance a consistent argument against the idea that equality of opportunity is a morally good thing to have. Yet a closer look at our educational institutions with their strong patterns of status inheritance reveals that many people are actually deprived of the opportunity to participate in the equal opportunity game (just think of children of migrants who often lack the opportunity to acquire the language skills at an early age on which scholastic success so critically depends). The norms and principles that are valid and well-considered often fail to apply in practical terms.

(3) The third criticism of progressive politics relates to the fact that, firstly, potential progress can, in the light of all the costs involved, turn out not to be worth the effort deployed, and secondly, because the necessary action which could give rise to progress is not being taken. It is based on the doubt whether a “different world” is at all possible, a doubt that gives rise to privatist and fatalistic indifference. The blatant conflict between norms we all share (or at least feel compelled to pay lip service to) and things we all (fail to) do leads many into plain cynicism, and a deep disbelief in the possibility of politics, let alone progressive politics. We cannot afford to live in accordance with our political principles and moral insights because more urgent matters (such as economic growth and the priority to restore it) have to be taken care of first. As a consequence, we have become used to living, it seems, with the reality of ongoing moral scandals, hypocrisy and embarrassment. Moreover, we have become used to massive policy irrationalities of the following inter-temporal sort: On the one hand, we know that solutions will grow prohibitively more costly unless we start to apply preventive remedies now, yet on the other hand we need more time, due to current priorities and resources, before we can start doing so (see Stern, 2006). This reality of seemingly insurmountable embarrassments and irrationalities cannot but breed cynicism and attitudes of post-modernist indifference and a widespread disaffection with political life.

Our societies are evidently largely incapable of avoiding (or effectively coping with) self-inflicted moral or physical disasters and self-destructive crises. The political and philosophical elites of slave-holding societies (or,

for that matter, the executioners of Stalinist modernisation) may well have lived in perfect harmony with their own normative premises (that is, they did what they believed in and believed in what they did, repugnant as these beliefs are from our present enlightened point of view). Such consistency is not something we are able to enjoy. Yet rather than turning to indifference, the progressive alternative, in fact the only adequate conception of progress in the present condition, is to strengthen our collective capacity for disaster control and the prevention of civilisational relapses. We do not need more progress, but we need to cope in better ways with the consequences of the (putative) progress we have made already. That is to say, we do not need new values, visions, or principles – such as revolutionary theorists of former times were busy spelling out. All we need, as progressives, is to dare to take ourselves seriously and build conditions under which we can do so.

Today, an institutional design for social and political progress is no master plan or encompassing blueprint (such as “socialism”, which appears to have become a virtually empty phrase if we look at what all kinds of self-described socialist mean by it). It rather is whatever it takes to make modern societies, regression-prone as they are, less defenceless against their self-inflicted catastrophes. Evidence has been accumulating that such defence mechanisms do not flourish under conditions that neo-liberal economists advocate. The reason is simple: markets do quite wonderful things, but they most certainly do not cultivate the much-needed capacity of human agents for concern for others (“solidarity”) and concern for the future (or solidarity with our future selves) (Lukes, 2005).

In order to strengthen the practice of these two virtues, progressives will, first of all, have to come to terms with the rather oxymoronic insight that the last thing we need is more progress – progress, that is, along the conventional objectives of economic growth, productivist accomplishments, “full” employment, consumerism, and privatisation of the economy as well as of our individual lives (Fitzpatrick, 2004; Goodin, 2001). To be sure, economic growth is – and has long been – the universal peace formula of the capitalist economy and civilisation, as in its absence neither would investors invest nor workers content themselves with the discipline of the workplace and the rewards consumerism has to offer. What progressives need instead is to think about defensive mechanisms that are called for in order to cope with some of the disastrous consequences of “progress”. Given the prevailing tendency of our type of civilisation to slide back into partial barbarism (Offe, 1996) and to subvert its own viability through causing moral as well as physical catastrophes, the question is: how can

we make social and economic processes reasonably “regression-proof” – and thereby sustainable? Albert Hirschman (1993) speaks of the need to “solidify” past progress, to preserve its “robustness and meaning”. No doubt, this is a defensive, not to say conservative (or rather “conservationist”) stance to take. Yet it demands more than just thinking about a “green technology” that will supposedly inaugurate a “third industrial revolution”. It will also involve thinking about designs for mutually constraining roles for states, supranational organisations, and corporations, about new cultural patterns of consumption, mobility, family life, and about the distribution of capabilities, social security, and caring activities.

Again, it is entirely unoriginal to predict that political agendas of the 21st century will be dominated by three tightly interwoven systemic challenges: energy, security, climate. None of these challenges can be conceivably coped with by more economic growth and more employment – quite the contrary. Hence we need to think about, experiment with, and advocate institutional patterns by which we can better cope with our self-inflicted risks and dangers. For that, no holistic blueprint of a “good”, “well-ordered” or “post-revolutionary” society is presently available – nor even desirable. If progressives make progress in redefining “progress”, it is most likely to come in the form of sectoral and piecemeal innovations, the implementation of which will allow us, if all goes well, to bridge the gulf that exists between our current realities and the normative claims of the liberal and socialist traditions. (Incidentally, many authors have been puzzled recently by the question why it is that at exactly when global capitalism underwent its most serious crisis since the Second World War the Social Democrats – in Europe at least – also faced their sharpest decline. Perhaps part of the answer might be that Social Democrats have come to fully embrace a notion of progress that the economic crisis and its aftermath have so profoundly discredited.)

The revised notion of progress that I am trying to explore here is no longer captured by the metaphor of “marching forward”. On the contrary, the appropriate metaphor is that of establishing effective stop signs and thus protecting ourselves individually, as well as society as a whole, against the tendency of “sliding back”. Much of the current controversies on social and labour market policy is framed by defensive concerns, with progressives asking: How can rights of employees, pensioners etc. be defended against the onslaught of European and global neo-liberal forces? The two types of movement contrasted here – “marching forward” versus stopping and preventing disasters – differ in the sociological nature of their respective dynamic. While representative political elites, together with their

technocratic advisers and administrative staff, can pose as leaders in the march of progress and pride themselves on the achievement of quantitatively measurable cumulative results (such as growth rates, jobs, the balancing of current accounts, or even the equalisation of incomes), the issue of what needs to be avoided and prevented must be settled by including the level of ordinary citizens and their perception of the dark underside of progress. A “good” society is not to be defined by a new and utopian set of principles, institutions and visions; it is rather to be designed by its members’ well-founded confidence that “X” cannot happen – with X being a major individual or collective disaster or injustice that social and political actors have either inadvertently caused or failed to prevent. Such a society is one that is equipped with adequate “shock absorbers”, stop signs and brakes, thus becoming able to defend itself against the social and physical consequences of its own mode of operation. Historically, attempts to set up progressive stop signs have been carried out by social movements and their protest activities: anti-war, anti-discrimination, feminist, urban, ecological, anti-imperialist, anti-nuclear energy mobilisations are cases in point. The current supranational negative goal of avoiding and slowing down climate change is another example.

Still another one is the widely perceived obsolescence of the overarching policy goal of “full employment”. As this goal either manifestly cannot be achieved in the political economies of the OECD world (or, if achieved, only under conditions that are to be considered unacceptable in terms of income, security, working conditions and work-life balance), the “defensive” answer is the demand for economic citizenship rights, the partial uncoupling of employment and income, and even the adoption of a scheme that provides for an unconditional basic income for all citizens (or long-term residents) of a country, designed to avoid the condition of social and economic precariousness (van Parijs, 1995). A slogan such as “freedom instead of full employment”, as it has been used by activists advocating economic rights of citizenship in Germany, indicates the shift of perspective: from a “positive” demand for something to be achieved (“full” employment) to a “negative” demand designed to protect those who are otherwise most severely affected (through long-term unemployment and its individual as well as collective implications) by the failure to achieve the positive goal of stable labour market integration. The preventive policy perspective is focused on precluding the incidence of “worst cases” by building durable floors of security. This is clearly in conflict with the aim of ensuring equal resources. For it claims that individual resources may legitimately be unequal – provided, that is, that nobody ends up below some appropriately defined threshold. Some social democratic parties

still promise their electoral clientele that they will universalise upward social mobility. It would be more in line with the current argument if they were to promise that nobody should be left behind and excluded. (But that is probably not advice that campaign consultants would tend to give.)

In order to capture the difference that I wish to emphasise, let me use the metaphorical distinction between “gross progress” and “net progress”. “Gross progress” is a quantitative measure of economic performance, leaving all kinds of negative externalities as well as wasteful and unsustainable aspects of the process unaccounted for. In contrast the notion of “net progress” is a qualitative measure of the increment of liberation and the enhancement of well-being that results from the process in question. The distinction between the two leaves open the logical possibility that a plus in “gross progress” involves a minus in “net progress”, which is to say: an actual decrease of well-being. Yet as we do not have an unequivocal and consensual metric that would allow for the quantitative measurement of “net progress”, we are left with the need to assess the negative side effects and long term externalities of “gross progress” in qualitative terms. Nevertheless, we may conclude that the ambitions of progressive politics are the better fulfilled the more reliably these negative side effects can be controlled and eliminated.

To be sure, there is no objective measure by which we can determine the gap between “gross progress” (such as GDP per capita) and “net progress” (such as changes in the level of some notion of “well-being”). As this is so, two simple rules of justice suggest themselves. First, the question of how much (and what kind of) economic growth must be sacrificed for the sake of protecting and enhancing levels of well-being must be settled, in the absence of uncontested quantitative yardsticks, through deliberative procedures. What we cannot optimise by means of calculation must be decided through methods of enlightened will formation (which, however, it would be naïve to assume will result in consensus.) Second, those categories of people who are most likely to be affected by the negative externalities of “gross progress” (be it peasants in the southern hemisphere, be it the long-term unemployed in rich OECD countries) must be given priority in compensating for some of these externalities in ways that enable them to cope with the remaining ones.

Progress, as conceptualised here, consists in the increased capacity of societies and polities to control those costs (in a very broad sense) resulting from the pursuit of progress, as conventionally understood and

practised. Such a switch to a preventive notion of progress calls for a critical reflection on the question to what extent some sacrifice in terms of “gross progress” will add to “my” (or rather “our”) “net progress”. What proportion of the costs of conventional “gross progress” can we save without inflicting upon ourselves unacceptable losses in terms of “net progress”? And how can we improve the trade-off so as to make what we know is the normatively “right” choice actually affordable?

To illustrate: the mobility regime of most modern societies is based upon highways, automobiles, and carbon fuels. We know that this mobility regime is unsustainable for its ecological and climate-related externalities. Yet the choice between living according to this mobility regime and resisting it (by walking, using a bike, minimising movement, etc.) is not really a choice for most people most of the time, as they depend on commuting to the (typically distant) places where they must work, study, shop and so on. In this situation, the building of an efficient system of public transport is a genuinely progressive (“liberating”) change, as it now provides people with the acceptable choice of using other means of transportation than their private cars. They are now free to practise responsible mobility. Yet politicians may not be free in the first place to open up that choice through putting in place a public transport system that is both technically and economically competitive with the conventional mobility regime. This lack of freedom may be jointly due to the facts that they (a) lack the budgetary resources needed to build and operate the public transport system and that (b) they have reasons to fear that, if most people were to switch to public transport for most of their mobility needs, this would involve a (from their perspective, categorically unacceptable) loss of jobs in the car industry. We might summarise this sad story by saying: it is politically unaffordable to make choice affordable to citizens – a choice, that is, in favour of a widely shared notion of “net progress”.

Needless to say, people differ in their awareness and appreciation of what the undesirable side effects and long-term externalities of the dynamics of (the conventional understanding of) progress are. What is to be avoided with the highest priority – and can be avoided and prevented under acceptable terms – is far from self-evident or consensual. There are so many adverse features, risks, moral embarrassments and unsustainable implications in the day-to-day operation of capitalist democracies that any intellectual ambition would seem hopeless to single out one “dominant” contradiction or crisis tendency. The first step of any progressive politics (not of political parties, but more likely of social and political movements and civil society actors) is to sensitise people to the regressive potential

inherent in the social, political and economic arrangements under which we live. The second step is to persuade them that cynical acquiescence and indifference is not a viable option as it hinders us from taking ourselves seriously.

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Europe AD 2010: challenges, prospects, tasks

Zygmunt Bauman⁷⁴

On 8 March 1994 Vaclav Havel, then the President of the Czech Republic, appealed to the European Parliament to prepare a document defining the meaning of “Europe” and of “European”. Havel suggested something like a “Charter of European Identity”: in his view such a charter was indispensable given that the world had all but compelled Europe to shoulder the responsibility for ensuring the unavoidable unification of humanity. The charter was to be in its intention a manifesto of the European *raison d’être* in the era of globalisation. To this day, the appeal has retained its topicality – while gaining enormously in urgency.

Havel’s appeal was widely heard; and yet not closely enough listened to, nor widely enough followed, due to the widespread short-sightedness and the absence of vision prominent in our times. Attempts to answer Havel’s call were however made, most remarkably by the Europa-Union Deutschland, which on its 41st Congress, held in Lübeck on 28 October 1995, voted and accepted Havel’s suggestion to write up the “Charter of European Identity”.⁷⁵ That document presents, or postulates, Europe as a community of values, naming tolerance, humanism and brotherhood as most important among them. The authors of the document admitted that in the past Europe recklessly violated those values on numerous occasions, yet expressed their hope that after bitter experiences of rampant nationalist chauvinism, imperialism and totalitarianism, Europe would return to those values and use them in its effort to build international relations on the foundations of freedom, justice and democracy. The authors went on to say: “Europe” also means a “community of responsibility”. Europe is obliged to share its experience and the lessons it has learnt with the rest of humanity. Its mission and duty actively assist in the solution of world problems through co-operation, solidarity and unity, and through its example of the sanctity of human rights and a valiant defence of the rights of minorities.

Indeed, until quite recently one could still define Europe as Denis de Rougemont suggested not that long ago: by its “globalising function”. Europe was for most of the last few centuries a uniquely adventurous continent, unlike any other. Having been the first continent to enter the mode of life that it subsequently dubbed “modern”, Europe created, on

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75. www.europa-web.de/europa/02wwwswwww/203chart/chart_gb.htm.

a local level, the kind of problems no one on Earth had heard of before or had the slightest inkling how to resolve. But Europe also invented the recipe for their resolution – though of a kind unfit to be universalised and deployed by all those whom those problems, originally exclusively European, confronted later. Europe resolved the problems it produced internally (and so locally) by transforming other parts of the planet into a source of cheap energy, cheap minerals, inexpensive and docile labour – and above all a dumping ground for Europe’s excessive and redundant products and supernumerary and redundant people – the products it could not consume and people it could not employ. To put it in the nutshell, Europe invented a global solution to locally produced problems; though by putting that invention in practice, it forced all other humans to seek, desperately yet hopelessly, local solutions to the globally produced problems – which is roughly the present state of affairs for which we, the Europeans, bear collective responsibility.

The opportunity to resolve local problems at the expense of the world is no longer available – and hence the shock and the trauma, anxiety, and fast fading of Europe’s (and its overseas extensions) confidence. It is not available since global solutions to the locally produced problems can by definition be plausible only to a few inhabitants of the planet, and only as long as those few enjoy superiority over the rest, benefiting from a power differential large enough to secure, or at least to hope to secure, the possibility of exploiting their advantages with impunity. But Europe no longer enjoys such privilege and cannot seriously hope to recover what it has lost.

Hence an abrupt fall of European self-assurance, a sudden explosion of acute interest in a “new European identity” and in “redefining the role” of Europe in a planetary game where the rules and the stakes have drastically changed and continue to change, although they are no longer under Europe’s control, and Europe’s influence, if any, is minimal. Hence also a resurrection of the “back to your tents, O Israel” longings, a rising tide of neo-tribal sentiments swelling from Copenhagen to Rome and from Paris to Prague, magnified and beefed up by the ever louder “enemy at the gate” and “fifth column” alerts and fears, and the resulting “besieged fortress spirit” manifested in the rapidly growing popularity of securely locked borders and firmly shut doors.

Europe cannot seriously contemplate having the means to re-order the planet by force or forceful pressure. Europe cannot match the American military might, and so can effectively resist the push towards militarisation

of the planet; nor can it hope to recover its past industrial domination, irretrievably lost in our increasingly polycentric world, now subjected in its entirety to the processes of economic modernisation. It can – and should – however try to make the planet hospitable to other values and other modes of existence than those represented and promoted (until recently, explicitly and blatantly) by the American military super power; hospitable to the values and modes which Europe, more than any other part of planet, is predisposed to offer the world, the values which the inhabitants of our planet need more than anything else to design, to enter and to follow the road leading to Kant's *allgemeine Vereinigung der Menschheit* (Universal unification of humanity) and perpetual peace.

Having admitted that “it is nonsense to suppose that Europe will rival the economy, military and technological might” of the United States and of the (particularly Asiatic) emergent powerhouses, George Steiner insists that Europe's assignment “is one of the spirit and the intellect”.⁷⁶ “The genius of Europe is what William Blake would have called ‘the holiness of the minute particular’. It is that of linguistic, cultural, social diversity, of a prodigal mosaic which often makes a trivial distance, twenty kilometres apart, a division between worlds ... Europe will indeed perish if it does not fight for its languages, local traditions and social autonomies. If it forgets that ‘God lies in the detail’.”

Similar thoughts can be found in the literary legacy of Hans-Georg Gadamer.⁷⁷ It is its variety, its richness boarding on profligacy, which Gadamer places at the top of the list of Europe's unique merits; he sees the profusion of differences as the foremost among the treasures which Europe preserved and can offer to the world. “To live with the Other, live as the Other's Other, is the fundamental human task – on the most lowly and the most elevated levels alike ... Hence perhaps the particular advantage of Europe, which could and had to learn the art of living with others”. In Europe, like nowhere else, “the Other” has been and is always close, in sight and within arm's reach; metaphorically or even literally, the Other is a next-door neighbour – and Europeans can't but negotiate the terms of that neighbourliness despite the alterity and the differences that set them apart. The European setting marked by “the multilingualism, the close neighbourhood of the Other, and equal value accorded to the Other in

76. See Steiner, G., *The Idea of Europe*, Nexus Institute 2004.

77. See in particular Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Das Erbe Europas* (Suhrkamp, 1989) – quoted here after Philippe Invernél's French translation, *L'héritage de l'Europe*, Rivages poche 2003, pp. 40 and 124.

a space tightly constrained" could be seen as a school from which the rest of the world may well learn crucial knowledge and skills making the difference between survival and demise. To acquire and share the art of learning from each other is, in Gadamer's view, "the task of Europe". I would add: Europe's mission, or more precisely Europe's fate, waiting to be embraced and recast into its destiny.

The importance of this task, and the importance of Europe's determination to undertake it, is impossible to exaggerate, as the decisive condition of solving vital problems of modern world, a truly *sine qua non* condition, are friendship and "buoyant solidarity" that alone can secure an orderly structure of human cohabitation. Confronting that task, we may need to look back to our shared European heritage for inspiration: for the ancient Greeks, Gadamer reminds us, the concept of "friend" "articulated the totality of social life". "Friends" tend to be mutually tolerant and sympathetic. "Friends" are people who are able to be friendly with each other however they differ, and helpful to each other despite or rather because of their differences – and to be friendly and helpful without renouncing their uniqueness, while never allowing that uniqueness to set them apart from and against each other.

More recently, Lionel Jospin⁷⁸ invested his hopes for a new world importance of Europe in its "nuanced approach to current realities". Europe has learned, he said, the hard way and at an enormous price paid in the currency of human suffering, "how to get past historical antagonisms and peacefully resolve conflicts" and how to bring together "a vast array of cultures" and to live with a prospect of permanent cultural diversity which is no longer seen as only a temporary irritant. Let's note that these are precisely the sort of lessons which the rest of the world most urgently needs.

When seen against the background of the conflict-ridden planet, Europe looks like a laboratory where the tools necessary for Kant's "universal unification of humanity" keep being designed, and as a workshop in which they keep being "tested in action", though, for the time being, in the performance of less ambitious, smaller-scale jobs. The tools that are currently forged and put to test inside Europe are use, above all, in the delicate operation (for some less sanguine observers, too delicate for anything more than a sporting chance of success) of separating the

78. See Jospin, L., "Solidarity or playing solitaire", *The Hedgehog Review*, Spring 2003, pp. 32-44.

bases of political legitimacy, of democratic procedure and willingness for a community-style sharing of assets, from the principle of national/territorial sovereignty with which they have been for the most part of modern history inextricably linked.

The logic of global responsibility, if adopted and given preference over the logic of local retrenchment, may help to prepare the Europeans, those eminently adventurous people notorious for their fondness for experimentation, for their next adventure, still greater perhaps and more seminal than all previous ones. Despite the formidable volume of adverse odds, it could once more cast Europe into the role of a global pattern-setter; it may enable Europe to deploy the values it has learned to cherish and managed to salvage and preserve against overwhelming odds, and the political/ethical experience it has acquired of democratic self-government, of replacing coercion with dialogue, deep seated antagonisms with coexistence, enmity with co-operation, in the awesome task of replacing the collection of territorially entrenched entities engaged in a zero-sum game of survival with a fully inclusive, planetary human community. Only when (if) such a community is achieved, may Europe consider its mission accomplished. Only within such a community can the values enlightening Europe's ambitions and pursuits, values that are Europe, be truly safe.

The budding European Federation is now facing the task of repeating the feat accomplished by the nation-state of early modernity: the task of bringing back together power and politics, presently separated and navigating in opposite directions. The road leading to the implementation of that task is as rocky now as it was then, strewn with snares and spattered with incalculable risks. Worse of all, this road is unmapped, and each successive step seems like a leap into the unknown.

Many observers doubt the wisdom of such an undertaking and predict that its chances of success are low. The sceptics don't believe in the viability of a "post-national" democracy, or any democratic political entity above the level of the nation – insisting that the allegiance to civic and political norms would not replace "ethno-cultural ties" and that citizenship is unworkable on a purely "civilisational" (legal-political) basis without the assistance of "Eros" (the "emotional dimension"), while assuming that the "ethno-cultural ties"⁷⁹ and "Eros" are uniquely and inextricably linked to the kind of the "past-and-destiny-sharing sentiment" which went down in history under the name of nationalism. They believe that

79. See, for instance, Shore, C., "Whither European Citizenship?", in *European Journal of Social Theory*, February 2004, pp. 27-44.

communal-style solidarity can strike roots and grow only inside this connection and cannot be rebuilt or established anew in any other way. The possibility that the nationalistic legitimisation of state power was but a historically confined episode and but one of the many alternative fashions of combining politics and power, or that the modern blend of statehood and nationhood was more akin to a marriage of convenience than the result of providence or historical inevitability (or indeed that the marriage itself was not a foregone conclusion and when arranged proved to be as stormy as most divorce procedures tend to be) is thereby dismissed by the simple expedient of begging the question.

Jürgen Habermas is arguably the most consistent and the most authoritative spokesman for the opposition to that kind of scepticism. "A democratic order does not inherently need to be mentally rooted in 'the nation' as a pre-political community of shared destiny. The strength of the democratic constitutional state lies precisely in its ability to close the holes of social integration through the political participation of its citizens."⁸⁰ This is true – but the argument may be pushed yet further. "The nation", as any promoter of any "national idea" would eagerly admit, is as vulnerable and frail without a sovereign state that protects it (indeed, assures its continuing identity), as the state would be without a nation that legitimises its demands of obedience and discipline. Modern nations and modern states are twin products of the same historical constellation. One might "precede" the other only in the short run, trying to make that short run as short as possible – seeking to replace priority with simultaneity, and inserting an equal sign between the ostensibly autonomous partners. The French State was "preceded" by Savoyards and Bretons, not Frenchmen; the German State by Bavarians and Prussians, not Germans. Savoyards and Bretons would have hardly turned into Frenchmen and Bavarians and Prussians into Germans were not their reincarnation "power assisted" by, respectively, the French and the German states.

To all practical intents and purposes, modern nations and modern states alike emerged in the course of simultaneous and closely intertwined processes of nation- and state-building; anything but cloudless processes, and anything but guaranteed to succeed. To say that a political framework cannot be established without a viable ethno-cultural organism already in place is neither more nor less convincing than to say that no ethno-cultural organism is likely to become and stay viable without a working

80. Habermas J., *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*, tr. Pensky M., Polity Press, 2001, p. 76.

and workable political framework. A chicken-and-egg dilemma, if there ever was one.

Habermas's comprehensive and grinding analysis points in a very similar direction:⁸¹

precisely the artificial conditions in which national consciousness arose argue against the defeatist assumption that a form of civic solidarity among strangers can only be generated within the confines of the nation. If this form of collective identity was due to a highly abstractive leap from the local and dynastic to national and then to democratic consciousness, why shouldn't this learning process be able to continue?

Shared nationhood is not a necessary condition of state legitimacy if the state is a genuinely democratic body: "The citizens of a democratic legal state understand themselves as the authors of the law, which compels them to obedience as its addressees."⁸²

We may say that nationalism fills the legitimation void left (or not filled in the first place) by the democratic participation of the citizens. It is in the absence of such participation that the invocation to the nationalist sentiments and the efforts to beef them up are the state's sole recourse. The state must invoke the shared national destiny, building its authority on the willingness of its subjects to die for the country if and only if the rulers of the country need its residents solely in their readiness to sacrifice their lives, while not needing, or shunning, their contribution to the daily running of the country affairs.

All the same, Europe as a whole, as well as many of its parts, seems currently to be seeking an answer to the new and unfamiliar problems in inward – rather than outward-looking policies, centripetal rather than centrifugal, implosive rather than expansive: as retrenchment, falling back upon themselves, building fences topped with X-ray machines and closed-circuit television cameras, putting more officials inside the immigration booths and more border guards outside, tightening the nets of immigration and naturalisation law, keeping refugees in closely guarded and isolated camps or turning them back before they've had a chance of claiming refugee or asylum-seeker status; in short, sealing its own doors while doing pretty little, if anything at all, to repair the situation that prompted their closure. Let's recall that the funds which the European

81. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

Union transferred most willingly and with no haggling to the central and east European countries applying for accession were those earmarked for the fortification of their eastern borders.

Casting the victims of the rampant globalisation of financial and commodity markets as first and foremost a security threat, rather than people needing aid and entitled to compensation for their damaged lives, has its uses. First, it puts paid to the ethical compunctions: one is dealing with enemies who “hate our values” and cannot stand the sight of men and women living in freedom and democracy. Second, it allows for the diversion of funds that could be used “unprofitably” on the narrowing of disparities and defusing of animosities, to the profitable task of beefing up the weapons industry, arms sales and stockholders gains, and so improving the statistics of home employment and raising the feel-good gradient. Last but not least, it beefs up the flagging consumerist economy by retargeting diffuse security fears through the urge to buy the little private fortresses on wheels (like the notoriously unsafe for the drivers inside and those outside, gas-guzzling yet pricey “Hummers” or Sport Utility Vehicles (SUVs)), or by imposing the unpopular yet lucrative “brand rights” or “intellectual rights” with the excuse of preventing the profits drawn from their violation from being diverted to the terrorist cells.

It also allows governments to shake off the more irritating constraints of the popular, democratic control by recasting political and economic choices as military necessities. America, as always, takes the lead – but it is closely watched and eagerly followed by a large number of European governments. As William J. Bennett recently stated in a book aptly titled *Why we Fight: Moral Clarity and the War on Terrorism*, “the threats we face today are both external and internal: external in that there are groups and states that want to attack United States: internal in that there are those who are attempting to use this opportunity to promulgate the agenda of ‘blame America first’. Both threats stem from either a hatred for the American ideals of freedom and equality or a misunderstanding of those ideals and their practice”.⁸³ Bennett’s credo is an ideological gloss over a practice already in full swing – like the USA Patriot Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act), aimed explicitly at people engaged in the kind of political action protected by the American Constitution, legalising clandestine surveillance, searches without warrants and other

83. See Rampton, S. and Stauber, J., “Trading on Fear”, *The Guardian* “Weekend”, 12 July 2003.

invasions of privacy as well as incarceration without charge and trials before military courts.

Admittedly, there are reasons for Europe to be increasingly inward-looking. The world no longer looks inviting. It appears to be a hostile world, a treacherous, vengeance-breathing world, a world that needs yet to be made safe for us, the tourists. This is a world of the imminent “war of civilisations”; a world in which all and any steps are fraught with risks. The tourists who dare to take such risks must look out and stay constantly on the alert; most crucially, they should stick to the safe havens and marked and protected paths cut out from the wilderness for their exclusive use. Whoever forgets those precepts does so at her or his own risk – and must be ready to bear the consequences.

In an insecure world, security is the name of the game. It is the main purpose of the game and its paramount stake ... It is a value that, in practice if not in theory, dwarfs and elbows out all other values – including the values dearest to “us” while hated most by “them”, and the prime motivation for “their” wish to harm “us”. In a world as insecure as ours, personal freedom of word and action, right to privacy, access to truth – all those things we used to associate with democracy and in whose name we still go to war – need to be trimmed or suspended. Or at least that is what the official version, confirmed by the official practice, maintains.

The truth, nevertheless, is that we cannot effectively defend our freedoms at home while fencing ourselves off the rest of the world and attending solely to our home affairs.

I repeat: there are valid reasons to suppose that on a globalised planet, on which the plight of everyone everywhere determines and is determined by everyone else’s plights, one can no longer assure freedom and democracy “separately” – in one country, or in a few selected countries only. The fate of freedom and democracy in each land is decided and settled on the global stage – and only on that stage it can be defended with a realistic chance of a lasting success. It is no longer in the power of any singly acting state, however heavily armed, resolute and uncompromising, to defend chosen values at home while turning its back on the dreams and yearnings of those outside its borders. But turning our backs is precisely what we, the Europeans, seem to be doing, while keeping our riches and multiplying them at the expense of the poor outside.

A few examples will suffice. If 40 years ago the income of the richest 5% of the world population was 30 times higher than the income of the

poorest 5%, 15 years ago it was already 60 times higher, and by 2002 it reached the factor of 114.

As Jacques Attali points out in *La voie humaine*,⁸⁴ half of the world's trade and more than half of global investment benefits just 22 countries, which accommodate a mere 14% per cent of the world's population, whereas the 49 poorest countries, inhabited by 11% of the world's population receive between themselves just half of a 1% share of the global product – just about the same as the summary income of the three wealthiest men of the planet. Ninety per cent of the total wealth of the planet remains in the hands of just 1% of the planet's inhabitants.

Tanzania earns US\$2.2 billion a year which it divides among 25 million inhabitants. The Goldman Sachs Bank earns US\$2.6 billion, which is then divided between 161 stockholders.

Europe and the US spend \$17 billion each year on animal food while, according to experts, \$19 billion is needed to save the world's population from hunger. As Joseph Stiglitz reminded the trade ministers preparing for their Mexico meeting,⁸⁵ the average European subsidy per cow “matches the \$2 per day poverty level on which billions of people barely subsist” – whereas America's \$4 billion cotton subsidies, paid to 25 000 well-off farmers, “bring misery to 10 million African farmers and more than offset the US's miserly aid to some of the affected countries”. One occasionally hears Europe and America accusing each other publicly of “unfair agricultural practices”. But, Stiglitz observes, “neither side seems to be willing to make major concessions” – whereas nothing short of a major concession would convince others to stop looking at the unashamed display of “brute economic power by the US and Europe” as anything other than an effort to defend the privileges of the privileged, to protect the wealth of the wealthy and to serve their interests – which, in their opinion, boil down to more wealth and yet more wealth.

If they are to be lifted and refocused at a level higher than the nation state, the essential features of human solidarity (like the sentiments of mutual belonging and of shared responsibility for the common future, or the willingness to care for each other's well-being and to find amicable and durable solutions of sporadically inflamed conflicts) must necessarily have an institutional framework of opinion-building and will-formation.

84. Attali, J., *La voie humaine*, Fayard, 2004.

85. Stiglitz, J., “Trade imbalances”, *The Guardian*, 15 August 2003.

The European Union is aiming, however slowly and haltingly, towards a rudimentary or embryonic form of such an institutional framework (the future will decide which of the two concepts was better suited to the current efforts), encountering on its way, as the most obtrusive obstacles, the existing nation states and their reluctance to part with whatever is left of their once fully-fledged sovereignty. The current direction is difficult to plot unambiguously, and prognosticating its future turns is even more difficult (in addition to being irresponsible and unwise).

The present momentum seems to be shaped by two different (perhaps complementary, but then perhaps incompatible) logics – and it is impossible to decide in advance which logic will ultimately prevail. As has been mentioned already, one is the logic of local retrenchment; the other is the logic of global responsibility and global aspiration.

The first logic is that of the quantitative expansion of the territory-and-resource basis for the *Standortkonkurrenz* (“competition between localities”, “locally grounded competition”; more precisely, competition between territorial states) strategy. Even if no attempts were ever made by the founders of the European Common Market and their successors to emancipate economy from their relatively incapacitating confinement in the *Nationalökonomie* frames, the “war of liberation” currently conducted by the global capital, finances and trade against “local constraints”, a war triggered and intensified not by local interests but by the global diffusion of opportunities, would have been waged anyway and gone on unabated. The role of European institutions does not consist in eroding member states’ sovereignty and in particular in exempting economic activity from their controlling (and constraining) interference; in short, it does not serve to facilitate, let alone initiate, the divorce procedure between power and politics. For such a purpose the services of European institutions are hardly required. The real function of European institutions consists, on the contrary, of stemming the tide: stopping the capital assets that have escaped the nation-state cages inside the continental stockade and keeping them there. If in view of the rising might of global capitals the effective enclosure of capital, financial, commodity and labour markets and the balancing of books inside a single nation-state become ever more daunting tasks – perhaps severally, or all together, the powers of nation-states will be able to match and confront them on more equal terms? In other words: the logic of local entrenchment is that of reconstructing at European Union level the legal-institutional web which no longer holds together the “national economy” within the boundaries of the nation-state’s territorial sovereignty. But, as Habermas

put it – “the creation of larger political unities in itself changes nothing about the mode of *Standortkonkurrenz* as such.”⁸⁶ Viewed from the planetary perspective, the joint strategy of a continental combination of states is hardly distinguishable from the single nation-states’ codes of conduct which it came to replace. It is still guided by the logic of division, separation, enclosure and retrenchment; of seeking territorial exemptions from the general rules and trends – or to put it bluntly, local solutions for globally generated problems.

The logic of global responsibility on the other hand (and once that responsibility is acknowledged and taken, also the logic of global aspiration), is aimed, at least in principle, at confronting the globally generated problems point-blank – at their own level. It stems from the assumption that lasting and truly effective solutions to the planet-wide problems can only be found and work through the renegotiation and reform of the web of global interdependencies and interactions. Instead of aiming at the least local damage and most local benefits derived from the capricious and haphazard drifts of global economic forces, it would rather pursue a new kind of global setting, in which the itineraries of economic initiatives anywhere on the planet will no longer be whimsical and guided haphazardly by momentary gains alone, with no attention paid to the side-effects and “collateral casualties”, and no importance attached to the social dimensions of the cost and effects balances. In short, that logic is aimed, to quote Habermas again,⁸⁷ at the development of “politics that can catch up with global markets”.

Unlike the logic of local entrenchment which mostly replays the persistent motifs of the “*raison d’état* philosophy”, familiar since universally (or almost) dominant in the nation-state era, the logic of global responsibility and aspiration ushers us onto an unknown territory and opens an era of political experimentation. It rejects, as leading into a blind alley, the strategy of a purely local defence against planetary trends; it also abstains (by necessity, if not by reasons of conscience) from falling back on another orthodox European strategy of treating the planetary space as a “hinterland” (or, indeed, the *Lebensraum*) onto which the problems home-produced yet unresolvable at home could be unloaded. It accepts that it would be utterly pointless to follow the first strategy with a realistic hope of even a modicum of success; whereas having lost its global

86. Habermas J., *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*, tr. Pensky, M., Polity Press, 2001, p. 76.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

domination, and living instead in the shadow of an empire that aspires to become planetary and which it can try at best to contain and mitigate, but hardly to control – Europe is not in a position to follow the second strategy, however successful that course might have been in the past and however tempting it may still be.

And so, willy-nilly, new unexplored strategies and tactics must be sought and tried without the possibility of reliably calculating, let alone to guaranteeing, their ultimate success. “At the global level”, Habermas warns, “co-ordination problems that are already difficult at the European level grow still sharper”. This is because “civic solidarity is rooted in particular collective identities”, whereas “cosmopolitan solidarity has to support itself on the moral universalism of human rights alone”, while the “political culture of a world society lacks the common ethical-political dimension that would be necessary for a corresponding global community.”⁸⁸

A genuine catch-22: the community which could conceivably underlie a common ethical sensibility and make political co-ordination feasible (thus providing the necessary condition which must be met if the supra-national and supra-continental solidarity is to sprout and take roots) is difficult to attain precisely because the “ethical-political dimension” is thus far missing and is likely to go on being missing, or stop short of what is needed, as long as the “ethical-political dimension” is incomplete. What Europe faces now is the prospect of developing, gradually and simultaneously, and possibly through a long series of trials and errors, the objects and the tools fit to tackle and resolve them. To make the task yet more daunting, the ultimate destination of all that labour, an effective planetary policy based on a continuous polylogue rather than on the soliloquy of a single planetary government, is equally unprecedented. Only historical practice may prove (though never disprove) its feasibility; or, more correctly, render it feasible.

We feel, guess, suspect what needs to be done. But we cannot know in which shape and form it eventually will be done. We can be pretty sure though that the ultimate shape will not be familiar – different from all we have got used to in the past, in the era of nation building and nation states’ self-assertion. And it can hardly be otherwise, as all political institutions currently at our disposal were made to the measure of the territorial sovereignty of the nation-state; they resist stretching to the planetary, supra-national scale, and the political institutions serving the self-constitution of the planet-wide human community won’t be, can’t

88. Ibid., pp. 104, 108.

be “the same, only bigger”. We may well sense that the passage from “international” agencies and tools of action to “universal” – all-human – institutions must be and will be a qualitative, not merely a quantitative change. So we may ponder, worryingly, whether the presently available frames of “global politics” may accommodate the practices of the emergent global polity or indeed serve as their incubator; the United Nations, for instance – briefed at its birth to guard and defend the undivided sovereignty of the state over its territory? The binding force of global laws – can it depend on the (admittedly revocable!) agreements of sovereign members of the “international community” to obey them?

To grasp the logic of the fateful departures in 17th-century European thought, Reinhart Koselleck deployed the trope of the “mountain pass”. I suggest that this is apt and felicitous metaphor for us as much as it was for our ancestors of four centuries ago; for us, who struggle to anticipate the twists and turns which the 21st century will inevitably bring in its course, and to give shape to the seminal departures by which the current century is likely to be retrospectively defined in the accounts penned by future historians.

Like our ancestors three centuries ago, we are on a rising slope of the mountain pass which we have never climbed before – and so we have no inkling what sort of view will open once we have reached it; we are not sure where the winding and twisted gorge will eventually lead us. One thing we can be sure of is that where we are now, at some point of a steeply rising slope, we cannot settle and rest. And so we go on moving; we move not so much “in order to, as “because of” – we move because we can’t rest or stand still for long. Only when (if) we reach the pass and survey the landscape on its other side, will the time come to move “in order to” be pulled ahead by the sight of a visible destination, by the goal within our reach, rather than pushed to move by current discomforts.

For the time being, little can be said of the shape of that vexingly distant *allgemeine Vereinigung der Menschengattung* except that it will (hopefully) gradually acquire more visible and manageable contours; that is, it will if there are still climbers left to find out that it has and to say so. I suggested that much to Koselleck, pointing to the current rarity of prophetic talents and the notorious deficiencies of scientific prediction. In his reply, however, Koselleck added an argument yet more decisive: we don’t even have the concepts with which we could articulate and express our anticipations. Concepts fit to grasp the realities that are not yet are formed in the practice of climbing, and not a moment before it started. Of the other side of the mountain pass, prudent climbers ought to keep silent.

The climbers' ignorance about the shape of their final destination does not mean that they should stop moving. And in the case of Europeans, known for their fondness for adventure and knack for experimentation, it is unlikely that they will. We will need many stark choices, all to be made under the condition of severely limited knowledge (this is exactly what sets adventure apart from routine and acting on command). Adversary odds seem truly daunting – but there are also hopes which are not at all idle, hopes rooted firmly in our acquired skills of living with difference and of engagement in meaningful and mutually beneficial dialogue, skills that stay hidden most of the time yet come to the surface in the moments of crisis.

Ultimately, the choice we confront is between our cities turning into places of terror “where the stranger is to be feared and distrusted”, or sustaining the legacy of mutual civility of citizens and “solidarity of strangers”, solidarity strengthened by the ever harder tests to which it is subjected and which it survives – now and in the future.

Cities, and particularly mega-cities like London, are the dustbins into which problems produced by globalisation are dumped. They are also laboratories in which the art of living with those problems (though not of resolving them) is experimented with, put to the test, and (hopefully, hopefully ...) developed. Most seminal impacts of globalisation (above all, the divorce of power from politics, and the shifting of functions once undertaken by political authorities sideways, to the markets, and downward, to individual life politics) have been by now thoroughly investigated and described in great detail. I will confine myself therefore to one aspect of the globalisation process – too seldom considered in connection with the paradigmatic change in the study and theory of culture: namely, the changing patterns of global migration.

There were three different phases in the history of modern-era migration.

The first wave of migration followed the logic of the tri-partite syndrome: territoriality of sovereignty, “rooted” identity, gardening posture (subsequently referred to, for the sake of brevity, as TRG). That was the emigration from the “modernised” centre (that is, the site of order building and economic progress – the two main industries turning out, and off, the growing numbers of “wasted humans”), partly exportation and partly eviction of up to 60 million people, a huge amount by 19th-century standards, to “empty lands” (that is, lands whose native population could be struck off the “modernised” calculations; be literally uncounted and unaccounted for, presumed either non-existent or irrelevant). Native resi-

dues still alive after massive slaughters and massive epidemics were proclaimed by the settlers as the objects of “white man’s civilising mission”.

The second wave of migration could be best described as an “Empire emigrates back” case. With the dismantling of colonial empires, a number of indigenous people in various stages of their “cultural advancement” followed their colonial superiors to the metropolis. Upon arrival, they were cast in the only world view, strategic mould available: one constructed and practised earlier in the nation-building era to deal with the categories earmarked for “assimilation” – a process aimed at the annihilation of cultural difference, casting the “minorities” at the receiving end of crusades, *Kulturkämpfe* and proselytising missions (currently renamed, in the name of “political correctness”, as “citizenship education” aimed at “integration”). This story is not yet finished: time and again, its echoes reverberate in the declarations of intent of the politicians who notoriously tend to follow the habits of Minerva’s Owl known to spread its wings by the end of the day. As the first phase of migration, the drama of the “empire migrating back” is tried, though in vain, to be squeezed into the frame of the now outdated territorial sovereignty syndrome.

The third wave of modern migration, now in full force and still gathering momentum, leads into the age of diasporas: a worldwide archipelago of ethnic/religious/linguistic settlements – oblivious to the trails blazed and paved by the imperialist-colonial episode and following instead the globalisation-induced logic of the planetary redistribution of life resources. Diasporas are scattered, diffused, extend over many nominally sovereign territories, ignore territorial claims to the supremacy of local demands and obligation, are locked in the double (or multiple) bind of dual (or multiple) nationality and dual (or multiple) loyalty. The present-day migration differs from the two previous phases by moving both ways (virtually all countries, including Britain, are nowadays both “immigrant” and “emigrant”), and privileging no routes (routes are no longer determined by the imperial/colonial links of the past). It differs also in exploding the old TRG syndrome and replacing it with a EAH one (extraterritoriality, “anchors” displacing the “roots” as primary tools of identification, hunting strategy).

The new migration casts a question mark on the bond between identity and citizenship, individual and place, neighbourhood and belonging. Jonathan Rutherford, acute and insightful observer of the fast-changing frames of human togetherness, notes⁸⁹ that the residents of the London street on

89. Rutherford, J., *After Identity*, Laurence & Wishart, 2007, pp. 59-60.

which he lives form a neighbourhood of different communities, some with networks extending only to the next street, others which stretch across the world. It is a neighbourhood of porous boundaries in which it is difficult to identify who belongs and who is an outsider. What is it we belong to in this locality? What is it that each of us calls home and, when we think back and remember how we arrived here, what stories do we share?

Living like the rest of us (or most of that rest) in a diaspora (how far-reaching, and in what direction(s)?) among diasporas (how far-reaching and in what direction(s)?) has for the first time forced on the agenda the issue of “art of living with a difference” – which may appear on the agenda only once the difference is no longer seen as a merely temporary irritant, and so unlike in the past urgently requiring arts, skills, teaching and learning. The idea of “human rights” translates today as the “right to remain different”. By fits and starts, that new rendition of the human rights idea brings, at best, tolerance; it has as yet to start in earnest to bring solidarity. And it is a moot question whether it is fit to conceive group solidarity in any other form than that of the fickle and fray, predominantly virtual “networks”, galvanised and continually remodelled by the interplay of individuals connecting and disconnecting, making calls and declining to reply to them.

The new rendition of the human rights idea disassembles hierarchies and tears apart the imagery of upward (“progressive”) “cultural evolution”. Forms of life float, meet, clash, crash, catch hold of each other, merge and hive off with (to paraphrase Georg Simmel) equal specific gravity. Steady and stolid hierarchies and evolutionary lines are replaced with interminable and endemically inconclusive battles of recognition; at the utmost, with eminently renegotiable pecking orders. We live together, interact, co-operate without losing our separate identities and the idiosyncrasies that mark them. Imitating Archimedes, reputed to insist (probably with a kind of desperation which only the utter nebulosity of the project might cause) that he would turn the world upside down if only given a solid enough fulcrum, we may say that we would tell who is to assimilate to whom, whose dissimilarity/idiosyncrasy is destined for the chop and whose is to emerge on top, if we only were given a hierarchy of cultures. Well, we are not given it, and are unlikely to be given it soon.

Whatever happens to cities in their history, one feature remains constant: cities are spaces where strangers stay and move in close proximity to each other. The ubiquitous presence of strangers, constantly within sight and reach, inserts a large dose of perpetual uncertainty in all city dwellers’ life

pursuits; that presence is a prolific and never resting source of anxiety and of usually dormant, yet time and again erupting aggressiveness.

Strangers also provide a convenient – handy – outlet for our inborn fear of the unknown, uncertain and unpredictable. In chasing strangers away from our homes and streets, the frightening ghost of uncertainty is, even if only for a moment, exorcised: the horrifying monster of insecurity is burnt in effigy. Despite those exorcisms, our liquid modern life remains however stubbornly uncertain, erratic and capricious; relief tends to be short-lived, and hopes attached to the toughest of measures are dashed as soon as they are raised.

The stranger is, by definition, an agent moved by intentions which can be at best guessed – but of which we can never be sure. In all equations we compose when deliberating what to do and how to behave, the stranger is an unknown variable. A stranger is, after all, “strange”: a bizarre being, whose intentions and reactions may be thoroughly different from those of the ordinary (common, familiar) folks. And so, even when not behaving aggressively or explicitly resented, strangers are discomfoting: their sheer presence makes a tall order of the already daunting task of predicting the effects of action and its chances of success. And yet the sharing of space with strangers, living in the (as a rule uninvited and unwelcome) proximity of strangers, is the condition that city residents find difficult, perhaps impossible to escape.

As the proximity of strangers is the urban dwellers’ non-negotiable fate, some *modus vivendi* able to make cohabitation palatable and life live-able must be designed, tried and tested. The way in which we go about gratifying this need is however a matter of choice. And we make choices daily – whether by commission or omission, by design or default; by conscious decision or just by following, blindly and mechanically, the customary patterns; by wide-ranging discussion and deliberation, or just through following the trusted, because currently fashionable means. Opting out from the search of *modus co-vivendi* is one of possible choices.

Paradoxically, cities originally constructed to provide safety for all their inhabitants, are these days more often associated with danger than security. As Nan Elin puts it⁹⁰ the “fear factor has certainly grown, as indicated by the growth in locked car and house doors and security systems, the popularity of ‘gated’ and ‘secure’ communities for all age and income

90. Elin, E., “Shelter from the Storm, or Form Follows Fear and Vice Versa”, in: Nan Elin (ed.), *Architecture of Fear*, Princeton Architectural Press, 1997, pp. 13, 26, 30.

groups, and the increasing surveillance of public spaces, not to mention the unending reports of danger emitted by the mass media”.

Genuine and putative threats to the body and the property of the individual are fast turning into major considerations whenever merits or disadvantages of a living place are assessed. Threats have also been assigned the topmost position in the real-estate marketing policy. Uncertainty of the future, the frailty of social position and existential insecurity, those ubiquitous accompaniments of life in the liquid modern world, are rooted notoriously in remote places, yet the passions they generate tend to be focused on the nearest targets, and channelled into concerns with personal safety: the kind of concerns that condense in turn into segregationist/exclusionist urges, inexorably leading to urban space wars.

As we can learn from the perceptive study of young American architectural/urbanistic critic, Steven Flusty,⁹¹ servicing that war and, particularly, designing the ways to deny adversaries access to the claimed space, are the most salient concerns of architectural innovation and urban development in American cities. The most proudly advertised novelties are “interdictory spaces” – “designed to intercept, repel or filter the would-be users”. Explicitly, the purpose of “interdictory spaces” is to divide, segregate and exclude – not to build bridges, easy passages and hospitable meeting places; not to facilitate but to break communication and to separate, not to bring people together. The architectural/urbanistic inventions listed and named by Flusty are the technically updated equivalents of pre-modern moats, turrets and embrasures of city walls; only instead of defending the city and all its inhabitants against the enemy outside, they are built to set the city residents apart. Among the inventions named by Flusty, there is “slippery space” – “space that cannot be reached, due to contorted, protracted, or missing paths of approach”; “prickly space” – “space that cannot be comfortably occupied, defended by such details as wall-mounted sprinkler heads activated to clear loiterers or ledges sloped to inhibit sitting”; and “jittery space” – “space that cannot be utilised unobserved, due to active monitoring by roving patrols and/or remote technologies feeding to security stations”. All these, and others like them, have but one purpose: to cut extra-territorial enclaves off, to erect little fortresses inside which the members of the supra-territorial global elite may groom, cultivate and relish their bodily independence and spiritual isolation from locality. Developments described by Steven Flusty are high-tech manifestations of the ubiquitous mixophobia, a most widespread reaction to the mind-boggling,

91. Flusty, S., “Building Paranoia”, in Elin, *Architecture of Fear*, pp. 31, 48-52.

spine-chilling and nerve-breaking variegation of human types and life-styles that rub their shoulders in the streets of contemporary cities and in their "ordinary" (that is, unprotected by "interdictory spaces") living districts. Unloading segregationist urges may relieve the rising tension. Confusing and disconcerting differences could be unassailable and intractable, but perhaps the toxin may be squeezed out of their stings by assigning to each form of life its separate, isolated, well-marked and well-guarded physical spaces ... Perhaps one could secure for oneself, for one's kith and kin and other "people like oneself", a territory free from that jumble and mess that irredeemably poisons other city areas.

"Mixophobia" manifests itself in a drive towards islands of similarity and sameness amidst the sea of variety and difference. The reasons for mixophobia are banal – easy to understand, if not necessarily easy to forgive. As Richard Sennett suggests,⁹² "the 'we' feeling, which expresses a desire to be similar, is a way for men to avoid the necessity of looking deeper into each other". It promises thereby some spiritual comfort: the prospect of making togetherness easier by making redundant the efforts to understand, negotiate and compromise. "Innate to the process of forming a coherent image of community is the desire to avoid actual participation. Feeling common bonds without common experience occurs in the first place because men are afraid of participation, afraid of the dangers and the challenges of it, afraid of its pain". The drive towards a "community of similarity" is a sign of withdrawal not just from the otherness outside, but also from the commitment to the lively yet turbulent, engaged yet cumbersome interaction inside.

Choosing the escape option prompted by mixophobia has an insidious and deleterious consequence of its own: the more self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing the strategy is, the more it is ineffective. The longer the time people spend in the company of others "like them", with whom they "socialise" perfunctorily and matter-of-factly without risk of miscomprehension, and without the onerous need to translate between distinct universes of meaning – the more they are likely to "unlearn" the art of negotiating shared meanings and a *modus co-vivendi*. As they failed to learn or have forgotten the skills needed to live with difference, or neglected to acquire them, they view the prospect of confronting the strangers face to face with rising apprehension. Strangers tend to appear ever more frightening as they become increasingly alien, unfamiliar

92. Sennett, R., *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life*, Faber & Faber, 1996, pp. 39, 42.

and incomprehensible, and as the mutual communication which could eventually assimilate their “otherness” to one’s own life-world fades, or never takes off in the first place. The drive to a homogeneous, territorially isolated environment may be triggered by mixophobia; but practising territorial separation is that mixophobia’s life-belt and food purveyor.

Mixophobia, though, is not the sole combatant on the urban battlefield. City living is a notoriously ambivalent experience. It attracts and repels, yet it is the same aspects of city life that, intermittently or simultaneously, attract and repel ... The variety of urban environment is a source of fear, yet the same twinkling/glimmering of urban scenery, never short of novelty and surprise, boasts a hard-to-resist charm and seductive power.

Confronting the never-ending and constantly dazzling spectacle of the city is not therefore experienced as, unambiguously, a curse; nor does the sheltering from it feel like an unmixed blessing. City prompts mixophilia as much as mixophobia. City life is an intrinsically and irreparably ambivalent affair. The bigger and more heterogeneous a city, the more attractions it may support and offer. Massive concentration of strangers is, simultaneously, a repellent and a most powerful magnet, drawing to the city ever new cohorts of men and women weary of the monotony of rural or small town life, fed up with its repetitive routine – and despairing of the dearth of chances. Variety is a promise of opportunities, many and different, fitting all skills and any taste. It seems that mixophilia, just like mixophobia, is a self-propelling, self-propagating and self-energizing tendency. Neither of the two is likely to exhaust itself, nor lose any of its vigour. Mixophobia and mixophilia coexist in every city, but they coexist as well inside every city person. Admittedly, this is an uneasy coexistence, full of sound and fury – though signifying a lot to the people on the receiving end of the liquid modern ambivalence.

It all started in the US, but leaked into Europe and has by now spilt over into most European countries: the tendency of the better-off urban dwellers to buy themselves out of the crowded city streets on which everything may happen, but little can be predicted, and into “gated communities”: the walled-off developments with strictly selective entry, surrounded by armed guards and stuffed with closed circuit television (CCTV) and anti-intruder alarms. Those lucky ones who bought themselves into a closely guarded “gated community” pay an arm and a leg for “security services”: that is, for the banishment of all mixing. Gated “communities” are heaps of little private cocoons suspended in a spatial void.

Inside “gated communities” the streets are empty most of the time. And so if someone who “does not belong”, a stranger, appears on the pavement, he or she will be promptly spotted – before a prank or some damage could be done. As a matter of fact, anybody you can see walking past your windows or front door can fall into the category of strangers, those frightening people whose intentions and what they will do next you can’t be sure of. Everybody may be, unknown to you, a prowler or a stalker: an intruder with ill intentions. We live, after all, in the times of mobile telephones (not to mention MySpace, Facebook and Twitter). Friends can exchange messages instead of visits, the people we know are constantly “on line” and able to inform us in advance of their intention to pop in, and so a sudden, unannounced knock on the door or ringing of the bell is an extraordinary event and a signal of potential danger ... Inside the “gated community”, streets are kept empty – to render the entry of a stranger, or someone behaving like a stranger, too risky to be tried.

The term “gated community” is a misnomer. As we read in the 2003 research report published by the University of Glasgow, there is “no apparent desire to come into contact with the ‘community’ in the gated and walled area ... Sense of community is lower in gated ‘communities’.” However they (and the estate agents) may justify their choices, they do not pay exorbitant rental or purchase prices in order to find themselves a “community” – that notoriously intrusive and obtrusive “collective busybody”, opening its arms to you only to hold you down as in steely forceps. Even if they say (and sometimes believe) otherwise, people pay all that money in order to liberate themselves from company: to be left alone. Inside the walls and the gate, live loners: people who would only tolerate such “community” as they fancy at the moment and only in the moment they fancy it.

A large majority of researchers agree that the main motive prompting people to lock themselves inside the walls and CCTV of a “gated community” is – whether consciously or subconsciously, explicitly or tacitly – their desire to keep the wolf from the door, which they translate as keeping strangers at arm’s length. Strangers are dangers, and so every stranger is a portent of danger. Or so at least they believe. And what they wish more than anything else is to be secure from dangers. More exactly, though, to be secure from the daunting, harrowing, incapacitating fear of insecurity. They hope that the walls will protect them from that fear.

The snag, however, is that there is more than one reason to feel insecure. Whether credible or fanciful, the rumours of rising crime and of throngs of

burglars or sexual predators lying in ambush and waiting for an occasion to strike produce just such reasons. After all, we feel insecure because our jobs, and therefore our incomes, social standing and dignity, are under threat. We are not insured against the threat of being made redundant, excluded and evicted, losing the position we cherish and believe to have earned to be ours forever. Nor are the partnerships we cherish foolproof and secure: we may feel subterranean tremors and expect earthquakes. The familiar cosy neighbourhood may be threatened by being run down in order to clear the site for new developments. All in all, it would be downright silly to hope that all those well- or ill-founded anxieties could be placated and put to rest once we've surrounded ourselves with walls, armed guards and TV cameras.

But what about that (ostensibly) prime reason to opt for a "gated community" – our fear of physical assault, violence, burglary, car theft, obtrusive beggars? Won't we at least put paid to those kind of fears? Alas, even on that front the gains hardly justify the losses. As signalled by the most acute observers of contemporary urban life, the likelihood of being assaulted or robbed may fall once behind the walls (though research conducted recently in California, perhaps the main stronghold of the "gated community" obsession, found no difference between the gated and non-gated spaces) – the persistence of fear, however, would not. Anna Minton, the author of a thorough study of *Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the Twenty-First-Century City*, tells the case of Monica, who "spent the whole night lying awake and far more scared than she had ever been in the twenty years she had lived on an ordinary street" when "one night the electronically controlled gates went wrong and had to be propped open". Behind the walls, anxiety grows, instead of dissipating – and so does the dependence of the residents' state of mind on the "new and improved" high-tech gadgets, marketed on the promise to keep the dangers, and fear of dangers, out of court. The more gadgets one surrounds oneself with, the greater is the fear that some of them may go wrong. And the more time one worries about the menace lurking in every stranger, and the less time one spends in the company of strangers, the further one's "tolerance and appreciation for the unexpected recedes" and the less one is able to confront, handle, enjoy and appreciate the liveliness, variety and vigour of urban life. Locking oneself in a gated community in order to chase fears away, is like draining water out of the pool to make sure that the children learn to swim in complete safety.

Oscar Newman, American town planner and architect, suggested in 1973, in a book with a tell-it-all title *Defensible Space: People and Design*

in the Violent City, that the preventive medicine against fear of urban violence is a clear marking of boundaries – an act that would discourage strangers from trespassing. The city is violent and teeming with dangers because – so Newman and dozens of his enthusiastic apostles and converts had decided – it is full of strangers. Want to avert misfortune? Keep strangers at a safe distance. Make your space compact, brightly lit, easily watched, easily seen through – and your fears will vanish, you'll savour, at long last, that wondrous taste of safety. As experience has shown, though, concerns with making space "defensible" have led to a sharp rise in security concerns. Tokens and symptoms of security "being a problem" keep reminding us of our insecurities. As Anna Minton put it in her recent study:⁹³ "The paradox of security is that the better it works the less it should be necessary. Yet, instead the need for security can become addictive". There is never enough safety and security. Once you start drawing and fortifying borders, there is no stopping. The principal beneficiary is our fear: it thrives and flourishes feeding on our border-drawing and border-arming efforts.

In sharpest conceivable opposition to Newman's opinion stand recommendations penned by Jane Jacobs:⁹⁴ it is precisely in the crowdedness of the city street and the profusion of strangers around that we find succour and free ourselves from the fear oozing from the city, that "great unknown". The short word for that link, she says, is trust. The trust in the comforting safety of city streets is distilled from the multitude of minute pavement encounters/contacts. The sediment and lasting trace of casual public contacts is a tissue of togetherness-in-public woven of civil respect and trust. The absence of trust is a disaster to a city street, concludes Jacobs.

The collateral casualties of a "disaster to the street" can only be those thousands who live along it.

We may say that culture is in its liquid modern phase made to the measure of (willingly pursued, or endured as obligatory) individual freedom of choice. And that it is meant to service such freedom. And that it is meant to see to it that the choice remains unavoidable: a life necessity, and a duty. And that responsibility, the inalienable companion of free choice, stays where liquid modern condition forced it: on the shoulders of the individual, now appointed the sole manager of "life politics".

93. Minton, A., *Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the Twenty-First-Century City*, Penguin, 2009, p. 171.

94. See her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Random House, 1961.

Relearning progress and faith in the future institutionalisation of plurality

*Tariq Ramadan*⁹⁵

All societies of the Western world (and moreover the world at large) are going through a profound crisis of confidence. On closer examination, this crisis is perceived to be multidimensional because its causes are likewise multiple and interdependent. Without going into detail, but with an effort to apprehend its determinants, one may point to four major causes through which we can understand the scope of the tensions that dwell within us. The impacts of globalisation of the economy, communication media and culture are real: the old landmarks (nation-state, specific cultural references, etc.) are less cogent and meaningful, and this sometimes arouses defensive reactions carrying strong claims to separate identities, often with an exclusionist intent. The new visibility of “foreigners”, predominantly Muslim, who may be permanently settled citizens, disrupts the categories pertaining to perception of self, one’s society and the integrity of one’s cultural and religious affiliation: the “Other” is there, within “Us”,⁹⁶ and creates tensions from within regarding self-definition. A third factor should be added: immigration. Europe’s economic needs are known (we need immigrants and workers to take up the challenges of the future, with an ageing European population), but these needs are at cross-purposes with our cultural defences. Racism and xenophobia find voice, and politicians win votes by advocating ever harsher immigration policies. Lastly, there are the acts of violence and terrorism which have shaken Western societies and, on top of the other kinds of societal violence, have heightened an overall sense of insecurity. These four factors, which have functioned often cumulatively as interdependent causes, are at the bottom of this profound crisis of confidence and identity that permeates present-day societies generally, and European ones especially. The question of prime interest to us is how to overcome this crisis and, in sum, learn over again how to trust in ourselves, in our resources and in our development capabilities. In this paper, I intend to begin by taking stock of the priority issues that challenge our societies, then pause at the gains made, and finally envisage definite actions along four complementary paths that might lead us out of the crisis.

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96. As I have entitled my book (*L’Autre en Nous – Une philosophie du pluralisme*, Presses du Châtelet, Paris, 2009) attempting to draw positive inferences from recognised peculiarities and from the universal element shared among human beings, cultures, religions and civilisations.

1. Democracy, society and citizenship

A literally incalculable number of books deal with the crisis of democracy; sociologists, philosophers and economists have scrutinised the problem and diagnosed the different “disorders” (hence the potential “therapies”) afflicting the democratic systems from within. The givens are of various kinds: a series of objective factors reveal genuine tensions, even contradictions at the core of the democratic systems, compounded by diffuse perceptions and feelings that aggravate the ill-being.

- a. A genuine crisis of confidence in political systems, parties and politicians is palpable in all modern societies. The turnout at elections (apart from the great presidential “shows”) is dangerously low, and awareness of individual and collective political responsibility is becoming dulled among the citizens.
- b. The time constraints of the political exercise compel politicians to engage in less and less political, and more and more communicational, activity (often emotional and sometimes appealing to mass instincts).
- c. The relationship with the media and their might has transformed the function and role of politicians, and their relationship with the society which gives them their mandate. Politicians need to communicate more and, strangely, constituents’ trust in their intentions, their role and their mandate dwindles in an inverse ratio.
- d. The citizens – used to claiming and upholding their rights in democratic societies – see these eroded with less freedom, more surveillance, increasing social restrictions and ever more tense debates about freedom of expression and movement, etc.
- e. Civic education and knowledge of national (even European) institutions are in an alarming state, symptomatic of lack of interest and withdrawal from public and political affairs.
- f. Civic belonging is determined by a relationship with rights far more than with a sense of one’s responsibilities. For some years now, it has even turned into an identifier with a cultural (and religious) connotation sometimes strongly marked by exclusivism.
- g. The cultural referencing of civic identification goes hand in hand with the cultural slant given to the socio-economic issues affecting

our societies: there is more talk of religion and culture than of power relationships, classes, marginalisation and pauperisation, the concerns that underpin people's attachment to democracies with egalitarian aspirations.

- h. The latest economic crisis has indeed forced politicians to intervene but has also confirmed a general feeling and corroborated certain facts, namely that the economic and financial worlds live on the fringe of the democratic management of powers. The liberal values of democracy differ in their essence and implications from the values of the so-called liberal or neo-liberal economy: the liberal economy, financial institutions and multinational enterprises are not (less and less, moreover) subject to democratic rules.
- i. The world of the media plays what is now a major part in the world of politics. The public are instantly informed, opinion polls are continuous, political ideas and commitments are personalised to a point where individuals, their image and their media impact are often the arbiters of the election results. Debates in civil society are ever rarer and suggest that democratic participation is more formal than actual.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but its salient features provide a basis on which to chart the various crises running through our societies, to be reckoned with if we are to restore confidence and build a more favourable future. The propensity to deprive political acts of their political substance stems from a dangerous development revealing a general trend towards erosion of individual and collective responsibility. The economy seems to hold a monopoly of real power; the might of the media spawns "political figures", leaders, midway between politics, show business and the near-religious projection that embodies confused mass aspirations; finally, one sees emerging a self-perception that transforms the citizen into the victim of an incomprehensible and/or oppressive system. These combined factors, as was remarked above, point to a deep-seated depoliticising process, featuring a lack of confidence in the act of government, a victim-minded passiveness and an idealised, simplistic linkage of the solution with a person (foreshadowing a great future for populism).

It is naturally important to add a sense of insecurity with multiple causes and facets and accounting for the identity entrenchments, the cultural bias of political statements and stances and of course xenophobic attitudes towards the alien, the immigrant, the "Other". Fear is plainly an added factor confirming the citizens' inclination to see themselves as

victims. The democratic ideal personified is the very opposite: an educated, responsible citizen, a participant and agent of change and the subject of his own story. There is every indication that the present-day tendency will (or might) turn against the state of mind that set it in motion and made a democratic society possible. Globalisation, mass media and ease of movement have brought the individual back to a sense of dispossession which may render the democratic ideal void of substance. We must beware of it, otherwise we would forfeit even the tenets of the philosophy that made it possible to form and to safeguard personal independence and freedom.

2. The gains

Resisting these dangerous tendencies and developments requires awareness and commitment on the part of politicians, teachers, social protagonists and citizens generally. If we are to build self-confidence, learn to take a positive view of the future and command the means to peace of mind, we must overcome every dimension of the crisis mentioned above. This is a significant challenge.

We lack remembrance and historical consciousness. It is urgent that the citizens be reminded of the gains made by our societies, either by going back over the stages which led to them or by making comparisons with the position in other societies worldwide. It is important to recall that, despite all the accumulated shortcomings, political pluralism is an incalculable gain and that the only way to preserve it is to reconcile people with a sense of individual and collective responsibility.

Institutions, separation of powers, even the meaning of “nation” and of accepted, open patriotic belonging, are objective and subjective factors to be hailed as preconditions for democratic systems tasked with the individual’s protection and inclusion in a collective scheme. It is not at all a matter of blind nationalism, narrow chauvinism or allegiances that exclude and discriminate; rather, bringing out the positive traits of attachment to a memory, a past that fashions a meaning for our origins and a plan reaching back into the history of human beings and societies. Acknowledging one’s roots, without enfolding oneself in them, is the reverse of identity entrenchment which returns to the source in order to seek protection from the world. Conversely, acknowledgment of origin uses the source as a starting point for trustful openness towards the other person. Everyone needs to identify their roots and give body to their memory. To deny this is to run the risk of being a captive in time of crisis, but by acknowledging it one is girded to cope with the crisis.

It should be noted that cultural diversity seems to be handled better among the younger generations, both in Europe and worldwide. Younger folk experience fewer difficulties than their elders in living and studying with people, pupils or students who have other cultural and religious outlooks. Far removed from the alarmist political rhetoric and from the management of “integration” in our democratic societies, young people seem to live quite composedly with cultural pluralism. The situation remains precarious nonetheless, but the “natural” gain is crucial in this respect and one must equip oneself to exploit and amplify it. This naturally accepted pluralism is the basis on which it may be possible to rebuild a historical meaning, a shared history embodying specific memories, a shared history of memories. This inclusive history would be apt to re-examine the concept of belonging and to solidify its substance.

One should also be on the lookout for crises and try to gain the most profitable lessons and benefits from them. The three crises (political, identity-related and economic) are profound, complex and often uncontrollable, but there are invariably different ways to make positive inferences from them and to devise new strategies for overcoming the actual crises or to enter a new phase in the history of our societies. The world today, with migration, ecology, the responsibilities and rights of human beings, calls on us to think out the purposes of our actions and in so doing to define an ethic, necessarily shared at a time of globalisation. By induction, the above-mentioned crises take issue with us about our attainments and call us to account both philosophically and ideologically. These ethical, philosophical, ideological and religious questions should be the means, and perhaps the immediate pretext, of our acquiescence to the imperative thinking out of goals. Continued neglect of nature adds up to planning our own destruction; continuing to protect ourselves from migration by legal means will bring about our economic death; continued self-perception as victims will cut us down to passive objects of history or pawns of populist politicians. Crises call us back to our responsibilities and should therefore be converted into gains of our historical experience.

The debates about “good governance”, the characteristics, components and facets of identity, the global economic crisis (with such strange ideas as “ethical capitalism” or “social market economy”) are great opportunities if taken for what they really are, without doom and gloom, that is: questions of survival, decisive choices that confront developed societies and their communities with unavoidable alternatives. Our reconciliation with the plurality of our origins will, like the restoration of meaning to progress, be attained through the identification of common challenges

and collective goals, and through ethics applied to technology, economics, politics and science. It is the “commonality” of the future, with its compelling queries, that may enable us to manage the “diversity” of the present better.

3. Four avenues

To restore confidence, positive commitment to social, human, scientific and technological progress, and to manage pluralism rationally, we must have a comprehensive view, a holistic approach and, all in all, a vision defining sectors of activity and priorities for the actions to be carried out. In the light of the stocktaking above, it is possible to identify what I regard as four priority focal areas of work.

a. School and school syllabuses

It is important to examine school education and its syllabi in order to be capable of impacting on the development of societies. Young people, of course, seem to have fewer problems in coping with cultural diversity among themselves, but it is important to bolster this natural inclination with deeper knowledge of the more complex human realities. Reunion with the teaching of history, philosophy and religion (in the sense of a scientific approach to religious facts) seems to me an imperative of our era. A deeper perception of social history, origins, struggles and evolutions is disastrously lacking in the young generations, and a whole part of national literatures is inaccessible to them for want of philosophical and/or religious culture.

Civic instruction – beyond knowledge of the institutions alone – is also imperative: “newcomers” are often criticised for not knowing the laws and institutions of their country, but on closer scrutiny many natives of the European countries are seen to be ignorant of their own political and cultural landmarks. This ignorance is culpable and dangerous, because a progressive society that loses the sense of its history is aboard a rudderless ship. Without an origin, the future cannot be given direction.

b. Social and political questions

At school, in towns and neighbourhoods, lifelong education programmes and a citizen-centred policy need to be undertaken. Contact must be regained with politics, with notions of responsibility and

governance. That means speaking of citizen rights and duties, processes of exclusion and marginalisation, power relationships, social classes, discrimination, racism and xenophobia. The citizens must be permitted to rediscover, with a minimum of confidence, politics and its function in the conduct of public affairs; today the political world is perceived as one of personal desire for power (and of ceaseless struggle to win it), of suspicion, unfair privilege, even corruption.

At the local level, with adult citizens and youth alike, the realm of politics and governance is to be looked upon and lived with as one of service, commitment and responsibility nurtured by the sense of belonging and the will to reform society for the better. It is utopian and unrealistic to think that the questions of pluralism and diversity can be grasped without first addressing the pervasive sense of disengagement that undermines social relations, and the indifference to real hands-on politics unless accompanied by media spectacle or excessive personalisation of the ideas and views.

The “ancient” and “old” ideologies and conceptions regarding social dynamics, economic relations and political control cannot be sacrificed in the political arena to slogans voided of their meaning. To speak of “ethical capitalism” at a time of economic crisis, or of the “social market economy”, may be alluring as stated above, but what can it signify for the choice of social policies, of priorities to meet the crisis? That is, who should be protected first, the citizens or the main banks and enterprises? The citizens are not fooled and cannot be blamed for not feeling respected and heeded in the midst of the crises which rack our societies. If in addition some politicians – whether cunning, cowardly or simply apolitical – shift the debates onto the strictly cultural issues (“our identity”) or the religious ones (visible marks, the headscarf, the burka, minarets, etc.), or again those relating to security (immigration, radicalisation, etc.), it is not at all surprising that distrust and estrangement set in and create a collectively negative atmosphere.

The solution will probably not come from the politicians themselves, but from civic movements, associations, social workers, students and women (more and more involved on the ground). This is a complex, critical area of work and its tensions are contradictory, but it is where the stakes are played for the future of a civil society which we would like to be more aware and “politicised” in the nobler sense of the word.

c. *Legislation and cultural and religious pluralism*

Management and institutionalisation of pluralism will require us to address the question of laws and their interpretations. Not, as is sometimes the case today, as the first and only answer to management of diversity, but as a facet of a comprehensive perception and policy regarding the future of our societies. The experience of cultural and religious plurality demands – as with political pluralism – stringent regulation and institutionalisation of the processes laying down respect for the rights and principles of coexistence.

The unending debates on “integration”, “identity” “secularity” and “laicism” have developed a general attitude that ties the legal question to an area of control over protection of “national identity”, “culture” or “belonging”. Thus the law is firstly meant to circumscribe and restrict, not necessarily to include, regulate and equalise. This approach via restriction is perilous, as has been repeated many times, and it is important to tackle the law by studying its liberalities, what it affords and allows, to enable new citizens to attain equality at the very core of what ordinary law offers. The letter, the spirit and the omissions of legislation permit more than is often acknowledged by the politicians and jurists who read them as “in a state of siege”.

Our societies, in the midst of crises, fundamentally lack legal amplitude and creativity, yet this is what we need in order to grasp the cultural and religious pluralism that characterise present-day societies. The challenge is considerable; to invite the citizens, the cultural associations and the institutions, whether or not religious, to participate in the debates is an unavoidable imperative. The state has not to undertake the management or control of religious institutions (prevented precisely by religion-state separation), but it must never cease to permit and facilitate access to greater equality, collective recognition and expression of an accepted presence.

For their part, religious communities and their institutions must work at their institutionalisation in their respective societies. Knowledge of the language, knowledge and observance of the laws, to which must be added clear expression of the principle of loyalty to the nation, are crucial prerequisites in the current debates. New citizens, and the new presence of this cultural and religious pluralism, particularly Europe’s Muslim citizens, make this a decisive stage. It must precede a significant effort of settlement, not only to establish places of worship (whose design and architecture must be conceived according to

the sociocultural setting), but also educational facilities (whose content must likewise take account of the society), associations or other facilities.

Religious communities and Muslims – since they are the people mainly at issue today – have a duty to take charge of their settlement by creating institutes and institutions for training (religious, for youth, imams, chaplains, etc.), associations (support, solidarity, students, women, etc.), even platforms of national representation (necessarily respecting the diversity of religious tendencies within a religious tradition) which are in tune with the setting and with the needs of women, men and the respective societies in the broad sense. The state may again assist the processes by financial grants in order to move towards greater equality, but there can be no question of controlling this necessary process of institutionalisation (even for the sake of fighting radicalisation, fundamentalism, violent extremism, etc.). It is a gradual evolution towards the normalisation of a presence, and the different partners must be able to perform a very specific role without breaking the bounds of their prerogatives. However, on the issue of Islam, bids to restrict and control are more often the rule than the exception in management by state or local authorities. Distrust is profound.

d. Common ethics and values

The debating of goals, of ethical queries and shared values, in the philosophical, scientific and social spheres, are significant opportunities to help forward the process of normalising cultural and religious plurality. To reacquaint ourselves with philosophical enquiry, ethical goals in the sciences, ecology and consumption, as also in the field of politics and economics, is not only urgent but also brings us back to the crux of the real questions which we must address together as fellow citizens sharing the same space and the same future.

In civil society, in schools, universities or even in the public service media, there is a priority area of commitment for achieving universal well-being, and this is to promote critical awareness and discussion, especially on the question of goals. It is by no means utopian; as has been seen with the acquisition of critical consciousness, there are worthwhile opportunities. Climate change, poverty, war, colonisation and use of torture remain factors of potential citizen mobilisation. Above and beyond the differences, the questions of survival, dignity

and rights affect all of us in the same way and can make for common commitments and mutual knowledge which are the conditions for trust.

Therefore the focus of the question of plurality must be shifted, possibly by ceasing to sit round tables in councils or assembly to address "the question of pluralism" but rather give pride of place to the common challenges, the questions of applied ethics, and discuss them from our own standpoints without spending valuable time in talking about the specificity of the standpoint itself. It would be worthwhile to let this standpoint be expressed and apprehended differently, through debates and expectations and not as the prime object of the actual dialogue. That means inviting to the national debates on all kinds of societal questions, women and men from all cultural and religious backgrounds, and not only when dealing with "their religion", "their culture" or "their social problems". Fragmentation and segregation within intellectual discussions can only confirm and entrench the consciousness and the reality of tangible social fragmentation and spatial segregation. The former represents, propagates and in effect institutionalises the latter.

One ought not to minimise the register of collective intelligence, psychology, representations, perceptions and symbols. In that respect, all areas of expression (artistic, cultural, sporting, etc.) are important in the dynamic that seeks to express the coherence and the value of an ethnic presence. Input (the watchword of this approach to the post-integration era), presence, language, image and participation are the five pillars of this general movement.

As can be seen, our common future and the attainment of trust are impossible to contemplate unless we begin with a comprehensive approach identifying the fears, circumscribing the objective and subjective causes of crises and, further down the line, allowing identification of the areas of work to which we should evidently commit ourselves first of all. The crisis of democracy is multidimensional and operates at several levels. The fact remains that our gains in this regard are vital, and absolutely must be placed in the foreground. Using this critical but assertively constructive approach, it is possible to work along four axes, each of which constitutes an area of exploration, commitment and advancement. It is a matter of normalisation, institutionalisation and multilateral input, with due regard for every latitude offered by the rights and the independence that belong in the same way to institutions. At a time of distrust, this raises a complex

and most stimulating challenge. Yet an evident condition to be complied with concerns the angle from which the issues are addressed, no longer engaging in dialogue on the subject of dialogue but actuating a multi-dimensional dynamic which is in itself both a verbal and a non-verbal dialogue, at once political, legal, philosophical and religious, enabling us to overcome the divisions which our very approach to the problem sometimes tends more to heighten than to overcome.

Common assets and environment: the future contribution of consumption to progress and well-being

*Tim Cooper*⁹⁷

Securing the future

Sustainability is a prerequisite in the quest for well-being for all. Excessive consumption in industrialised countries and disempowerment and injustice in poor countries each need to be addressed. Noting that over a billion people live on less than a dollar a day, more than 800 million are malnourished and over 2.5 billion lack access to adequate sanitation, the UK Government's sustainable development strategy highlights the global context: "While increasing wealth is most often associated with depletion of environmental resources, extreme poverty can also leave people with no option but to deplete their local environment." This coexistence of rising affluence and severe poverty results in a pervasive sense of insecurity across the world: "Unless we start to make real progress toward reconciling these contradictions, we all, wherever we live, face a future that is less certain and less secure than we in the UK have enjoyed over the past fifty years. We need to make a decisive move towards more sustainable development both because it is the right thing to do, and because it is in our long-term best interests. It offers the best hope for securing the future" (DEFRA 2005).

Debate on global security has historically centred on the possibility of armed conflict between nations, a revolutionary uprising or threats posed by nuclear proliferation and, in more recent times, on fear of terrorism arising from conflicts rooted in cultural and religious differences. A less publicised source of insecurity, arguably of comparable global significance, surrounds the possibility of future energy or resource scarcity. Sustained periods of substantial economic growth in countries with large and growing populations, such as China and India, has increased global demand for fossil fuels, food (notably grain for livestock) and raw materials. Oil prices rose fivefold between 2000 and 2008, while food and other commodity prices doubled (sentence, 2008). Recession halted these upward trends, but perhaps only temporarily. The potentially nega-

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tive impact of climate change on food production, uncertainty over long-term reserves of energy, metals and minerals (and, by implication, prices) and the knowledge that population growth cannot be readily curtailed heighten concern about long-term well-being.

Is pessimism inevitable?

In one sense, the idea of human beings securing “the future” is naïve, a sign of hubris. There will inevitably be a future in some shape or form. The real anxiety for humankind is the likely quality of life in that future. Deeply pessimistic about any prospect of mitigating climate change, James Lovelock, originator of the Gaia hypothesis, has argued for an adaptive response: a “retreat” to lifestyles based on reduced resource use. Even so: “Despite all our efforts to retreat sustainably, we may be unable to prevent a global decline into a chaotic world ruled by brutal war lords on a devastated Earth” (Lovelock, 2006). Lovelock’s pessimism is in the tradition of British economist Thomas Malthus, American biologist Paul Ehrlich, the 1970s Club of Rome report *The Limits to Growth*, and Oxford academic Norman Myers, editor of *The Gaia Atlas of Planet Management*.

Others are more hopeful. American political commentator Gregg Easterbrook, for example, has suggested that “the Western world today is on the verge of the greatest ecological renewal that humankind has known; perhaps the greatest that the Earth has known” (Easterbrook, 1995). Though latterly convinced about climate change, he has concluded that “action against artificial global warming may not prove nearly as expensive or daunting as commonly believed” (Easterbrook, 2006: 1). Meanwhile Danish statistician and author of *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, Bjørn Lomborg (2001), has argued that the statistics used to raise environmental concerns have often been misinterpreted, resulting in flawed arguments. Both follow in the “cornucopian” tradition of American business economist Julian Simon and Oxford economist Wilfred Beckerman, who have similarly challenged environmentalists’ arguments through different interpretations of scientific data and a confidence that technology is capable of overcoming resource constraints.

Which line of argument has proven more persuasive to the general public? In a recent international study, people were asked for their assessment of the future state of the environment at local, national and global spatial levels. Their assessments were compared with a review of each country’s environmental quality by an expert panel. Temporal pessimism, belief that “things will get worse”, was prevalent in all countries except

one. In most, there was a sense that their own situation was currently better than that in other countries (belief that “things are better here than there”) but, at the same time, concern that this may not remain the case in future (Gifford et al., 2009). There appears to be a widespread sense of pessimism about our capacity to overcome environmental threats.

Such pessimism appears to be well-founded if judged by recent data from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) (2008). Development paths must be sustainable in order to maintain or improve human well-being and yet our global ecological footprint (the area of land and sea required to provide the resources we use and absorb our waste) currently exceeds the Earth’s biocapacity (the area of cropland, pasture, forest and fisheries available to meet human needs) by about 30%. Humankind’s global ecological footprint averaged 2.7 global hectares per person (gha/pp), whereas the Earth’s total biocapacity is estimated at 2.1 gha/pp. Moreover, this “global overshoot” is worsening. If human demands continue to grow at the current rate, by the mid-2030s WWF estimate that we will need land and sea equivalent to that of two planet Earths to maintain our lifestyles.

Where are the possible escape routes? Some suggestions as to how to bring change that will enable greater optimism about future well-being are presented in this paper. Such optimism must be founded on an assumption that sustainable development is achievable. It is proposed below that this will necessitate a re-examination of our sense of connectedness with our surroundings, a reassessment of our responsibilities over time and, consequently, a radical transformation in our approach to consumption.

Disconnectedness and an ethic of interdependence

A fracturing of relationships between people and planet is partly responsible for environmental abuse and social injustice that has led to pessimism and, by implication, lack of societal well-being.

For much of their lives people do not live in a state of conscious awareness of connectedness with the rest of the natural world. This is the outcome of our cultural history, the evolution of dominant philosophical world views and belief systems. It is not helped by the fact that human ecology, the formal study of relationships between human beings and their surroundings, is rarely taught in schools and universities. Of course, people have an instinctive sensitivity to their immediate surroundings. Recognition of place (that is, familiarity with where we are) and prevailing conditions (such as the weather) affect our sense of well-being and, sometimes, our

behaviour. Likewise, when images of more distant parts of the planet are communicated to us through the media, perhaps revealing their beauty or exposing threats such as climate change, we may feel an emotional connection with other places on planet Earth. At another level, though, we act as if divorced from our surroundings. We live immersed in the activities of the moment, too engrossed in what we are doing – whether work, shopping or leisure – to think consciously about connections with the world around us. Thus we consume goods and services with neither awareness of, nor concern about, the environmental and social impacts of their production: “the world behind the product” (de Leeuw, 2005).

This failure to see ourselves as inextricably linked to the rest of the world provides an explanation, at least in part, for our contribution to environmental damage. Is it, perhaps, only a modern phenomenon?

Philosopher Stephen Clark (1993) has described a romantic view that “Long ago or far away ... people were unselfconsciously united with their world ... They did not imagine an ‘objective world’ behind or apart from the world experienced by them.” While not wholly convinced that this is a historically accurate representation, Clark uses it, by means of contrast, to propose that in modern times we have constructed an idea of the “real world” as “the world as it is apart from sentient and human experience.” He compares the scientific method, whereby “the truth of things is modelled by detachment, non-involvement”, with the idea that “moral and aesthetic values are ... functions of our involvement in the world” and argues that “because our idea of the real world is of a world without values, we conclude that the real world has no value, that it is available for any use we please.” In similar vein, Donald Worster’s historical study of ecology described the influence of 20th-century philosopher Alfred Whitehead upon how the world is viewed. According to Worster (1979): “After Descartes, ethical and aesthetic values alike had been widely ignored by science.” Whitehead sought to restore moral values to the pursuit of science, hoping that “by emphasizing the quality of relatedness in the natural world” his ideas “would teach mankind a new ethic of interdependence”.

In more recent times, a similar philosophical approach has been described by Norwegian Arne Naess in the form of “deep ecology”. Popularised by Bill Devall and George Sessions, this became one of the most significant environmental concepts to emerge in the 1970s: “For deep ecology, the study of our place in the Earth household includes the study of ourselves as part of the organic whole. Going beyond a narrowly materialist

scientific understanding of reality, the spiritual and the material aspects of reality fuse together" (Devall and Sessions, 1985: 66). The significance of the "spiritual" will be revisited below.

While the notions of there being "only one earth" (Ward and Dubos, 1972) and a need for "one planet living" (Desai and King, 2006) are now in common use, the extent to which there has been a cultural shift towards such holistic, ecological mindsets, or towards regarding the Earth as a common asset, is less clear. Although Eurobarometer surveys reveal that an overwhelming majority of respondents express a desire to protect the environment, environmental problems appear geographically distant to many Europeans. We may be aware of our connectedness with (and even our dependence upon) other people and the natural environment in theory, but this does not necessarily mean that we make connections in practice. In short, many Europeans neither think holistically, nor act "as if the planet mattered" (Schumacher, 1974).

Sustainability as a temporal concern

If human failure to recognise spatial interconnections is one obstacle to sustainability, another is temporal in form: the common mindset of operating within a short timeframe. Myopia is not only prevalent among politicians whose long-term vision is curtailed by the imperative of electoral cycles or businesses whose focus on short-term commercial pressures hinder their vision and ability to devise sustainable, long-term strategies. It is common across society, manifest in what has often been described as a "culture of immediacy". Popular psychology, communicated through the mass media, encourages people to "live in the present moment".

The pressure to consume in industrialised countries is such that the future is heavily discounted: people value goods and services for immediate consumption far more highly than those for consumption at a future date. Moreover, prospective consumers primarily consider the short-term personal benefits of purchasing goods and services, disregarding any longer-term environmental or social cost. This combination of discounting the future and ignoring the wider impacts of consumption is at odds with one of the foundational principles of sustainability, that the interests of future generations should be given equal weight to those of the present generation.

There is, however, an emergent movement of people seeking cultural change away from this short-term focus. An important source of inspiration for this movement has been the Long Now Foundation, whose

co-founder Stewart Brand (1999: 133) has warned that “civilisation’s shortening attention span is mismatched with the pace of environmental problems.” Brand argues that a greater sense of long-term responsibility needs to be engendered. Contrasting the “hasty cycles ... of human attention, decision and action” with “the slow, inexorable pace” of ecological cycles. He concludes that this demands reflection upon the significance of “now”, “the period in which people feel they live and act and have responsibility”.

This idea that human well-being requires a slowing down of certain forms of behaviour is not new, but has long been implicitly recognised by people in expressing concern at the “pace of life”. Only in recent years, however, have such people (“slow activists”) begun to develop countermeasures, most notable among which have been taken by the Slow Food movement.

Towards a circular, low-carbon economy

A greater sense of human connectedness with other people and the planet and the adoption of longer-term perspectives will only lead to increased well-being if they result in practical change in the form of more sustainable consumption patterns. These, in turn, require a more environmentally sustainable economic model and greater social equity, both within and between nations.

Historically, industrial economies have been managed according to a “linear” economic model of inputs and outputs, which assumed unlimited future access to energy and other material resources from which to produce goods and services and an infinitely large “sink” into which to place the resultant waste. This needs to be replaced by a “circular” economic model in which inputs of virgin resources are minimised (through reuse, reconditioning, remanufacturing and recycling), as is waste. The theoretical origins of this circular model can be traced to systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1976) and the subsequent emergence of ecological economics and industrial ecology. Popularised in debate through the Cradle-to-Cradle principle (McDonough and Braungart, 2002), the model was formally adopted by the Chinese Government in 2008 through its Circular Economy Law.

Such change may not suffice. It has been argued that sustainable development requires not merely a move to a circular economy, in which the consumption of raw materials is reduced, as waste is managed more effectively, but a reduction in final consumption, a slowing down of the

throughput of products (Cooper, 1994, 2005). This would require the purchase of fewer and longer-lasting goods (Cooper, 2010).

European governments are traditionally very wary of prescribing any limits to final consumption, even in the context of sustainability, but the climate change debate may provide a new opportunity to assess appropriate levels of consumption in an international context because of the “embedded carbon” in products (that is, carbon emissions from manufacturing).

In international negotiations to reduce carbon emissions (in order to mitigate climate change), embedded carbon is currently attributed to the country of production rather than the country of consumption. This system thus favours the more mature industrialised countries, which have often relocated much of their manufacturing overseas. Britain, for example, can only claim to have reduced its carbon emissions since 1990 because these are counted against the country in which production takes place (BBC, 2009). It is less favourable to China, whose carbon emissions have been rising. Estimates suggest that between 15% and 25% of China’s emissions take the form of carbon embedded in goods that are exported for consumption in other countries (ICTSD, 2009). It is unsurprising, therefore, that a perceived injustice in emission targets is creating pressure to reform the current system.

According to Oxford economist Dieter Helm, such reform has significant implications for public policy because “the US and Europe will have to take much more drastic action to reduce those emissions embedded in their own consumption.” Moreover, Helm argues, “the impact on economic growth and living standards there will also be more severe than so far believed” (BBC, 2009). This is politically problematic because governments tend to develop policies on an assumption that progress in improving people’s “living standards” is to be judged by increased consumption.

Well-being through goods?

Politicians evidently suspect that many people are not convinced that the kind of lifestyles depicted in the media as “sustainable” would increase their well-being. They suspect that potential benefits such as more leisure, reduced stress, improved relationships or a sense of altruism would not adequately compensate for the implied changes or reduction in consumption. By contrast, Peattie and Peattie (2009) propose that governments adopt a more affirmative approach and use social marketing initiatives to promote the possibility of low-consumption but satisfying lifestyles.

Sustainable lifestyles will only be adopted voluntarily if people can be convinced that their well-being will improve. This leads to the issue of whether there can be “prosperity without growth”. Tim Jackson (2009: 47) has described this challenge in terms of “the possibility that humans can flourish, achieve greater social cohesion, find higher levels of well-being and still reduce their material impact on the environment”. Jackson points to an imbalance between the pursuit of material affluence and other objectives that, if met, contribute to human well-being: a healthy family life, being engaged in useful employment, having respect from peers and a sense of belonging in a community. He argues that people who focus more on family and community-oriented goals are likely to find greater well-being than those who strive to display their affluence and social status.

Of course, people will continue to derive well-being through the consumption of goods. Beyond meeting immediate functional requirements (such as food, clothing and shelter) and providing a sense of material security, certain forms of consumption are necessary for proper engagement in society and have a symbolic value in allowing people to create and communicate their identities, reveal social affiliations and express feelings to others. Accelerating progress towards sustainability will, however, require people who currently live in relatively affluent circumstances to become less dependent upon material goods for their well-being, whether by rejecting particular types of consumption, consuming less frequently or choosing forms of consumption that minimise negative environmental and social impacts.

One approach that people seeking to adopt sustainable lifestyles may choose to take is to reflect upon need. British author G. K. Chesterton is reputed to have said: “There are two ways to get enough: one is to continue to accumulate more and more; the other is to desire less.” Most people in industrial societies typically choose the former path and their affluence consequently increases but, in the meantime, their expectations rise. Schumacher (1974), among others, noted that goods considered luxuries by one generation often become regarded as necessities by later generations. Other people may choose to consume less in order to increase their well-being. In the case of working couples, for example, it is common for one partner to work part time in order to improve their work–life balance, earning and consuming less than their potential but able to devote more time to other objectives such as family life. A smaller number of individuals make a more fundamental response to consumerism by deliberately choosing a lifestyle of “voluntary simplicity”.

Such people may be unconvinced of the links between consumption and well-being. In exploring why some people choose to reject consumerist lifestyles, Cherrier (2009: 187-8) identified a group of consumers for whom "there is no meaning in copying the consumption lifestyles displayed in the media." They react against "unreachable social accomplishments" and "no longer acquire, consume and dispose of material objects in response to others' expectations." Instead, these "creative consumers" seek fulfilment by consuming according to their personal values and concerns: "Here, the self is not perceived as a performative self influenced by sign values and codes of practices, but as a creative self who can reformulate cultural meanings and practices according to personal preferences and social history. By practicing creative consumption, consumers express their evolving identities."

Research by Marchand and Walker (2008: 1167) involving adherents of voluntary simplicity found a desire among them "to evaluate their attachment to possessions and to invest emotionally in a few carefully chosen objects." People's relationship with their possessions was somewhat ambiguous: "On the one hand, they spoke of a conscious and thoughtful reflection about the place objects should occupy in their lives ... On the other hand, a distance was maintained, in the form of a certain emotional detachment." Their decisions relating to consumption were undertaken with care, although the process was not seen as burdensome, and they tended to consider an object "more as a means, for what it allows, rather than as an end in itself." The research also provided insights into the kinds of goods favoured by such individuals. They were, for example, attracted to goods that allowed a degree of interaction and enabled them to feel engaged in an activity of "doing": manual coffee percolators and traditional shaving brushes were offered as examples. They also favoured goods that were easily understood in terms of their constitution and functioning because this gave them a sense of control over their possessions and, specifically, increased their ability to identify any faults.

Well-being through a just use of resources

If well-being for all is to increase, it will be necessary to consider the resources of the world as a whole, potentially common assets, in seeking to determine appropriate levels of consumption. The ecological footprint of a country or region, which is determined by consumption patterns and population density, will need to be compared with that of other countries or regions to judge whether it represents a fair use of the Earth's finite resources, while also taking account of biocapacity.

Data produced by the WWF (2008) indicates that the European Union (EU) as a whole is an “ecological debtor”: its ecological footprint (4.7 gha/pp) exceeds its biocapacity (2.3 gha/pp), although in a few member states (Sweden, Finland, Bulgaria and the Baltic States) the reverse is true. Similarly, European countries not in the EU are all ecological debtors apart from Russia (largely due to its forests) and Moldova (although due to the dominant size of Russia these countries overall are creditors, their ecological footprint being 3.5 gha/pp and biocapacity 5.8 gha/pp).

Like financial debt, ecological debt is unsustainable in the long term. In the meantime “debtor countries can only maintain their level of consumption through some combination of harvesting their own resources faster than (the) replacement rate, importing resources from other nations, and using the global atmosphere as a dumping ground for greenhouse gases” (WWF, 2008: 16-17). Ultimately such countries will “face increasing risk from a growing dependence on the biological capacity of others”.

Ecological debt arises through unsustainable consumption patterns and population density, but may also reflect an uneven global distribution of biocapacity. While it is open to debate whether the biocapacity of the Earth as a whole is to be regarded as a common asset and there is consequently an ethical imperative to correct this imbalance between countries, human well-being is unlikely to prevail alongside perceived inequity.

Europe’s contribution to the global overshoot noted earlier (the fact that, globally, the average ecological footprint exceeds available biocapacity by 30%) is unambiguous. The ecological footprint of all European countries except four (Moldova, Albania, Serbia and Montenegro) is at or above the global average, which is itself unsustainable.

Reshaping consumption

As the world’s population is rising and biocapacity, threatened by climate change and inappropriate agricultural practices, is unlikely to increase, the global overshoot can only be corrected by reducing the throughput of goods and services and, more specifically, their resource and waste intensity. A range of strategies will be required to reshape consumption patterns to this end, although detailed discussion of these is beyond the scope of this paper. The production of goods and services with a reduced environmental impact may prove a relatively easy issue to address. Encouraging people to reflect upon their connectedness with the world and dependence upon it, the passing of time and their long-term responsibili-

ties, and their relationships with goods and services is more problematic. People may prove harder to change than products.

One sign of hope is that people are already questioning the well-being they get from consumption and are modifying their lifestyles accordingly. Some are doing so on an individual basis as indicated above: changing their work–life balance or adopting lifestyles based on voluntary simplicity. Others are engaged in social movements that influence consumption such as Transition Towns, EcoTeams and Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) schemes.

The more committed individuals are often motivated by ethical values derived from religious belief or involvement in environmental politics. Among the general public, however, consumption is not generally regarded as in the domain of morality (hence use of the term “ethical consumption” to define the exception). Hansen and Schrader (1997: 458-9) make the point that “consumers do not usually interpret ‘normal’ thoughtless consumption as an active immoral act from which they should abstain.” They are more inclined to regard “exceptional” forms of consumption as immoral than behaviour that they perceive as “ordinary”. Hansen and Schrader conclude that, as one of the distinctive features of being a human being is a capacity for reflective self-evaluation, “consumption decisions must be coupled with a reflection of needs.” People should be encouraged to “weigh short-term, individual wants against long-term objectives and values.”

People’s relationship with goods will need to change not only at the point of acquisition but in their use: taking greater care of them through regular maintenance and repair, for example, or sharing with people who might otherwise have to buy their own.

The power of consumers should not, however, be overstated (Cooper, 2008). Changes in consumption must also be promoted by industry. This will require new business models that are better equipped to enable profitability without dependence on ever-rising sales. Companies may, for example, seek to generate profit by focusing on the utilisation of goods, offering long-lasting products, enhancing their after-sales support or offering leasing contracts, rather than by selling new items (Stahel, 2006).

Faith in the possibility of change

Is there a significant likelihood that increased well-being for all, prosperity based on sustainability and social justice, will come about?

Pessimists might conclude that there will only be a sufficient human response to environmental threats once a crisis threshold has been reached, a "tipping point" (Gladwell, 2000). Only then will governments introduce the necessary regulatory and fiscal reforms. Somewhat disturbingly, WWF (2008: 22) concludes that "scientists cannot accurately predict the tipping point at which an ecosystem decline may suddenly accelerate." On the other hand, the motivation for change may gradually develop through public debate on prosperity and the failure of increased consumption to meet people's expectations of an increased quality of life.

If increased well-being is to be achieved, there needs to be a degree of faith: a confident belief in the value and possibility of an alternative vision of the future. In the context of social responsibility within businesses Marc Gunther (2004: 1) has argued that "faith provides the fuel that energizes these people as they strive to do business better and to find meaning in their work." He explains: "Some have faith in God. Others do not. But all have faith in the goodness of people, faith in the possibility of change and, perhaps most surprising, faith that corporations can become a powerful force for good in the world." Faith may similarly be needed to motivate the necessary transformation in relationships with other people and the natural environment that underpin the present consumer culture. Stephen Clark (1993: 19) writes that "we must wake up to a real appreciation of genuine Otherness, a world not limited by what we make of it".

Another requirement is a change in how people seek to achieve well-being. According to Triandis (1995) there is a continuum in society, from those who prioritise personal goals over group goals and emphasise their individual rights to others who are more committed to societal interest and emphasise the value of group harmony. In an individualistic culture people see well-being as a goal to be achieved by fulfilling their personal aspirations and it is unlikely that they will prioritise environmental and social objectives in their consumption choices. In a more co-operative, collaborative culture, however, they see well-being as a goal to be achieved for society as a whole, to which individuals collectively make a contribution. Such analysis has significant political implications, as government policies can affect the distribution of power between different individuals and social groups and can influence businesses' and consumers' decisions through fiscal incentives and other measures.

The extent to which well-being depends upon greater knowledge and understanding of sustainable development among the general public is uncertain. Environmental issues are widely reported in the media and

inadequate behavioural change among consumers appears to result from a complex range of systemic obstacles rather than a lack of information (Jackson, 2005). When describing education as “the greatest resource” Schumacher (1974) was not merely proposing that people be better informed, but that they needed to understand the metaphysical nature of societal problems in order to be sufficiently motivated to act.

Philosopher Robert Elliot (2001: 177) has written: “The human assault on the terrestrial environment shows no signs of abating ... Many are appalled by this destruction, much of it insidious and temporarily hidden, because of what it implies for themselves, their children, their friends, other creatures, the biomass, and the planet we inhabit. This response is in many instances an ethical response. People judge that what is occurring is not merely irritating, inconvenient, disappointing, or unfortunate, but immoral, bad, wrong, or evil.” While there is a risk that discussing environmental issues within a moral framework will deter some people from engaging in debate, there is evidence that ethical values need to be considered alongside cognitive and emotional influences upon human behaviour in order to achieve change. Theoretical work by Schwartz (1977, 1992), later developed by, among others, Stern (1999, 2000), has suggested that people who are aware of the consequences of their behaviour and are able and willing to assume responsibility for them develop a personal norm to act in a particular way. Pro-environmental values thus feed into appropriate behavioural responses.

Conclusion

Well-being for all requires security about future prosperity, which in turn necessitates environmental sustainability and social justice. Currently, however, there is clear evidence of unsustainable consumption: human-kind’s ecological footprint currently exceeds the Earth’s biocapacity and the gap is widening. Europe bears particular responsibility for this global overshoot as the ecological footprint in nearly all European countries exceeds the global average.

Environmental pessimism is prevalent, but it can be overcome: sustainable development is achievable. This will, however, require us to recognise our dependence upon other people and the natural environment and, perhaps, to re-examine our sense of connectedness to them. It will also entail change in the dominant culture of immediacy and short-term gratification, which is reflected in people’s tendency to discount the future

and thereby ignore the wider implications of their consumption. The necessary transformation in consumption patterns will involve a new, circular economic model aimed at reducing demands on the Earth's resources, a trend towards fewer and longer-lasting products, and recognition in the debate on climate change of embedded carbon in products.

Governments are wary of addressing consumption but need not be. There is growing evidence that prosperity is possible without rising levels of affluence. Human beings have a unique capacity for reflective self-evaluation and are increasingly applying this to consumption. Many already reject consumerism, making their consumption choices carefully and participating in new social movements such as transition towns. They reflect upon the kind of goods they want to own and they consume according to their personal beliefs and values rather than striving to meet the expectations of others. Some are motivated by ethical values, others by a desire for an appropriate work–life balance. Governments and industry need to provide a more supportive environment for such change.

Increased well-being is more likely to become a reality if people have faith in their vision of the future, a confident belief that environmental security and social justice might together be achieved. There is good cause for faith in the potential for change.

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How to democratise power? Reflections on the financial crisis

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This essay explores some lessons of the recent financial crisis. I begin with a consideration of who caused the crisis, distinguishing three distinct categories of agent. I go on to ask who amongst these agents should be held responsible, arguing that it is the public authorities that we should primarily take to task. But on what terms are we to hold those authorities to account? I reject a standard view of democracy that would give us restricted terms of remonstrance and I argue instead for a democracy of public standards. And then I conclude with some brief remarks on what this democracy would require in institutional practice. The upshot is a view of things in which power is a dark reality but we are not condemned to live in a nightmare. The changes required for the democratisation of power are radical but not utopian.

1. Who caused the recent financial crisis?

Over the past year or two, almost everyone has had the experience of finding their life prospects deeply impacted by the decisions of managers in a range of banks and related institutions around the world. Young people contemplate fewer job opportunities than they might reasonably have expected. Those already in work have suffered a sharp decline in job security, even perhaps lost their job. A great number of retirees, or people contemplating retirement, discover that their superannuation and savings have fallen in value by up to 50%. And that is just looking at the fortunes of people who are lucky enough to live in the more economically developed parts of the Earth.

Under such a darkening of the economic sky, it is natural to ask who is to blame – natural indeed to look for culprits on whom we can vent our anger. But who exactly are to be pointed at as the causally responsible parties?

To begin with, we might look to those who were responsible for the sub-prime mortgages in the United States. It was those in the mortgage market, after all, who persuaded people to invest in homes they could not afford, banking on the prospect of a continuing rise in the value of those

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houses to get over the problem. Surely it was those agents and agencies that triggered the problems that we now face, or those individuals and bodies together with the home-buyers who were rash enough, or credulous enough, to bet on an enduring increase in house prices.

But perhaps we should hesitate about locating all responsibility for the crisis in the persons of these parties in the American real-estate and mortgage market. For in the circumstances that prevailed just a decade earlier, the problem they caused would have been restricted to the United States. Why did it spread across the world? As we think about this issue, it's clear that there are other candidates to be considered as well. There are the banks that introduced the financial instruments whereby it became possible to spread risk internationally, and to spread it in such a way that the nature of the risk became less and less clear to those who bought into it. And of course there are also the banks that assumed that opaque risk without giving the matter sufficient thought.

Do we stop there? Do we conclude that there are just two categories of culprits: those who gave and those who accepted unaffordable mortgages; and those who participated as donors or recipients in the spreading of risk? A little reflection suggests not.

Had the assassination in Sarajevo not triggered the First World War, then in the prevailing European network of treaties some similar event would have ignited conflict. That network of relations was the predisposing cause of the war, the assassination only the triggering cause. Applying that distinction here, the triggering cause of the financial collapse may have been the sub-prime adventure, and the triggering agencies may have been those involved in pursuing that adventure. But there was a deeper predisposing cause in place – the financial culture that made such an adventure possible in the first place. We now have a good sense of what that culture was like. In the absence of suitable regulation over the new financial instruments, there was a frenzy of competition among financial managers and financial bodies. And in that frenzy, the desire to outperform rivals, or the desire not to fall too far behind, seems to have stopped those agents from seeking to assure themselves individually about the reliability of the risks they were undertaking. Perhaps they each assumed that if others were taking similar risks, then those risks must be reasonable; perhaps no one dared suggest that the emperor had no clothes.

This observation directs us to a third class of potential culprits: the financial managers and financial bodies that, desperate not to lose ground to

competitors, gamed and gambled with a view to maintaining their annual returns and their value on the stock market. And crucially, as we shall see, there were the public authorities – central banks, regulatory agencies, administrations, legislatures – that allowed a new development in the financial sector to operate without proper regulation; in some cases, indeed, they actually removed regulations that had long been in place.

2. Who do we hold to account? The public authorities

Where, then, does the blame for the crisis lie? Do we spread the blame over the three classes of causally responsible agencies that we have distinguished? Or do we insist that the buck stops in one place? And if we do take the latter view, then who do we name in our indictment?

In considering this question, the most important distinction to draw is between the economic agents, on the one side, and the political agents on the other. The economic agents include the donors and recipients of mortgages, the institutions that spread and accepted a high level of opaque risk and the financial bodies and managers that allowed a frenzy of competition to dictate reckless practices. The political agents are the central banks and regulatory agencies, the executives and the legislatures – in short, the public authorities – that made an appearance at the third level in our narrative.

Which of these groups should we hold to public account? Private individuals and institutions are publicly accountable to the extent that they violated the law. But that accountability is limited and in the public forum it is the central banks and regulatory agencies, the executives and legislatures that have to answer primarily for the debacle. They have to answer for why the law itself, or at least the way it was interpreted and implemented, allowed the economic agencies to be financially reckless.

In taking this line, I do not mean to let private agents and bodies in the mortgage and banking industry off the hook. They were economically irrational in not recognising that as they each matched one another's high level of risk-taking, the chance of a collective failure in the market – the sort of failure that actually eventuated – became more and more salient. Besides, even where they complied with the law they are subject to moral censure for their lack of caution about a potential, worldwide crisis; they behaved in an outrageously short-term, asocial manner, displaying the worst side of human nature. My own impression is that they manifested an individual lack of character, and a corporate lack of culture, that

was probably unmatched in the public world – unmatched even in those countries where there was a degree of public corruption.

All that said, however, I insist that on the question of who to hold to public account, we have no choice but to point to those in public office. It is the central banks and regulatory agencies, the executives and the legislatures that we should be interrogating about the failure. It is they who represent us as a group and it is they who must answer to us for the debacle over which they presided.

The reason for taking this view is that for good or ill, our societies are now generally organised around a division between private and public labour. It may have been the case in the ancient or medieval world, perhaps even in parts of the early modern world, that people were required or expected to operate in their private business with a view to the common weal. But apart from the communist regimes of the mid-20th century that has not been so for more than 200 years. The working assumption of most of our economically successful countries, industrial and post-industrial, is that, within the limits of the law, we should let private individuals and bodies act for their own ends, whether because of the autonomy this may give them, or because of the aggregate good that the arrangement is expected to generate.

Put another way, the assumption is that, while the law should establish suitable constraints on corporate governance and corporate finance and while it should hold corporations and similar institutions answerable to the laws that bind individual persons, it should otherwise let them be. There are many differences among commentators on what exact form the legal constraints should take – and the financial crisis shows that these have been inadequate – but the consensus is that these entities should be otherwise free to pursue their private ends. There may be a civic expectation that financial and commercial organisations should be good corporate citizens, and these entities may seek to prove themselves, or at least advertise themselves, as having such a profile. But this falls short of holding these corporate bodies, or their officials, to public account; it does not amount to treating them in the way we think that central banks, regulatory agencies, executives and legislatures ought to be treated.

Why should we go along with this established divide between a private system of production and finance, on the one hand, and a public system of accountability on the other? One reason, of course, is the sheer cost and difficulty of trying to undo it. But another, deeper reason is that it reflects a long-tested principle that power is always best divided up among

different individuals and bodies in a check-and-balance pattern. Division guards against the abuse that melding production and policing functions in the same agency would make possible. And it may also serve useful purposes of specialisation, as it encourages the development of two forms of expertise and enterprise, and a system that allows for a synergy between them. Under this arrangement, the private agencies would generate ideas and initiatives, the public would test and organise them with a view to their social benefit. In a variation on an old theme, the private would propose, the public dispose.

The economic–political division of power will only work well, of course, if it is truly a division. One of the problems that has bedevilled our democracies is the leakage between the two domains. This has allowed at a micro level for regulatory capture in particular industries and, at a macro level, for the contamination of government policy by big business. I shall assume in what follows that those problems are not irresolvable and that their resolution falls within the domain of public accountability. But I do raise a red flag. There is a deep problem here that we are passing over. The most important imperative in political life may be to enforce a strict separation of business and government; it has the importance that the separation of church and state had for Western countries in previous centuries.

3. On what terms do we hold public authorities to account? A problem

Drawing on the example of the recent crisis, I have argued that while economic agents will be responsible just to their private constituencies – assuming that they did not breach the law – the political authorities have to account to us, the public. But what are the standards that we can legitimately expect those authorities to satisfy? What are the terms on which we can hold them accountable?

Central banks and regulatory agencies are accountable for satisfying the standards explicit or implicit in the brief that they are given by the legislature and executive. While they do not generally exercise their authority at the pleasure of government – any more than electoral commissions or other “statutory” bodies – the standards they are expected to meet are set out, subject to later amendment, in the legislation that establishes them. But to what standards are the legislature and executive to be held accountable? They have to abide by the constitution and the existing law, of course. But over and beyond the framework guidelines imposed by

constitution and law, what are the standards that we can fault them for failing to meet?

This question looks straightforward but turns out to be extremely tricky. The standards that legislature and executive – government, for short – should meet ought to be set in a democratic society by the citizenry; a democratic society should mean that we, the *demos* or people, enjoy *kratos* or control over how we are governed. But what standards did we put in place within any of our democratic societies that our governments might be thought to have breached in their handling of financial affairs?

The idea that is usually floated in discussion of this question is that government should be held to the standards associated with our shared wishes or views: our popular will or our shared opinion; if you like, our broad consensus about what the authorities should do. This consensus will require government to honour the constitutional constraints that are laid down in a founding document and/or encoded in an assumed framework of operation. And beyond that it will require government to heed the will or opinion of the people, where a will or opinion has plausibly been formed, on matters of particular policy.

It may be clear that the governments of a number of societies, such as the United Kingdom and Spain, breached a popular consensus – certainly a near-consensus – in being part of the coalition that invaded Iraq in 2003. But did our governments commit any such breach in their failure to regulate mortgage and financial markets more tightly? It does not seem that they did. In no case did we the people of this or that democratic country – in no case did we the people in a bloc of democratic countries like the European Union – assert ourselves in face of the omissions of governments. So how can we say that governments should be blamed for their lack of oversight? Shouldn't the blame rather lie with us? We failed as electorates to keep an eye on the behaviour of the markets, to register the negligence of governments, and to blow the whistle about the danger. Not only that, indeed. In many cases we rewarded governments electorally for the deregulation they championed and the seeming prosperity they brought. The odd commentator may have written about the housing bubble and the dangers it held – Paul Krugman comes to my own mind – but too few of us rallied behind such a call. On this line of thought, we ordinary folk are the ones responsible for the debacle.

The idea that democracy should require government to be responsible to popular consensus – to our shared will or opinion – sounds like a high ideal. But in practice it is going to amount to little. The ideal places such

a heavy, consensus-forming burden on ordinary people that no one can expect us to fulfil it: even if we are heroically earnest and deliberative, the most we will be able to muster on most issues is a divided set of views. And so, when the ideal requires government to be responsive to popular consensus, it requires absurdly little. It will allow governments *carte blanche* across the wide swathes of policy making where we, the people, have no shared view or wish. Governments will be democratically required to honour the constitutional restrictions we impose on their organisation and behaviour. And they will be democratically expected, on pain of electoral penalty, to respond to the mandates we may be thought to endorse at the polls and in the convergent surges that public opinion occasionally displays. But beyond that they will be under their own pilot, operating at will in the formation of policy.

Are we stuck with this view? Are there no other standards of public accountability to which we can hold government? Are there no standards that we can invoke in criticising governments for their failure of market oversight in the recent crisis? On the theory of democracy that is most widely embraced in social science and social theory, the answer is that there are not. The theory is represented with force in the classic statement it received at the hands of the Austrian-American economist, Joseph Schumpeter. For him, there is no popular will or opinion that can plausibly constrain government. In practice all democracy ensures is that the personnel in government – and perhaps, very broadly, the principles they claim to espouse – are selected on the basis of the aggregation of people's preferences: as he sees it, on the basis of a more or less randomly selected mode of aggregation applied to a more or less irrationally formed set of preferences. While this arrangement gives an influence to the electoral inputs of people – an influence that, like a lottery, may protect against the dominance of a single party or dynasty – it does not in any sense give the people control over government. In particular, it does not mean that there are significant expectations or standards to which a people can hold their government responsible.

Lying behind this Schumpeterian image is an essentially mechanical, as distinct from an agential, view of democracy. On an agential view, government is a responsible agency that its principal — we, the people — can hold to account; it is established on the basis of a contract or trust, to invoke familiar metaphors, in virtue of which it owes us a certain debt. On the mechanical view endorsed by Schumpeter – and arguably in the broad range of contemporary economics and political science – government is a function that is discharged by individuals under incentives and

sanctions, legal and electoral, that we have put in place in order to discipline what they do so that it benefits society generally. If the individuals in power act in a way that does not benefit society, then that means that the structure of incentive and sanction is inadequate, and it argues for some institutional redesign. It does not create a base on which we might feel resentment at what has been done and seek to hold the government to account. Holding the government to account would make no more sense than holding the market to account; there is no responsible agency there to be held accountable, only an impersonal apparatus of incentive and sanction under which individual agents pursue their own ends.

4. On what terms do we hold public authorities to account? A solution

The discussion up to this point leads us to stalemate. The only authorities we can properly hold to public account are those in government, by the earlier argument. And now by the argument of the last section, we cannot hold those in government to account, except to the extent that they violate the constitution or law, or breach explicit electoral commitments. Beyond that we must regard those in political power as agents who can march blamelessly to their own private drum within the limits of their explicit legal and electoral commitments. We cannot see them as agential bodies that are bound or obligated to us on any richer set of terms, for there are no richer terms to which we might hold them.

But there is a rival view of how democracy works and what constraints it places on governments. We begin to recognise the room for this view, as we think about how in any country – and perhaps in any union like the European Union – we, the people behave as a public. We talk and exchange ideas on issues of common concern, matters of political moment. We do not let our collective life and affairs evolve mechanically, as if they were something independent of human will. We get exercised about the way things go, we share our reactions, we form different views, we argue over their differences. We do not resign ourselves to the rule of government, as to a blank necessity, but treat every claim and proposal made by those in power as fair game for debate and contestation.

Importantly, we, the members of a democratic public, don't just do this in separate circles, insulated by impermeable membranes. The different views we form are aired in speeches, in pamphlets and in the media, so that the eddies of private debate connect up in mainstream currents. We gather as a public whenever two or more get together in discussion of

common affairs, and we may do this in any of a variety of forums, ranging from the workplace canteen to the city café, the street-corner harangue to the formal debate, the television interview to the printed exchange. And those forums are not disconnected from one another, for the use of public media maintains the flow of ideas between different circles. None of our conversations is closed and no one amongst us can expect to rely on just the arguments that happen to pass muster in a local coterie.

This pattern of continual exchange and discussion may suggest that, like a debating society, all we do as a public is to generate rival, divided views about the policies that government should follow. But that would be quite misleading. The fact that we do not give up on one another, and do not come to blows – the fact that we continue to find things we can say to one another in policy debate – shows that the exercise brings to light a range of assumptions on which we can agree in common. These commonplace presuppositions form a bedrock of convergence on which discursive disagreement must rest and we explore and establish the topology of that bedrock in the very process of arguing with one another about our differences. Unwittingly and unavoidably, we build dissensus on a growing base of consensual assumption.

There are two broad sets of shared commonplaces that public, democratic debate, however divisive, is likely to lay bare. The first is a set of participatory assumptions, as I shall call them, the second a set of discursive assumptions.

Participatory commonplaces are those assumptions about the titles that people have to participate in the ongoing exchanges that are implemented in any democratic exercise. If people are admitted to discussion at any centre of public debate, routinely enjoying the address of others and routinely getting a hearing from them, then they are recognised in effect as equal voices with equal claims to speak. The practice incorporates them in such a way that, should they occasionally be silenced or ignored or otherwise disrespected, then they will be able to appeal to the requirements of the practice in order to vindicate their position. Parties to discussion will acknowledge one another's rights as presumptive participants in exchange. They may not always honour those rights, not living up to the ideals implicit in the practice, but they will certainly give them countenance and they will thereby expose themselves to rebuke in the event of not complying. Paying lip service to the ideals, they can be called upon to pay behavioural service too.

The second category of commonplaces that will emerge in any ongoing public debate are discursive as distinct from participatory presuppositions. Participatory commonplaces are the assumptions that all members must be taken to endorse in virtue of treating one another as fellow participants in public discourse. Discursive commonplaces are assumptions that all members must be taken to endorse, to the extent that they agree (as the members of any ongoing conversation must agree), on what count as arguments and what as hopeless *non sequiturs*: things that just do not lead anywhere.

When we find an argument relevant in any discussion then we must give some credence to the connection it posits or presupposes between the premises and the conclusion. We may not find the argument compelling, whether because of rejecting a premise or thinking that the support the premises offer for the conclusion is outweighed by other considerations. But even if we reject an argument, marking out a point of explicit disagreement with our interlocutor, the fact of accepting its relevance means that we will have acknowledged an implicit point of agreement. The intended effect of the response may have been to focus on a difference but the unintended side effect will have been to mark out a common presupposition.

Let one person argue from the value of equality the need for a universal health service, for example, and another argue from the value of quality in health provision to the need for keeping a private component in the system. So far as they divide on the question, they will each weigh the competing values differently or deny the application of one of the values in the case on hand: thus the advocate of universal health provision may deny that it would reduce the quality of service. But so far as they each acknowledge the argument of the other as relevant to the issue, they will agree in seeing those values as at least pertinent features to invoke. It will be a common presupposition that the equality of health consumers and the quality of health provision both matter in the society.

The considerations and values that get ratified on this indirect, discursive basis may be various and may differ from society to society. This variation is not problematic for democratic theory, provided it is consistent with the basic participatory commitment to equal respect for all. In a society like one of our developed democracies, the discursively ratified commonplaces valorise the usual public goods such as, presumptively, defence, law and order, public health, economic prosperity and environmental sustainability. But they also recognise the value of providing help to those who suffer

natural disasters; making medical treatment publicly available, at least in emergency cases; preserving historical and cultural landmarks; and organising the polity around devices like the rule of law, the separation of powers, and the election of legislative and executive authorities.

Where debate continues in the open, networked manner that characterises a public, it is inevitable that, even, while deep differences emerge on particular matters of policy, there will be an accumulating body of consensus about the sort of address and argument that is appropriate among members of the public. There will be a dynamic, evolving convergence on common presuppositions of discussion. And the presuppositions will not just pass without saying; they will have to register with participants themselves. In order for people to be able to conduct themselves with assurance in exchange, after all, they will need to know what sort of argument is likely to go down well, and what is not. And they will need to rely on others knowing this too, and on their expecting them to know it in turn. The common presuppositions of argument will have to attain the status of commonplaces, counting as propositions that nearly everyone admits, expects everyone to admit, expects everyone to expect everyone to admit, and so on.

To recognise that any democratic public will generate a body of accepted commonplaces as a byproduct of political discussion and debate is to see that there are standards that the public can reasonably expect its government to respect. It can hold its government to the expectation that, in making decisions on law and policy, the authorities will take their guidance from the shared standards that those commonplaces inscribe and will expose themselves to the challenge of showing that they are in compliance with those standards. Those who stand for government have to make their case for being elected in a debate with their competitors, addressed to their constituents, and they will inevitably have to defend what they propose to do in the terms that all can countenance as relevant: that is, in the terms that reflect shared participatory and discursive commonplaces. And that means that once in government they can be held to those terms and expected to answer to the expectations that the commonplaces suppose. They can be treated as an agency proper: a locus of public accountability.

On the Schumpeterian view of democracy, discussed in the last section, government can only be held to those expectations that are grounded in popular consensus – a shared will or opinion – so that, consensus being hard to come by, democratic accountability constitutes a very light disci-

pline. But this discussion reveals a distinct source of democratic standards and expectations. It shows that a democratic government can be held accountable to the standards that are embodied in the working assumptions of public debate. Those in power can be rightly interrogated whether the policies they endorsed are consistent with participatory standards of equal, inclusive respect and with the discursive standards of reasonable argument that are accepted on more or less all sides.

How might this claim impact on the situation with the recent financial crisis? It explains why it is absolutely reasonable to hold governments to account for their regulatory negligence in allowing the markets to operate in a novel, opaque manner – in throwing caution, in effect, to the wind. Among the assumptions that no one is likely to question within public debate in any ongoing democracy is the assumption that government should not take undue risks with the economy, certainly not when the losses at issue are so potentially pervasive and destructive in their effects. The prosperity that deregulatory success may have seemed to promise was concentrated among the relatively rich, holding out the prospect of lesser payoffs for society more generally. But the problems that failure brought in its wake have been wide and deep and may even prove to be long-lasting. With such asymmetrical returns at stake, there is no question about what it is reasonable to expect government to have done. And given the performance of most governments, there can be no question about the appropriateness of holding them to account. Government failed us in allowing the markets the free rein that they came to enjoy over the past decade.

5. A democracy of public standards

We have looked at the different centres of power that played a part in the recent financial crisis; we have argued that among those powers it is the public authorities that should be held accountable; and we have identified a view of democratic accountability under which it is possible and appropriate to hold them to account in that way. On the emerging view, a government can be held to account according to the standards endorsed – endorsed, as an inescapable byproduct of participation and exchange – in the decentralised, often divisive policy debates in society at large.

The people will enjoy democratic control over government, then, to the extent that they are able to force those in power to honour the standards they support in the manner of commonplaces. They are able to force government to treat them as all equally worthy of respect, in accordance

with participatory standards, and they are able to force government to abide by the other considerations or values that also pass muster with all parties – or at least with all of those who are willing to live on equal terms with others.

But how are the people to force government to honour such public standards in the way they organise and conduct themselves? One prerequisite is the imposition of a constitutional or quasi-constitutional framework of operation, in particular a framework where it remains possible for the people to change, although under conditions that guard against any breach of participatory standards of equal respect for all. Another prerequisite is the periodic, open, competitive election of the principal legislative-cum-administrative authorities. A third is the appointment of personnel to the principal, unelected offices of authority – the courts, the central banks, the regulatory authorities – under conditions that ensure that the briefs attached to those offices are appropriate by public standards, and that the appointees can be trusted and disciplined to act according to their assigned briefs. And a fourth, higher-order prerequisite is that power be dispersed among these elected and unelected authorities in a pattern that ensures against any one centre becoming capable of unilateral, unchecked decision making.

Satisfying these four prerequisites will not ensure in itself, of course, that the people can force their government to honour public standards. The possibility of rejecting the principal legislative-cum-administrative authorities will make an important contribution to forcing the government in the right direction. But the people can only hold government to electoral account in the relatively long term – how long is fixed by the period allowed for elected office – and at a relatively coarse level of grain: how coarse depends on how many issues get bundled together in party programmes. In order for the people to hold government to account in the shorter term and at a finer level of grain, it is essential that possibilities of contestation be multiplied, in particular contestation that is based on a claim that public standards have been breached. There must be forms of contestation available to individual people and groups through the parliament or congress itself, in the courts and other tribunals, in submissions to ombudsmen and commissions of inquiry, in the press and, of course, on the streets. And things must be so set up, both in formal and informal ways, that such contestation has a chance of success that is not just grounded in the goodwill of those subject to challenge.

The satisfaction of this requirement of specialised contestation – contestation that is customised to distinct domains and policies – is the most challenging task that faces any democratic society or group of societies. It may be possible to put a constitution in place, arranging for free elections, organising for the appointment of unelected public authorities, and dispersing power appropriately across those centres. But that does not ensure the formation of public interest groups, for example, or the presence of a culture that facilitates their formation. And in a complex society it is clearly essential for the promotion of customised contestation that people do not rely on their own private informational or organisational resources; they must divide their contestatory labour between different issues and domains and they must collectivise their efforts within any one of those domains. They must incorporate in effective, non-governmental organisations and movements.

A government that is subject to control within a democracy of public standards will have to meet two conditions. First of all, the sorts of policies that would breach such standards are off the table: they do not make an appearance, being culturally unthinkable, or if they do they are soon dismissed. And second, the policies that are selected in any domain from among the various candidates that satisfy public standards – in the nature of the case, many will do so – are chosen and implemented according to procedures that do not themselves, in the particular context in question, breach public standards. There must be good reason, derived from the public standards, to use those particular procedures; the argument for the procedures must not be, for example, that they are likely to support independently favoured policies or lobbies.

The fact that a government is forced to satisfy these two broad conditions does not mean that the policies it selects will appeal to everyone's taste, or even to everyone's sense of justice. But it ought to mean that no one may reasonably treat the government or its policies as illegitimate. No one, or at least no one who recognises the need to live on equal terms with others, will have good reason to deny that the government has a right to enforce those policies. Anyone may oppose the policies within the system, of course, even resorting to civil disobedience in the attempt to highlight the opposition, but no one will have reason to think it is appropriate to go outside the system and try to undermine it. Democracy is designed to ensure that government is legitimate in this sense, not that government is optimal or even just. And it is precisely legitimacy that a democracy of public standards would promise.

Conclusion

There are two illusions to guard against in thinking about the powers under which we live in the modern world. One is the vacuum illusion, perhaps only maintained in extreme libertarian or existentialist circles, that we always have choices about what to do and that blaming our failures or our fortunes on external forces is a form of self-deception. The other is the gravity illusion, characteristic of a rather different, determinist extreme, that we live our lives under forces that are as silent and pervasive as gravity, imposing inescapable, unwelcome constraints on our every thought and feeling and response. The vacuum illusion offers us an exhilarating daydream, the gravity illusion a depressing nightmare.

The theme of this essay has been that we live in a world of power to which the daydream would blind us but that we are not in a scenario as bad as that nightmare; or, if we are, that there is something we can do about it. The powers that rule in our economy are privately controlled and it is probably infeasible and undesirable to try to undo that arrangement. We can live with the influence of those private powers, however, and yet not live as pawns in the hands of others, provided that we have public powers that are capable of controlling them: in particular, public powers that are answerable to us, the people, under a democracy of public standards. Such a democracy represents a challenging ideal of constitutional and civic organisation and, at best, we only imperfectly approximate it in our current polities and unions of polities. But it is a reasonably well-defined ideal, not a vague hope, and it is an ideal that we can take steps to realise, not a purely utopian vision. It would be a useful beacon by which to navigate in the continuing, evolving process of democratisation.

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